



RIO TINTO CHILD HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

Project Overview

The Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership (the Partnership) is a collaborative mechanism designed to fast-track improvements in the health and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, proactively addressing Indigenous maternal and child health nationally.

The partnership is an undertaking between the Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (The Institute), Rio Tinto Services Ltd (and its consortium of contributors), the Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Foundation (AER Foundation) and the governments of Western Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. From an Australian government perspective, the Partnership is supported by the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH) within the Department of Health & Ageing.

Research Focus

Within three projects, the Partnership aims to deliver improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal and child health by:

- o Providing an evidence base for future policy and decision-making, as well as service provision,
- o Focusing on prevention and effective intervention and the development of tangible outcomes,
- o Advocating for collaborative political and community action and social change by gathering and making available key data and research.

Project 1: National policy and planning information for Indigenous child health, education and wellbeing (the modelling of the WAACHS data)

Project 1 involves the translation of the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS) to Queensland and the Northern Territory, an important and significant step to achieving nationally-consistent indicators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. The WAACHS is the first cross-sectional study of its kind to investigate the health of Aboriginal children, and has produced a comprehensive set of indicators of Indigenous child health.

Project 2: National Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) prevention strategy

Project 2 looks at ways to prevent tobacco and alcohol consumption during pregnancy, the principle cause of low birth weight births and fetal alcohol spectrum disorder. Findings from the WAACHS indicate around 50 per cent of pregnant women used tobacco, and almost one quarter of women drank alcohol during their pregnancy, figures that suggest contemporary health promotion messages are not getting through to Indigenous women. Using health promotion and action research approaches, trial communities across the three states have developed resources designed to reduce and prevent substance use during pregnancy.

Project 3: National Indigenous community health workforce development strategy

Project 3 involves developing an Indigenous maternal and child health workforce. An important and successful outcome in Queensland is the development of a unique train-the-trainer resource to help health care professionals train community workers in promoting maternal and early infant health.

National Symposium

Among the significant outcomes achieved within the Partnership's second project is the national symposium on promoting healthy pregnancy in Indigenous communities –

Start Out Strong – A Healthy Beginning in Life, held in Perth on 9 -10 May 2006.

The symposium looked at ways to promote healthy pregnancy and highlighted programs that are achieving results in three major areas:

- o Reducing substance use during pregnancy
- o Improved nutrition, including breastfeeding
- o The first years of life.

Over 170 delegates attended the symposium representing a range of sectors including community-based health care organisations and clinics, Indigenous communities, State and Commonwealth government agencies and leading research institutes in Australia and overseas. All the presentations were of the highest standard and covered a range of issues and experiences.

The symposium was a great success and an invaluable opportunity for so many working in this important area to come together and share their success stories, expertise, research and resources.

A final symposium report has been produced and is available on the Kulunga website.

Planning is underway for another symposium in 2007, with a focus on Indigenous community health workforce development and will again seek to bring together a range of key players to advance some of the key issues.

The Rio Tinto Child Health Partnership is a successful demonstration of how corporate, government and research agencies can work together to deliver outcomes in health.

Further Information

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