



## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health

### Clearinghouse Connector – November 2015

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### Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a holistic view of health which encompasses not only the physical, but also the “social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being.”<sup>1</sup> This means that health for Aboriginal women is linked to their families and communities.<sup>2</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered great intergenerational trauma as a result of colonisation, forced removal of children, assimilation, segregation and racism. Cultural practices, traditions and identity have been interrupted which has had a devastating impact on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.<sup>3</sup> Aboriginal people also experience significant socio-economic disadvantage, which is strongly related to poor health outcomes.<sup>4</sup>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continue to have poorer health outcomes compared to non-Aboriginal women in Australia. The life expectancy for Aboriginal women is 73.7 compared to 83.1 for non-Aboriginal women.<sup>5</sup> Aboriginal women are more likely to have one or more chronic health conditions compared to Aboriginal men.<sup>6</sup> and are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised due to family violence.<sup>7</sup> Though they make up 0.9% of the Victorian population, Aboriginal women are the fastest growing segment of the Victorian prison population, representing 8.9% of Victorian female prisoners.<sup>8</sup> Most Aboriginal women in prison have experienced family violence and many are incarcerated for offences relating to homelessness and financial hardship.<sup>9</sup>

There is a need for more Aboriginal women-focused research as much of the research on Aboriginal health is gender blind and does not explore the impact of gender on the health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal women in addition to the trauma of colonization, forced removal, racism and socio-economic disadvantage.

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WHV thanks VACCHO for providing feedback for this Connector.

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## Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health

[Summary of Indigenous women's health](#) Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2013

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health performance framework 2014 report: Victoria](#) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015

[The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015

[Reempowering ourselves: Australian Aboriginal women](#) Journal of Women in Culture and Society, 2010

[Chapter 6: Social determinants of social and emotional wellbeing \*In: Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice\*](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2010

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## Health promotion

[Supporting Aboriginal knowledge and practice in health care: lessons from a qualitative evaluation of the strong women, strong babies, strong culture program](#) BMC Pregnancy and Childbirth, 2015

[Family food work: lessons learned from urban Aboriginal women about nutrition promotion](#) Australian Journal of Primary Health, 2010

[Hospitals, doctors, health and Aboriginal people](#) Creative Spirits [Weblog], 2015

[Cultural competency in the delivery of health services for Indigenous people](#) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015

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## Sexual and reproductive health

[Young Aboriginal women's voices on pregnancy care: final report](#) University of Western Australia. Telethon Kids Institute, 2014

[Improving Aboriginal women's experiences of antenatal care: findings from the Aboriginal Families Study in South Australia](#) Birth: Issues in Perinatal Care, 2015

[Exploring Australian Aboriginal women's experiences of menopause: a descriptive study](#) BMC Women's Health, 2014

[Oral health and other characteristics of pregnant Aboriginal women compared with general population estimates](#) Australian Dental Journal, 2013

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## Cancer and preventive screening

[My breast cancer journey: a guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families](#) Cancer Australia, 2013

[Increasing rates of surgical treatment and preventing comorbidities may increase breast cancer survival for Aboriginal women](#) BMC Cancer, 2014

[Increasing Pap smear rates at an urban Aboriginal community controlled health service through translational research and continuous quality improvement](#) Australian Journal of Primary Health, 2015

[Exposed: a literature review of the issues of women's cancers in Australian Indigenous communities](#) Women's Health Goulburn North East, 2010

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## Mental health and wellbeing

[Women and wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#) Target Magazine (Tear Australia), 2014

[Effective strategies to strengthen the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people](#) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, 2014

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and superannuation](#) National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA), 2013

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## Justice

[How Aboriginal women with disabilities are set on a path into the criminal justice system](#) The Conversation, 2015

[Unfinished business: Koori women and the justice system](#) Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, 2013

[The family business: improving the understanding and treatment of post traumatic stress disorder among incarcerated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women](#) Beyondblue, 2015

[Prison is not the answer: instead, address the needs of traumatised Aboriginal women](#) Croakey, 2015

[Keeping our mob healthy in and out of prison: exploring prison health in Victoria to improve quality, culturally appropriate health care for Aboriginal people](#) Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), 2015

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## Family violence

[FVPLS Victoria Submission to the Victorian Royal Commission into Family Violence](#) Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention & Legal Service Victoria, 2015

[Empowering Aboriginal women is the key to eliminating gendered violence](#) The Age. Daily Life, 2015

[Unfinished business: Strengthening law and justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault of women and children](#) Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010

[Innovative models in addressing violence against Indigenous women: State of Knowledge Paper](#) Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Limited (ANROWS), 2015

[Improving accessibility of the legal system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors of family violence and sexual assault](#) Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service Victoria, 2010

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## Substance use

[Aboriginal women, alcohol and the road to fetal alcohol spectrum disorder](#) Medical Journal of Australia, 2012

[Goreen narkwarren ngrn-toura: healthy family ai: a literature review to inform the VACCHO Smoking Amongst Pregnant Aboriginal Women Research Project](#) Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO), 2010

[Exploring the needs of Aboriginal women with co-morbid drug and alcohol and mental health problems](#) University of Sydney, 2010

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## Key policy documents

[Close The Gap progress and priority report](#) Close the Gap Steering Committee, 2015

[National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health plan 2013-2023](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2013

[Implementation plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health plan 2013-2023](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2015

[Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing plan](#) Victoria. Department of Justice and Regulation, 2015

[Koolin Balit: Victorian Government strategic directions for Aboriginal health 2012-2022](#) Victoria. Department of Health, 2012

[National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health strategy](#) Australian Women's Health Network, 2010

[Fourth national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander blood-borne viruses and sexually transmissible infections strategy 2014-2017](#) Australia. Department of Health, 2014

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## Related websites

[Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)

[Victorian Aboriginal Health Service](#)

[Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service](#)

[Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet](#) Women's health portal

[Closing the Gap Clearinghouse](#)

[Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists](#) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health

[Jean Hailes. Indigenous Health.](#)

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## Footnotes

1. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (2014). [Definitions](#). VAHS, Preston. Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
2. Australia. National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party (1989). [National Aboriginal Health Strategy. Ch 9: Women's business](#) Canberra, p. 179. Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation (2012). [Growing our children up strong and deadly](#). Canberra Accessed on 06/11/2015. ↵
4. Fredericks B, Adams K, Angus S, and Australian Women's Health Network Talking Circle (2010). [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health strategy](#). Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), Melbourne. p.8 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
5. Holland A (2015). [Progress and priorities report 2015](#). Close The Gap Campaign Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality. p. 7 Accessed on 06/11/2015. Victorian data not available. ↵
6. Fredericks B, Adams K, Angus S, and Australian Women's Health Network Talking Circle (2010). [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's health strategy](#). Australian Women's Health Network (AWHN), Melbourne. p.25 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
7. The Productivity Commission (2014). [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage - Key Indicators 2014](#). The Productivity Commission, Melbourne. table 4A.11.22 Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
8. Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2013). [Unfinished business: Koori women and the justice system](#). Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, Melbourne. pp.9-10. Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵
9. McInerney M (2015). [Prison is not the answer. Instead, address the needs of traumatised Aboriginal women](#). Croakey, Melbourne. Accessed on 06/11/15. ↵

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