

Aboriginal children and young people in Out of Home Care accessing health assessments in regional Victoria

A project evaluation identifying challenges and hope for change

The number of Aboriginal children and young people in Out of Home Care (OoHC) has been steadily increasing over the last few years. Health outcomes of this cohort are generally poorer compared to other cohorts, despite a range of initiatives implemented by the Victorian government to address this discrepancy. From 2014 onwards, the Taskforce 1000 project was instigated in North East Victoria by the Commissioner of Children and Young People to critically analyse the experience of Aboriginal children in OoHC. Subsequently, in 2016 the Department of Health and Human Services commissioned the Murray Primary Health Network to develop and implement a pathway for Aboriginal children and young people in OoHC accessing health assessments. La Trobe University evaluated the OoHC pathway project and submitted a report including recommendations early 2018.

For the evaluation of the pathway project, a qualitative research design was applied containing a comprehensive literature review, ten interviews with key stakeholders and a survey amongst frontline child protection staff. A thematic analysis of the interviews revealed the need for cross-sector education of allied health and human services staff, practical support for carers, and a range of systemic challenges. However, there are also elements of hope and the prospect of change to effectuate culturally 'safe' practice across the service sector by partnerships between organisations.

The aim of this paper is to critically reflect on findings and seek a dialogue with the audience regarding some of the recommendations for the pathway project implementation, and the principle of self-determination put in practice.

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