

Preparing our workforce to support families on a palliative care journey

"Palliative care is generally a taboo subject within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Death and dying is not widely discussed with the younger generation, leaving a gap in knowledge, and understanding of the important role of palliative care.... Why can't they be trained in that already as part of their studies?"¹ - Community Member

Community highlighted that one of the key barriers that mob experience in accessing palliative care and the dignity, self-determination, and healing that it can bring families, is the lack of palliative care knowledge and skills among our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. Currently, palliative care is an elective unit in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Practitioner training package. This means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must specifically and actively choose palliative care to study if they are to be trained in this area. But how do our students choose to study an area that they have never heard of or an area that they believe to be something else?

The Palliative Care Curriculum for Undergraduates (PCC4U) project is dedicated to addressing this important gap that was identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. PCC4U aims to improve the skill and confidence of the health workforce to support people with palliative care needs by embedding palliative care training in entry-to-practice curricula throughout Australia. While palliative care skillsets and knowledge is well established for other health professions,² less is known about what skillsets and knowledge are required to best build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and practitioners to respond to local palliative care health needs and contexts.

To better understand these training needs, PCC4U held a Roundtable to develop an evidence-based culturally specific palliative care curriculum for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker and practitioner training packages. Roundtable attendees included representatives from 12 of the 16 Registered Training Organisations delivering relevant training packages and six jurisdictional and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker representatives. Attendees considered how end-of-life care processes and practices are implemented in day-to-day care and how this translates into palliative care capabilities and training.

There was agreement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners need to be prepared to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples affected by life-limiting illness. However, there was a lack of consensus about how and when these knowledge and skills (capabilities) should be developed. Through discussions around the core roles, knowledge and skills required by all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners, the following key capabilities were identified:

- ☺ *Understanding what palliative care is and its role*
- ☺ *Having conversations around dying and death*
- ☺ *Providing information about palliative care*
- ☺ *Acting as a broker / translator / advocate between clients and mainstream palliative care services*
- ☺ *Supporting families / carers / community to provide care for people with life-limiting illness*
- ☺ *Recognising there are Western laws and cultural lore to be considered around dying and death*
- ☺ *Understanding how to navigate and operate in community after a death*
- ☺ *Actively undertaking self-care.*

¹ Simon, I. (2019). PEPA Engagement Analysis & Communication Plan. © Isaac Simon Mura Connect.

² Palliative Care Curriculum for Undergraduates (PCC4U) Project Team. (2012). Principles for including palliative care in undergraduate curricula. Brisbane, QLD: QUT.



Ongoing engagement with peak bodies has been instrumental in reflecting on the Roundtable outcomes to inform a strategy that will bring genuine benefit to building the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce to deliver palliative care. In collaboration with the Roundtable attendees, the following action plan was agreed upon:

- ◉ Utilise existing partnerships with IPEPA, education providers, jurisdictions, and Aboriginal Health Workers to reach local networks and focus on supporting tailored local activities.
- ◉ Couple a grassroots approach with Elders and other respected community members through community champions.
- ◉ Co-design and tailor bespoke learning and teaching resources with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to develop agreed capabilities.
- ◉ Use multiple channels of engagement including development of specific training resources, integration of content into existing training packages, awareness raising campaigns, webinars and podcasts, and newsletter articles.
- ◉ Recognise the scope of PCC4U and IPEPA, and work with Peak Bodies to highlight challenges and opportunities identified for this workforce.
- ◉ Partner with local implementation sites to evaluate outcomes.

To date, PCC4U has used the above capabilities to provide feedback to the Skills IQ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package review. We continue to work with stakeholders to develop flexible and culturally-relevant learning and teaching resources for integration in VET Sector training packages. We aim to have a practical suite of resources available for implementation in 2022.

The PCC4U team welcomes the opportunity and privilege to collaborate with, or receive feedback from, stakeholders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and community members to build on this learning journey. If you are interested or have any questions, please contact Kylie or Nicole:

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PALLIATIVE CARE EDUCATION & TRAINING COLLABORATIVE



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