

RESEARCHING ON NOONGAR BOODJA

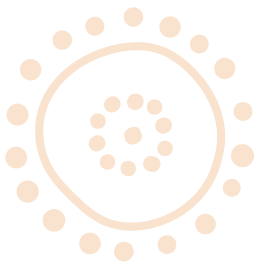
CONSULTATION REPORT



Kurongkurl Katitjin
Edith Cowan University



Report prepared by Anne McKenzie, Clair Scrine and Dan McAullay



Acknowledgment

The Project team acknowledges the authority and wisdom of Elders past and present and pays respect to the Noongar peoples on whose lands this project has been conducted.

We would also like to acknowledge the commitment of all those involved and thank those who provided their time in assisting with this project.

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BACKGROUND

Professor Caroline Finch, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research), Edith Cowan University, has committed to ensuring Aboriginal research conducted at the University is collaborative, as well as meeting the needs of Aboriginal people. A key aspect of this commitment has been to appoint an Inaugural Director Aboriginal Research, Associate Professor Daniel McAullay. Specifically, this role is to lead research through Kurongkurl Katitjin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research and the broader university, with a remit to further grow and support Aboriginal research across all other schools.

Strategic planning at Edith Cowan University (ECU) identified opportunities for improvements in the way research is conducted with Noongar people and Aboriginal people living on Noongar country. In 2021 Professor Finch provided funding for a project to consult with industry partners and community representatives to identify key research priority areas for future research with the Noongar community and/or Aboriginal people on Noongar country. The project team was led by Assoc. Professor Daniel McAullay. Stakeholders from universities, medical research institutes, government and non-government agencies, and communities have been part of the strategic direction and focus of the project (see Appendix A).



Scope of the Project

The project aimed to develop a formal strategy for research with the Noongar community and/or Aboriginal people on Noongar country by identifying priorities for future research through consultation and workshops with key stakeholders.

The key output was a report on outcomes of the project to identify gaps and opportunities to make a difference and provide a 'roadmap' for ECU and other organisations involved in the project, to influence and drive future research agendas.

Method

Consultation with stakeholders was undertaken through:

- Interviews with key informants from government agencies, universities and research institutes, and non-government organisations.
- A workshop with interviewees to discuss the findings from the interviews.
- Interviews and a workshop with community representatives to discuss the project and seek consensus on the findings and next steps.

Interviews

Interview questions included three broad questions and one specific to the interviewee's organisation:

- 1** In your opinion what are the important areas /issues for future research for the Noongar community/ Aboriginal people on Noongar country?
- 2** In what ways do you think research (and researchers) could be better serving the needs of the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?
- 3** What do you believe can strengthen the relationships between researchers, research institutions and the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

And

- 4**
 - a** (*For research professionals*) – How does your research impact on decision making around policies or practices that affect the Noongar community/ Aboriginal people on Noongar country?
 - b** (*For policy/government professionals*) – to what extent do you or your organisation use research in the decision making around policies or practices?
 - c** (*For community*) what would you like to see happen with research that is conducted with the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

Stakeholder Workshop

A workshop to share the collated findings and key themes arising from the interviews was held on 3 December, 2021. All those who participated in an interview were invited to attend the workshop.

Community Consultations

Consultations with members of the Noongar community were conducted. These were intended to:

- share the outcomes from the workshop and confirm whether these findings aligned with their views;
- seek feedback and further input to the best practice model; and
- identify any recommendations/next steps.

FINDINGS



Interviews

Twenty-five key informants took part in 19 interviews between August and November 2021. The participants included researchers from across WA, senior staff from universities, Department of Health WA, WA Country Health Service and Department of Communities, health professionals and community members.

Feedback from the interviews required a shift in focus for the project, from concentrating on research priorities for future research, to addressing the systemic issues with research which was raised by most participants. These issues were collectively seen to be the main hindrance to collaborative and effective research with the Noongar community and/or Aboriginal people on Noongar country.

The transcripts and notes from each of the interviews were analysed to identify the key themes to each of the four interview questions.

FINDINGS

Question 1: In your opinion what are the important areas /issues for future research for the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

- High rates of incarceration, child removal/ protection, youth suicide
- Adolescent health and issues relating to transitioning to adult services
- Rates of Discharge Against Medical Advice
- Housing insecurity
- Economic self-determination
- Low birthweight babies, access to appropriate antenatal and perinatal services
- Child development
- Ageing, end of life and palliative care
- Research that helps keep culture and language alive
- Racism and discrimination in services and poor access to services
- Neuroscience of engaging in culture and being on country
- Health and wellbeing of communities across the South-West and Wheatbelt
- Research that is holistic and solution focused.

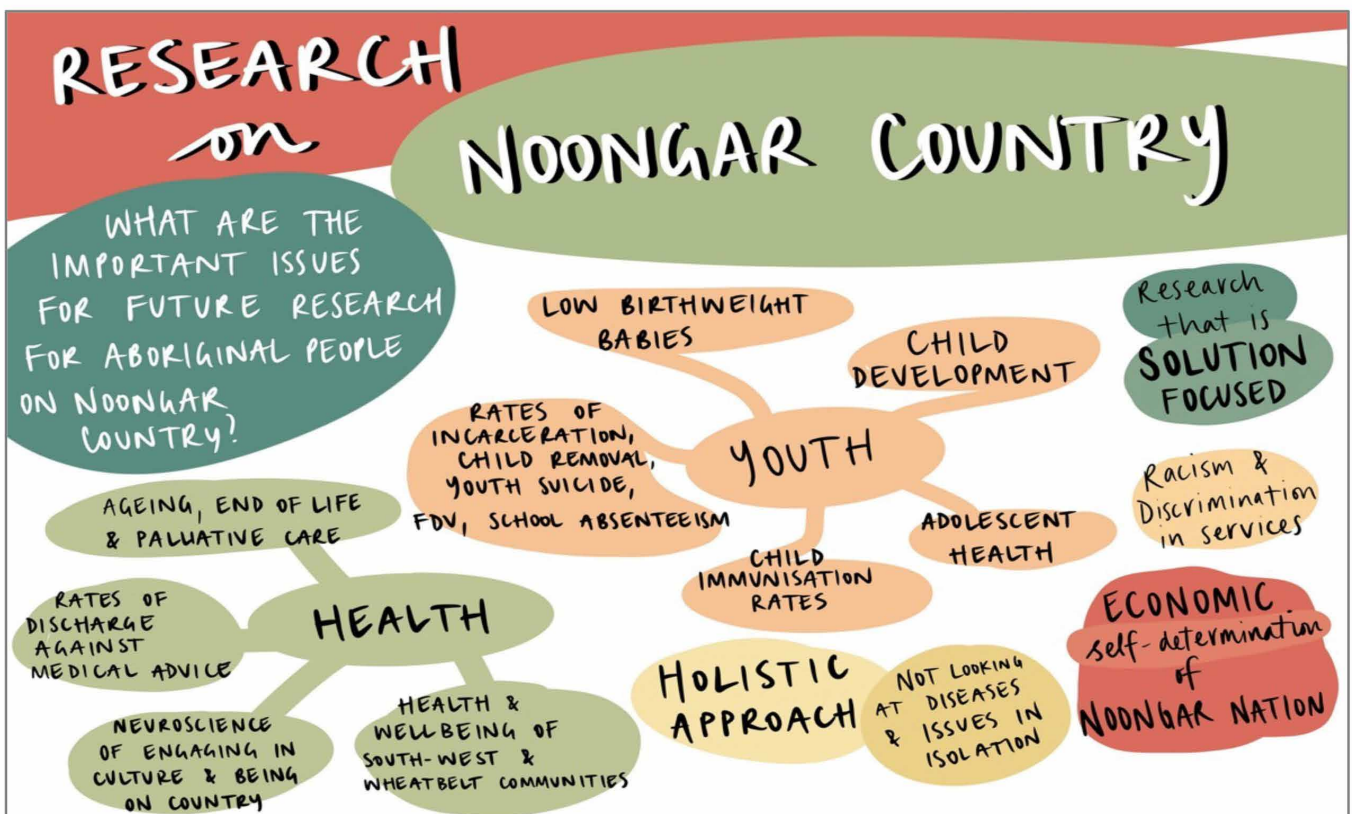


Diagram 1: Important issues for future research

FINDINGS

Question 2: In what ways do you think research (and researchers) could be better serving the needs of the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

- Only conducting research that the community regards as beneficial – research needs to be relevant in terms of how a community can use it to advocate for funding, programs, and services in their community.
- More funding and recognition of importance and impact of evaluations to community and their organisations.
- Consulting with community groups in the development stage and throughout the process.
- Conducting more applied research.
- Researchers getting out into the community to listen and build relationships and see how they can bring their skills to resolve, assist and investigate on behalf of the community.
- Ensuring non-Aboriginal researchers are provided training and support in how to engage with community.
- Ensuring a proportion of research and grant proposals are entirely determined from consultation with community.
- Fostering greater links with Aboriginal community-based and controlled organisations delivering programs and services – to identify ways to support the work and funding of the community organisations, for example, Continuous Quality Improvement projects.
- Ensure better feedback mechanisms so people, services and organisations can access research outcomes.
- Designing research in partnership with health services so that it is directly relevant to need and an operational context. A lot of research projects are designed without an understanding or account of the reality of how Aboriginal health services operate, the importance of contributing to changes at a service level and supporting organisations such as Aboriginal medical/health services to make (and get funded for) changes.
- It is a joint responsibility of researchers and service provider organisations to translate, but funding isn't provided for this – not in research grants and researchers rarely put a translation component in their budgets.

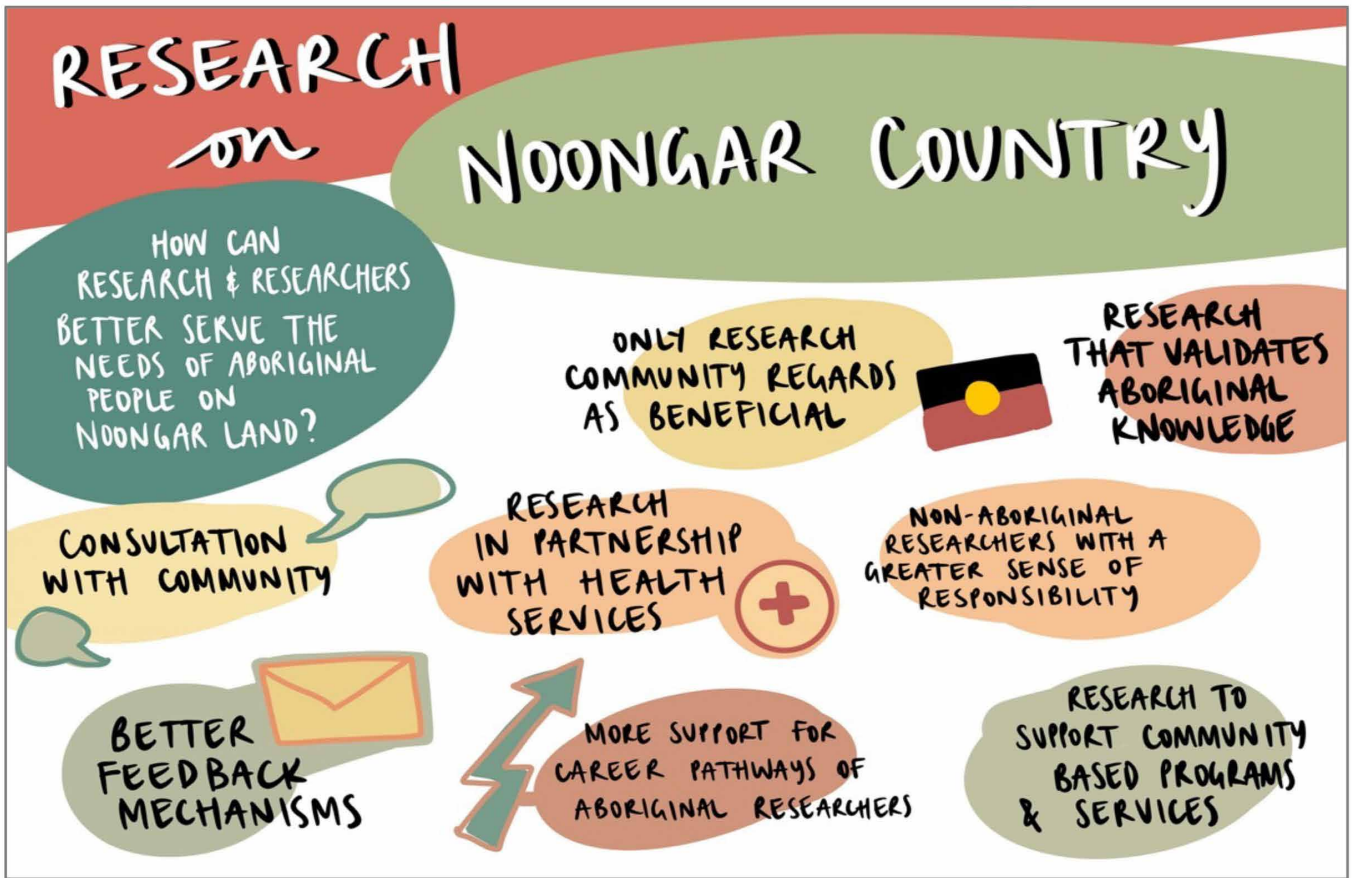


Diagram 2: Serving the needs

FINDINGS

Question 3: What do you believe can strengthen the relationships between researchers, research institutions and the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

- Creating partnerships and ensuring collaboration with the community that is equitable for all parties.
- Engaging community to recruit participants for research, paying community for their time and involvement (not always seeing community as volunteers), feeding back through appropriate channels and networks in community.
- Requiring that every project has a community advisory group.
- Having relevant advisory groups on research projects, not just a one size fits all group for all projects – or only Elders. Reference groups aren't always relevant if they don't involve the actual people affected by an issue or utilising a particular service.
- Stopping unrealistic timeframes that don't facilitate good relationships and trust.
- Ensuring there is meaningful capacity building so that Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people understand their rights in research, and how to advocate for their needs with research.
- Fostering relationships that are based on listening, integrity, openness and respect - not allowing for Fly In Fly Out researchers.
- Establishing an active, well-funded and representative Noongar Health Planning Forum to ensure consistency in processes and accountability. This could be formally linked to community and service delivery representatives and foster a broad research agenda for everyone.
- Rethinking WA Aboriginal Health Ethic Committee's 'black tick' (letter of support requirement from health service) that doesn't facilitate meaningful consideration or engagement by an Aboriginal community organisation – and creates an unsustainable and unfunded system for the organisations.
- Embedding protocols and agreement around how and what research is conducted on Noongar land, and to respect and recognise the authority of Noongar people and voices first and foremost.
- Ensuring non-Aboriginal researchers are more accountable to community and to Aboriginal researchers.
- Creating reports and findings that empower community and are written in plain language.
- Acknowledging Aboriginal knowledge systems – do this so research doesn't further colonise the Aboriginal community.
- Rethinking a system where Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC)s play a gatekeeper role against the interests and wishes of community members – need to make consent and ethics processes more accessible for the community, not just HRECs business.
- Ensuring there is more research translation and implementation - everyone talks about translation but many research projects lack an adequate translation component (for example a peer reviewed paper versus a model of care).
- More capacity building of Aboriginal people to lead and work in research - need for all universities and institutes to commit to supporting Aboriginal people to take up research positions, build their track records and capacity and not just be 'used' to support non-Aboriginal researchers' expertise and career development.

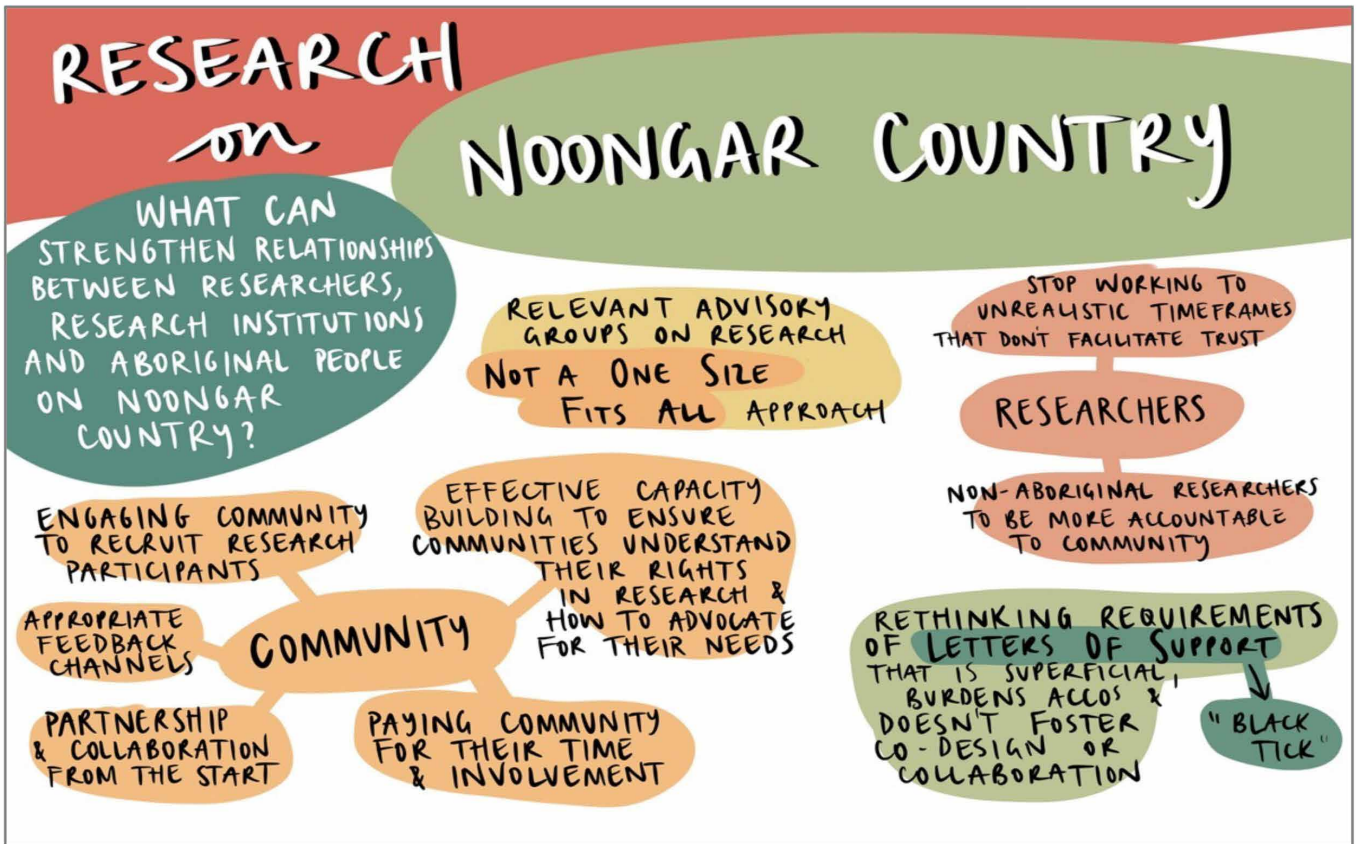


Diagram 3: Strengthening relationships

FINDINGS

Question 4: (For research professionals) – How does your research impact on decision making around policies or practices that effect the Noongar community/Aboriginal people on Noongar country?

(For policy/government professionals) – to what extent do you or your organisation use research in the decision making around policies or practices?

- By building relationships with all stakeholders and bringing them into the research design process from the beginning to ensure research outcomes are relevant and applicable to policy and program design.
- Research provides an important evidence base on many health issues that directs lobbying for funding and agenda setting for Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA).
- Research evidence and evaluations are utilised by WA Country Health Service, Population Health and the Department of Health WA to make decisions and funding allocations.
- Agencies and organisations utilise research and publications when applying for funding.
- Policy translation unit is attached to the National Drug and Research Institute to embed research into policy at a state and national level.
- Birthing on Noongar Boodjar project at Murdoch University's Ngangk Yira Research Centre worked closely with senior policy makers who championed the research and were invested in the outcomes. Recommendations were reduced from 20 to three and all three were implemented by Department of Health WA. Policy people were Chief Investigators on projects and provided support to write reports and recommendations so that they are appropriate for the audience.

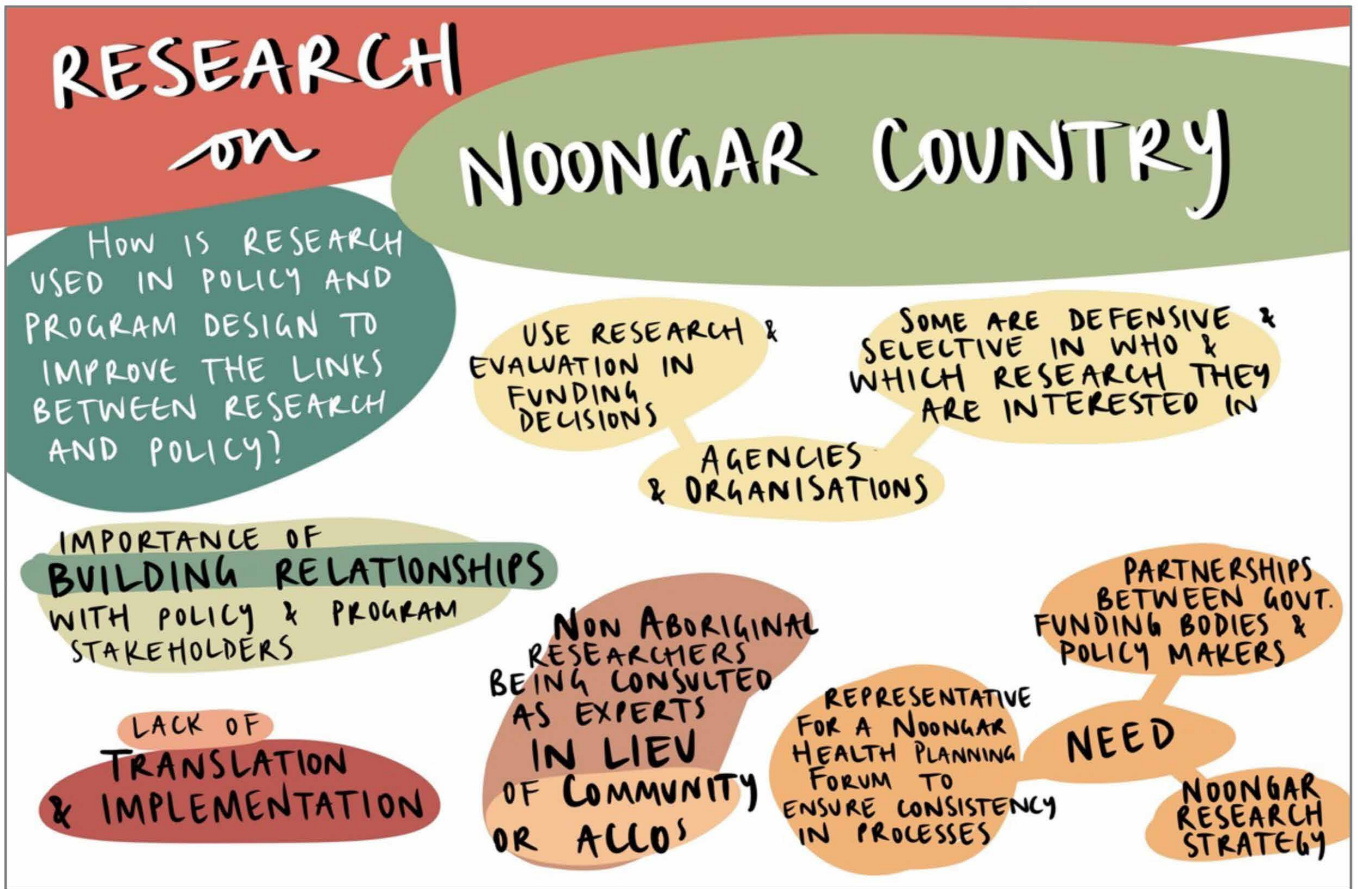


Diagram 4: Improving links between research and policy

Stakeholder Workshop

On 3 December, 2021, a workshop to share the collated findings of the interviews with all interviewees was held at ECU. The aim was to provide an opportunity for all the participants to discuss the findings from the consultations. Specifically, the workshop sought to confirm a list of future research topics and consider solutions to addressing the many systemic issues associated with conducting research with Aboriginal people raised during the interviews.

The workshop was four hours in duration and was attended by 10 interviewees, or representatives of those unable to attend, a digital scribe and staff from ECU's Kurongkurl Katitjin.

The workshop was facilitated by the consultants who conducted the 25 interviews and small group activities were facilitated by staff from Kurongkurl Katitjin. Associate Professor Daniel McAullay provided an overview of the aims of the project and collated feedback from the interviews.

The agenda for the day (Appendix B) covered information about the project and the feedback from the interviews which had been largely collated into two streams:

- 1 Topics for future research
- 2 Developing a good practice model for research with Noongar community and/or Aboriginal people on Noongar country.

The day finished with an opportunity for attendees to discuss challenges and the next steps for the project.

Outcomes

Topics for Future research

Workshop participants confirmed/ agreed with the list of research topics collated from the interviews (Diagram 1).

Addressing systemic issues

A number of ideas and concerns arose during the course of the workshop as participants considered the systemic issues with research identified during the interviews (Diagram 5).

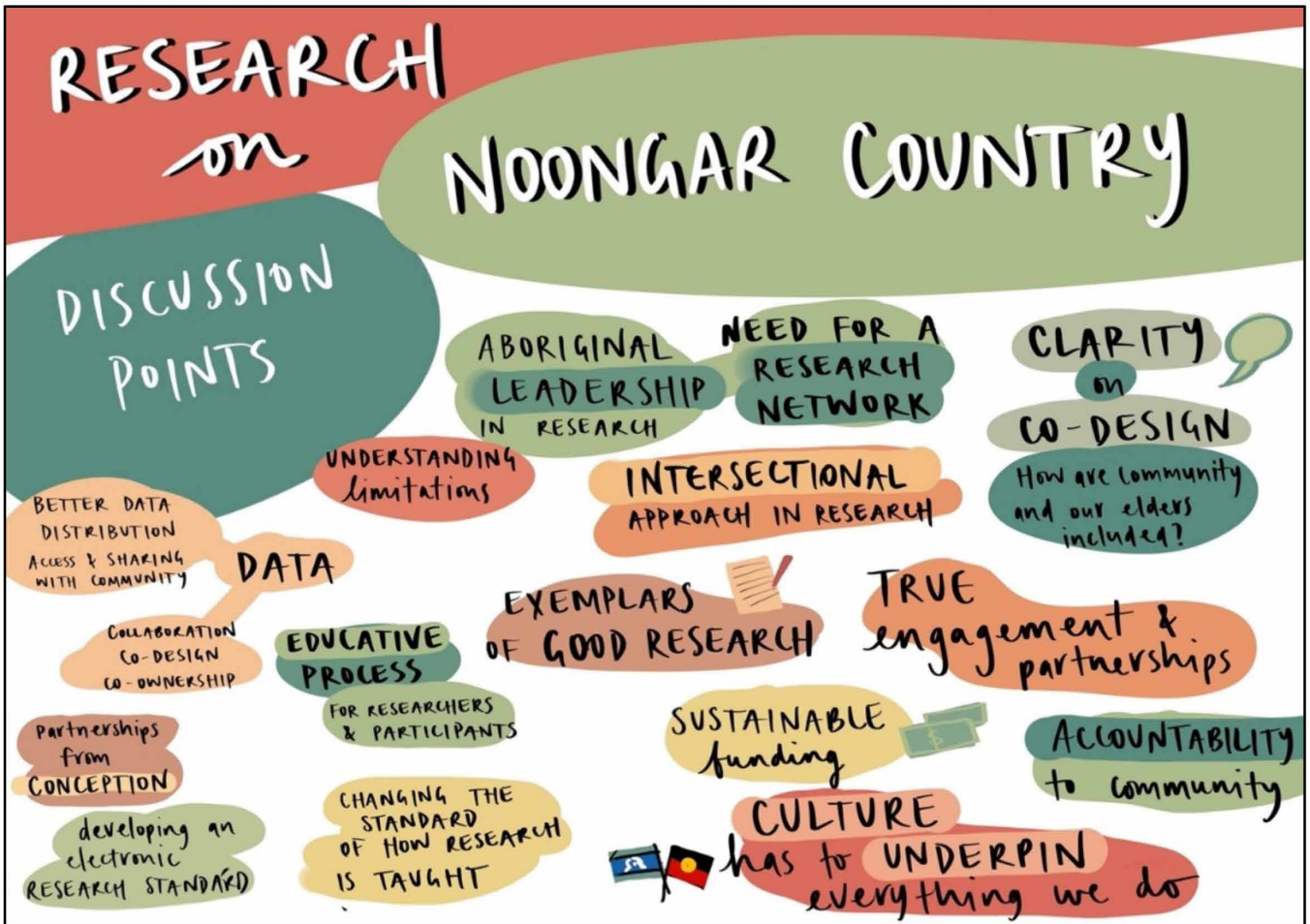


Diagram 5: Workshop discussion points

FINDINGS

The following provides the key concerns and solutions workshop participants discussed.

Establishing a Noongar Research Network

- The need to establish a network of Aboriginal researchers, and representatives of government and non-government agencies, universities, and medical research Institutes to foster collaboration in addressing many of the systemic issues identified during the consultations.
- Establish a formal repository of good practice examples of successful research that engages the community.

More research translation and implementation

- The need to ensure stakeholders such as government, policy makers, non-government organisations and the community are part of the research design process to avoid research projects that are not able to be translated and implemented.
- Conducting research that has relevant implementation for example, new Models of Care or validating existing Aboriginal Models of Care utilised in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHO)s.

Role of Ethics Committees

Human Research Ethics Committees must address process issues around:

- limited timeframes for culturally appropriate community consultation. There is a strong need for a cultural lens to be applied to these processes;
- the lack of coordination and communication to researchers from multiple ethics committees is creating disparate processes that can lead to research being conducted without proper accountability;
- non-government organisations and individual researchers are constantly barraged by requests for letters of support. This is not contributing to good practice and is seen by many as a 'tick and flick' process; and
- NHMRC road map and statement for ethics are often approached by researchers in a superficial way and not valued for what they are intended.

Engagement with the community

- Accountability to the community throughout the process and a requirement to return to the community to share findings and plans for translation. There is a need for 'deep time, deep listening', being respectful and not constrained by chronological timelines. Timeframes often dictate how researchers approach things and this can limit effective engagement. Researchers need to understand the preconditions to commencing engagement is not a literature review, its about building sustainable relationships that endure through all stages of the research project.
- Rethinking training for researchers to avoid superficial engagement with the community requires a fundamental shift in the way research with Aboriginal people is taught and conducted. This needs to be embedded across all years of university curriculums. Emphasis must be on the importance of building the relationships with community and valuing their expertise, not just 'consultation'.
- A need to ensure the capacity building of community to engage with research and know their rights.
- Ensure that researchers manage community expectations about what the research can deliver and defining what is to be communicated back to those involved.

Supporting Aboriginal Researchers

- Too much research with Aboriginal people is led by non-Aboriginal people that doesn't always acknowledge the expertise of Aboriginal researchers or community members.
- The lack of capacity building initiatives and career opportunities for Aboriginal researchers means they cannot easily compete with non-Aboriginal researchers when applying for funding. Funding agencies could consider changes to processes to enable a more equitable system for recognising the different expertise of many Aboriginal researchers.

FINDINGS

Elements of a best practice model

Workshop participants were asked to discuss in small groups what a good practice model for research with the Noongar community and/or Aboriginal people on Noongar country should look like. The discussion was noted by the group facilitators and then collated into one list to which participants gave their consensus.

Requirements for a best practice model included:

- Takes a strength-based approach and reframes the agenda for measuring the gap
- Is underpinned by an evidence base and is implemented across the whole research cycle
- Has Aboriginal leadership across all levels of research
- Consults and builds relationships before the research process starts
- Funding agencies and Human Research Ethics Committees that commit to ensuring requirements for proper community engagement, translation and implementation are met and provided for in research projects.

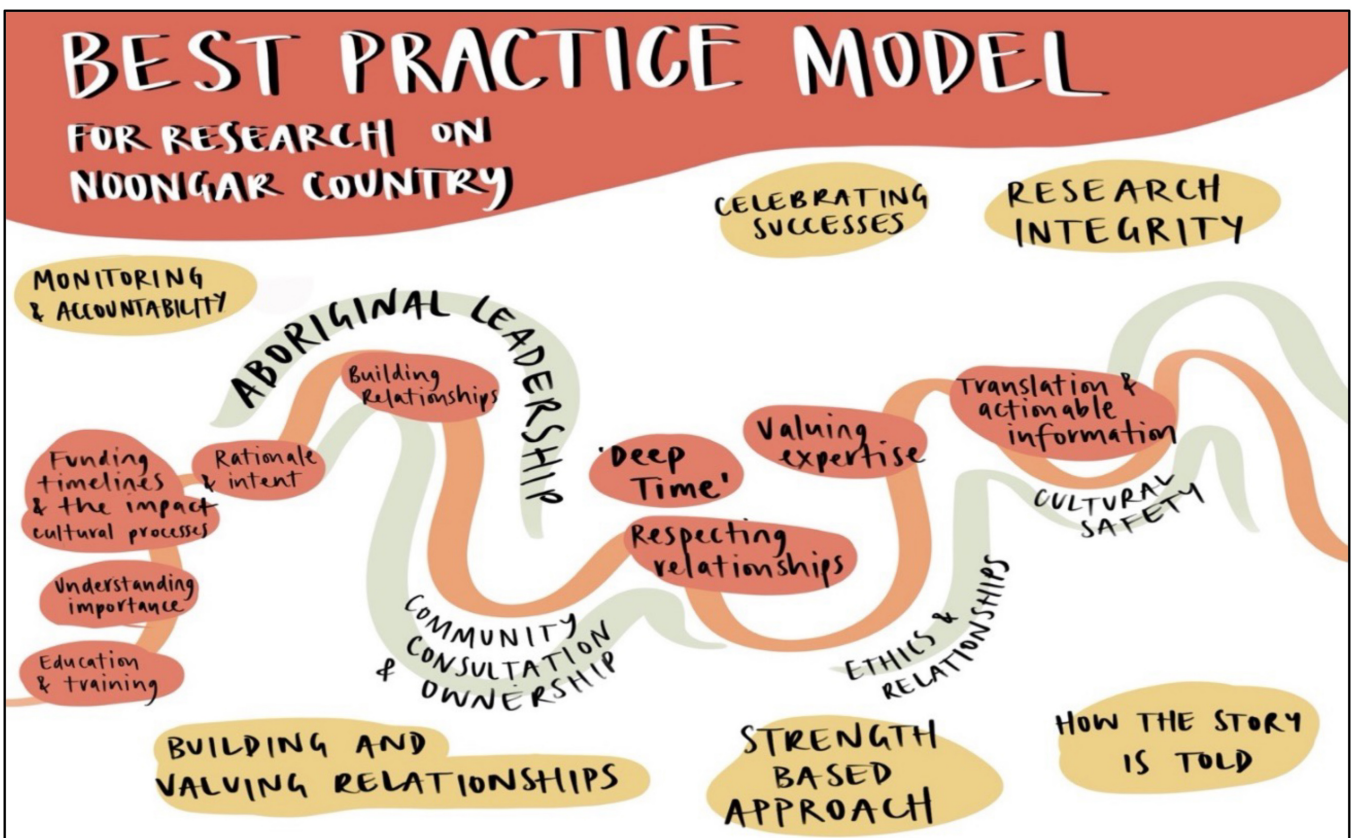


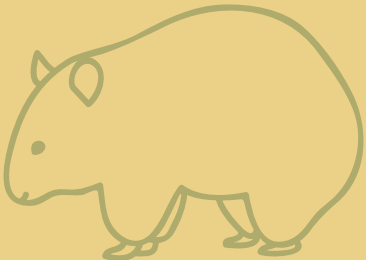
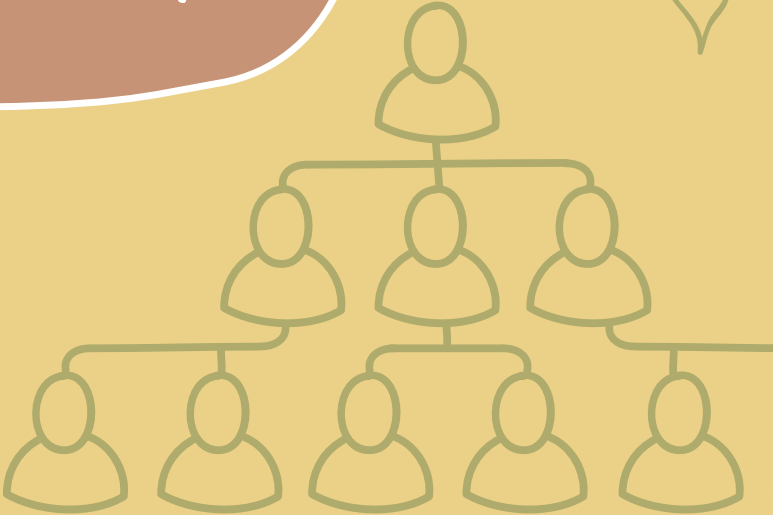
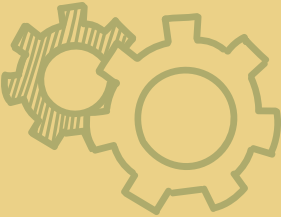
Diagram 6: Best practice model

Community Consultations

Following the workshop several meetings were held with community members in Perth and Bunbury. Of note is that these consultations confirmed a consensus with the issues and concerns raised during the workshop and endorsed the basis of the best practice model. A synthesis of the collective feedback is listed below.

- The project report needs to be shared with national research groups as well as local groups.
- Research funding bodies are the key to addressing issues regarding unrealistic timelines for research project development that curtail appropriate and effective community engagement.
- Ethics committees require a more realistic approach to research timelines to allow for appropriate and effective community engagement.
- Funding should be available to enable effective community involvement outside of the research cycle. This will provide researchers, research institutions and government with access to community feedback on what is important for future research and develop long term relationships.
- Asking community members about issues that affect them and how research can provide evidence to address these should be the starting point for all research with Aboriginal people.
- Utilise better ways to engage and consult communities in the research process e.g., using art, discussion groups about the benefits of research, and explaining the consent process.
- Concerns about a lack of respect for knowledge and authority, tokenism and systemic racism impacting on people who want to be involved in research either to establish a research career or as a community member.
- There is a need for funding to ensure an 'Elder in Residence' or similar position in universities, research organisations, government, and non-government agencies.
- The importance of the economic determination of the Noongar Nation.
- Embed cultural practice into all education courses.
- The need for ongoing consultation with students to understand the value of their life experiences, which could address barriers to easier enrolment and other system issues. This would also improve the confidence of students.

OVERALL SUMMARY



OVERALL SUMMARY

An important goal of research is to generate evidence to support and facilitate improvements in policies, programs and practices. Health services and government agencies utilise research to better understand problems, to inform decision making, to identify effective solutions and to validate ways of working and models of care.

Despite the critical role of research, the consultations undertaken for this project highlight that there continue to be many gaps and concerns with how Aboriginal research is being designed and conducted and its findings applied. Significantly, many of the issues raised during the project's consultations with representatives in government and non-government agencies and services and higher education were also confirmed through the consultations with representatives of community. A number of factors were identified as contributing to the concerns and gaps in research and research practices. These include limited community engagement and involvement in the design and conduct of research; research projects with little consideration for the priorities and needs of those outside the research team; inconsistent, or lack of, commitment to disseminating research findings and explaining their relevance and use; and the absence of efforts to prevent the duplication of research projects. Many of these limitations are, in part, the result of the ways in which research is funded, the time pressures placed on research projects, the requirement of ethics committees, and an absence of understanding, guidance and mentoring of non-Aboriginal researchers. There is also a disconnect in the value many non-Aboriginal researchers accord relationship building, different knowledge systems and cultural authority.

OVERALL SUMMARY

This project asked participants to describe the elements of a best practice approach to research. Among the ideas and prerequisites offered, this project has identified the particular importance of the following:

- ***Involving stakeholders (including community representatives) in a research study.***

This is a critical step toward the effective translation of research into practice. The involvement of stakeholders will work to ensure that research addresses program, policy or service delivery needs and will foster research commitment among stakeholders who can facilitate the utilisation of results. Many research projects do not allow, or adequately budget for, community engagement and stakeholder involvement. This needs to be addressed at a funding and research design level.

- ***Designing research projects in partnership with service providers to ensure relevance, transferability, and applicability.***

There are numerous benefits to researchers working effectively and in partnership with Aboriginal community-controlled services who are a direct link to community, to designing research that can be translated into meaningful practice, and who offer a wealth of insights and expertise.

- ***New means by which ethics committees can ensure genuine consultation and engagement processes in research projects***

Ethics committees' requirements for letters of support have seen this form of community control and authority reduced to a superficial process that is allowing many researchers to avoid meaningful engagement and consultation, and places far too much burden and responsibility on those expected to provide the letters.





RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

ECU have taken an important leadership role in bringing together a range of stakeholders to identify opportunities for improvements in the way research is conducted with Noongar people and Aboriginal people living on Noongar country. ECU is well placed to continue to take the lead in advancing a best practice model for Aboriginal research conducted on Noongar country, including the establishment of a Noongar Research Professional Network. The following recommendations are further ways in which ECU and other relevant agencies, ethics committees and research institutes can advance some of the solutions proposed during this project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Edith Cowan University	
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish and formalise as ECU policy, a set of prerequisites for Aboriginal research across all schools to ensure consistent standards that align to best practice. Develop an ECU policy to expand the career pathways of Aboriginal early career researchers and Higher degree students at ECU.
Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand the ECU Elder in-residence program to two days per week with sustained core funding for this position (and provided in Perth and Bunbury). Role to include mentoring of non-Aboriginal researchers and higher degree students, the provision of tailored workshops, yarning circles, and other avenues to facilitate links to students and staff across the campuses.
Curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expand curricular to address the necessary considerations for designing and conducting research with Aboriginal people across undergraduate courses.
Representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a requirement for each school to have an Aboriginal higher degree student as a member on its committees/Boards.

Relevant Stakeholders	
Funding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DOHWA research funding: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> to require Aboriginal research projects to plan and cost the dissemination of research and ensure a translation component. to require Aboriginal research projects to include involvement of policy, program and service delivery stakeholders and the community as part of the research design process. WA Government funding for a Noongar Research Professional Network to lead strategic change in Aboriginal research on Noongar country. Funding and research budgets to provide for resources including time to accommodate stakeholder (including community) input.
Ethics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Human Research Ethics Committees commit to a developing a more effective means of ensuring researchers undertake genuine community consultation and engagement with relevant Aboriginal people and community-controlled organisations.
Capacity building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify ways to build networks between policymakers and researchers to increase the influence that evidence has on policy and facilitate an evidence-based culture for policymaking.



APPENDICES

Appendix A

Stakeholders consulted

- Telethon Kids Institute
-
- Health Consumers Council of Western Australia
-
- Western Australia Drug and Alcohol Office
 - Department of Health WA
 - East Metropolitan Area Health Service
 - Justice Department
 - Western Australia Country Health Service
 - Child and Adolescent Health Service
 - Department of Communities
 - North Metropolitan Area Health Service
-
- Curtin University
 - Edith Cowan University
 - University of Western Australia
 - Murdoch University
 - The University of Notre Dame
-
- South West Aboriginal Medical Service
 - Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service
 - Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia



Appendix B

Workshop Agenda

Good practice model for research on Noongar country

When: Friday 3 December 2021, 10.00am – 2.00pm

Where: Kurongkurl Katitjin, Edith Cowan University

Workshop Agenda			
Time		Task	By
10.00am	20 mins	Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country Project overview and questions Outline of workshop process	TBC Dan McAullay Anne McKenzie
10.20am	40 mins	Small group discussion #1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introductions • Consider the issues raised in the interviews • Are there other items to include? 	All
	10 mins	Small group feedback Consensus check	Table facilitators Clair Scrine
11.15am	5 mins 40 mins	Good practice model for research on Noongar Country Small group discussion #2 Questions to be considered: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does the research process start? • Who should be involved, where and how do they become part of the process? • Where does ethics fit in the timeline/process? • When should translation and implementation be considered? • What should translation and implementation involve? • What else has to be considered? • Where does the greatest investment of resources need to occur? 	Dan McAullay All
12.00pm	30 mins	Lunch	
12.30pm	15 mins	The model (so far)	Clair Scrine
12.45pm	45 mins	Whole group discussion – Challenges of the good practice model and potential solutions	All
1.30pm	30 mins	Next steps Close	Dan McAullay



Published 2022

