

RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Five big ideas for healthier, happier Indigenous children

Professor Janette Perz and Professor Jane Ussher from the Centre for Health Research, along with Professor Kerry Robinson from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology, have been granted funding from the Gunawirra organisation to evaluate the effects of a pre-school program aimed at improving the wellbeing of Indigenous Australian children. Dr Christine Metusela and Dr Chloe Parton from the Centre for Health Research, and Ms Norma Tracey from Gunawirra will assist.

'The age gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' life expectancy has barely changed over the past five years, indicating that the long term health disadvantages plaguing Indigenous populations are still not being addressed', Professor Perz says. 'Indigenous infants are particularly vulnerable to chronic health conditions such as diabetes and ear infections, which are contributing to this gap – however, if these can be prevented or treated early on, the health outcomes of the next generation of Indigenous Australians may be improved, helping to "Close the Gap".'

Gunawirra is an organisation offering health programs for Indigenous families with young children. Their current "Five Big Ideas" program for pre-schools in NSW teaches children health and hygiene information, nutritional practices, and traditional Indigenous storytelling and culture. This "Five Big Ideas" program will be evaluated to determine if there are any areas of improvement, and whether the program could be a helpful tool across a wider range of pre-schools as part of the "Closing the Gap" initiative.

Four pre-schools in NSW will be monitored before starting the "Five Big Ideas" program, and again six months after. The researchers will interview and survey teaching staff and Gunawirra coordinators at



each school, and distribute surveys to staff at other schools that are just about to implement the program.

It is hoped that Gunawirra's "Five Big Ideas" program will equip young Indigenous children with the knowledge and skills to enjoy a healthier, happier, and longer life.

Project Title: An examination of the process and efficacy of an early intervention program for Aboriginal pre-school children, from the perspective of key stakeholders: Teachers and program developers

Funding has been set at: \$31,818

Contact Details: j.perz@uws.edu.au;
<http://www.uws.edu.au/centreforhealthresearch>

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