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Background

Falls are a leading cause of hospitalisation for older Aboriginal people in NSW and can lead to isolation, loneliness and depression. Despite the high burden of falls in Aboriginal people, there are few programs addressing falls for Aboriginal people.

Project Aims and Objectives

The Ironbark Project aims to develop a culturally appropriate falls prevention program specifically designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people, allowing them to stay healthy and strong in their homes and communities.

Outcomes of health services questionnaire

We distributed a questionnaire to a range of mainstream and Aboriginal Health and Community Services across NSW to establish what programs currently exist addressing falls for Aboriginal people, and if Aboriginal people are attending these.

The falls prevention programs identified were of mainstream design and were mostly run by non – Aboriginal services such as the Stepping on program.

It was repeatedly mentioned in questionnaire replies that these mainstream, programs were not always culturally appropriate for Aboriginal participants.

It is apparent that there is a need to develop an Aboriginal culturally appropriate falls prevention program for Aboriginal communities and the need to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities for the program to be sustainable for the future.

Results

We emailed, faxed and phoned over 700 questionnaires to both Aboriginal Health and Community services and mainstream services in NSW, we received 131 responses.

The table below shows the response areas.

Location	Total replies (out of 131)	Percentage
Metropolitan Local Health Districts		
Central Coast	17	13%
Illawarra Shoalhaven	7	5%
Nepean Blue Mountains	5	4%
Northern Sydney	4	3%
South Eastern Sydney	8	6%
South Western Sydney	6	5%
Sydney	16	12%
Western Sydney	3	2%
Rural & Regional NSW Local Health Districts		
Far West	2	1.5%
Hunter New England	28	21%
Mid North Coast	6	5%
Murrumbidgee	2	1.5%
Northern NSW	2	1.5%
Southern NSW	1	0.5%
Western NSW	6	5%
NSW-wide	18	14%

One of the questions we asked the service providers was:

“Are you aware of any fall prevention programs that specifically target Aboriginal people in your area?”

Very few respondents were aware of any falls prevention services that specifically catered for Aboriginal people in their area.

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Outcomes of Yarning Circles

There are programs being held in Aboriginal community organisations across NSW that provide culturally appropriate healthy ageing programs that respect and honour our elderly Aboriginal communities. We consulted with several of these programs and asked the leaders and Elders for permission to hold yarning circles in their community.

Eight yarning circles have been held with older Aboriginal community members in the Central Coast, Dubbo, Illawarra and Shoalhaven areas.

In the yarning circles, the topic of falls led to conversations about the inability to fulfil family roles or being able to remain involved in community life.



A community lead by Rose McBride a Kamillaroi Woman, gathers for a yarning circle about falls and the effect it has on family and community.

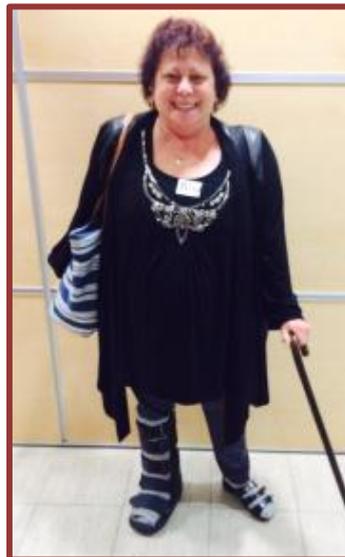
"That would kill me if I couldn't be on call for the grandkids. I've been on call a few times for that. But, yeah, I pick my grandkids up from school. Sara missed the bus so I go and pick her up from school; things like that. That gives me so much pleasure and if I couldn't do that..."

It is very common in Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal children to be cared for by their grandparents. There was a common theme of remorse if independence was lost due to a fall and they were no longer able to care for their grandchildren.

"I felt so useless because when I did eventually come home I couldn't do a lot, but horrible feeling because the kids had to come over and bring meals, my brother brought a few meals, and it's a horrible feeling; horrible."

Our Elders are treated with respect for their cultural knowledge and there is a need for our Elders to continue passing their knowledge onto the next generation and to keep our connection to land alive.

Becoming a burden on family, friends and community was a fear many participants had. Losing the ability to continue as care givers and cultural educators is a fear felt not only by some older Aboriginal people but also by those of us who have a desire to continue learning about our culture from our Elders.



"The loss of independence is greater than the loss of a partner or a friend. I feel so relaxed among these people, who are my people. I feel that I can't do anything wrong, and if I do something wrong one of them will let me know. Therefore I'm not being pulled up or jerked by somebody who is a superior being, I'm pulled up by my peers."

- Kay, yarning circle participant from Gosford

The Ironbark Project



Standing Strong and Tall

Funding

The project is funded by the NSW Health Aboriginal Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Demonstration Grants Program.

Key stakeholders include:

- MINGALETTA Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Corporation
- Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Centre
- Nunyara Aboriginal Health Service
- Darrumulan Aboriginal Home care
- Central Coast Medicare Local, Guri Wâgir
- Aunty Jeans Chronic Care Program
- Elders Groups from Dubbo

Governance

A Steering Committee provides overall guidance and advice for the program as it relates to Aboriginal communities in NSW. The committee ensures appropriate Aboriginal involvement at all levels of the project including design, conduct and dissemination, as well as sharing insights and knowledge of the Aboriginal community to maximise program effectiveness and success. The group meets in person twice a year and maintains ongoing communication by email and phone.

It is important to us that Aboriginal communities are consulted and that we work in partnership with the Aboriginal community in all aspects of this project. This program will be developed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people. From the birth of this project Aboriginal people have been involved, from the employment of an Aboriginal research officer to the naming of the project, the art work and of course for the future development of a culturally appropriate Aboriginal Falls Program that will be sustainable for Aboriginal communities.

Our Logo

The Iron Bark Project: Standing Strong and Tall

"The Iron bark project evokes images of old, strong, trees standing tall and that is what we want to see our old people doing. Standing tall and strong as they age." *Jake*

Jake Byrne is a Kamillaroi man and Project Officer for Driving Change.



"The symbols I have used in the tree are representing land and water. The tree symbolises strength and growth, the root system symbolises life and staying grounded. Around the tree are dreaming symbols representing our people and our cultural connection."



Kylie Cassidy a Wiradjuri woman completed our image with her Aboriginal art work of an Iron Bark tree.



Contacts



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Caroline joined The George Institute in February 2014 as the Project Manager for the Healthy Aging Project. The vast majority of Caroline's public health experience has been with working for international Non-Government Organizations in countries including India and Indonesia.

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Julieann Coombes
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Julieann joins The George Institute as an Aboriginal Research Officer with the Injury Division. Julieann's focus areas are; Aboriginal cultural awareness, equity and health. She advocates for better health outcomes for Aboriginal people at secondary, tertiary and national institutions.

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We would like to acknowledge the participation of Aboriginal people and Elders who engaged with us on our learning journey and we look forward to a continued partnership.

Your contributions have been extremely helpful and valuable.