



Media Release – Aboriginal natural helpers, helping naturally in getting accurate COVID information to their communities

20 September 2021

An Edith Cowan University project funded by the Western Australian government has been consulting with natural helpers in Aboriginal communities in the south west and Perth urban areas of Western Australia. Led by Dr Uncle Mick Adams, Senior Aboriginal Research Fellow at the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, Professor Neil Drew, Director of the HealthInfoNet, and Associate Professor Stuart Medley from the School of Arts and Humanities, supported by community Cultural Consultant Brett Hill, the project has been asking natural helpers about their experiences of COVID – 19.

Natural helpers are those in the community who are naturally turned to in times of crisis for information and support. A particular focus was to explore where people are getting their information from and how trustworthy they feel those sources are. Using a visual methods approach developed for the project by Associate Professor Stuart Medley, participants visually 'mapped' their sources of information from those that were nearest to them and trusted, to those that were further away and considered less reliable.

The workshops, held so far in Narrogin, Bunbury, Mandurah and Armadale attended by over 60 people, have been very revealing. Many participants feel that, despite the overwhelming weight of information available, they still lacked information that they could trust. They felt that many of the people used to promote the messages, like sports people or politicians were too far-removed from the circle of trust in communities. Many want to see and hear from local identities or natural helpers; people they know and trust. This includes Elders and community leaders but also, and importantly, other trusted natural helpers. They want authorities to visit and sit with them to discuss the issues in their community.

Another very strong theme is that people want resources that are visual and simple to understand. The team, along with the project Cultural Consultant Brett Hill, will be returning to each community in the coming months to get community endorsement of the findings which will be compiled in a report to the Western Australian government. The preliminary results shed some light on why vaccine rates in Aboriginal communities are low.

-END-

Spokesperson: Professor Neil Drew - HealthInfoNet Director

Tel: 08 9370 6155 Mob: 0418 901 468 Email: n.drew@ecu.edu.au

Media contact: Tara Hoyne – Tel: 08 9370 6109 Email: t.hoyne@ecu.edu.au

About the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet: A comprehensive web resource <https://healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au> that helps to close the gap by informing practice and policy in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health by making up-to-date research and other knowledge readily accessible. The HealthInfoNet makes research and other information freely available to practitioners and policy-makers, enabling them to make decisions based on the best available evidence.