

doi: 10.1111/1753-6405.13010

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations are taking a leading role in COVID-19 health communication

Summer Finlay,^{1,2} Mark Wenitong^{3,4}

1. School of Health and Society, University of Wollongong, New South Wales
2. Health Research Institute, University of Canberra, Australian Capital Territory
3. Apunipima Health Council, Australian Capital Territory
4. Tropical Public Health Medicine Rehabilitation Sciences, James Cook University, Queensland

Health communication during a health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is vital to reduce the impact on populations. To ensure the communication is effective, audience segmentation is required with specific resources that have been developed for each segment. In addition, the messages need to be clear, mutual trust between the communicator and the audience needs to be developed and maintained, and resources should focus on cultural values.¹⁻³ The evidence around effective crisis communication indicates that it needs to be timely, clear, concise and appropriate to the target audience.¹⁻⁶ Communication is particularly important for those at higher risk during the crisis,^{3,5-11} such as people who are immunocompromised, the elderly, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are at increased risk from COVID-19 due to a range of factors associated with higher rates of non-communicable diseases¹² and a lack of access to health services in remote communities.¹³ Additionally, there are socio-cultural factors that put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at risk, such as high mobility for family or cultural reasons.¹³ Despite the increased risk to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from COVID-19, there has been little specific communication tailored for them from governments since the pandemic commenced. This is despite the overwhelming evidence that health promotion messages need to be tailored for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.^{8-9,13-20}

To fill the gap, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) have demonstrated their capacity to deliver

scientifically valid, evidence-based and culturally translated COVID-19 prevention messages. The ACCHO sectors' understanding of population health has led to a strong history of culturally centred health promotion and social marketing materials.^{8-9,14,16,18-20} Even before the World Health Assembly declared COVID-19 a global pandemic (11 March),²¹ ACCHOs and their peak bodies had developed messages for their communities. The ACCHO sectors' communications on COVID-19 have been produced in addition to their usual service delivery and using existing funding.

Effective social marketing campaigns segment a target audience and develop resources that are culturally appropriate. Culturally appropriate resources include target specific language choices, imagery and an understanding of culturally specific behaviour change motivations.²²⁻²⁴ Four examples of ACCHOs that have delivered tailored resources include the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC), Apunipima Cape York Health Council (Apunipima), Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). Each of the examples provided resources that were tailored specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by including Aboriginal vernacular, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and some included Indigenous languages. Additionally, the material reflected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's kinship structures by promoting self-isolation and good hygiene as a way of taking care of family and community.

The AH&MRC, the NSW ACCHO peak body,²⁵ has disseminated existing and new resources promoting COVID-19 prevention online via their website,²⁶ Facebook,²⁷ Twitter,²⁸ YouTube²⁹ and Instagram.³⁰ Additionally, they created the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service Pandemic Response Tool Kit.³¹ The materials were either resources developed by their member services (ACCHOs) or mainstream materials that have been repurposed and contextualised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Apunipima, a Cape York ACCHO in Queensland,³² has also been communicating with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about how to protect themselves from COVID-19 via Facebook³³ and TikTok, and by distributing printed resources. The first Facebook post (6 March 2020)³⁴ used simple, evidenced-based prevention messages about handwashing. Subsequently, they produced infographics and short localised video updates.³⁴

AHCWA, the Western Australian ACCHO peak body,³⁵ has also developed infographics promoting prevention measures such as hand washing³⁶⁻³⁷ and COVID-19 symptoms.³⁸ AHCWA resources and updates have been published on their website.³⁷

NACCHO, the national ACCHO peak body,³⁹ has been amplifying communications from ACCHOs and the jurisdictional affiliates, such as the AH&MRC and AHCWA. They have shared these resources via their website,⁴⁰ the NACCHO communique,⁴¹ their Facebook page⁴² and Twitter.⁴³

ACCHOs, as comprehensive healthcare services whose core business is population-level health, have the skills, expertise and knowledge to create and execute appropriate COVID-19 prevention messages. Part of their success has been the trust that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people place in them primarily because they deliver culturally appropriate service.^{10,44-45} In a time of crisis, they are best placed to deliver health promotion and crisis communication to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. ACCHOs and their peak bodies, therefore, need to be resourced appropriately to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the best possible information to reduce the risk to themselves, their families and their communities.

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

References

- Vaughan E, Tinker T. "Effective health risk communication about pandemic influenza for vulnerable populations." *Am J Public Health*. 2009;99:324-32.
- Jones SC, Waters L, Holland O, Bevins J, Iverson D. 'Developing pandemic communication strategies: Preparation without panic.' *J Bus Res*. 2010;63(2):26-132.
- Vaughan E, Tinker T. Effective health risk communication about pandemic influenza for vulnerable populations. *Am J Public Health*. 2009;99 Suppl 2:324-32.
- Abraham T. Lessons from the pandemic: The need for new tools for risk and outbreak communication. *Emerg Health Threats J*. 2011;4:7160.
- World Health Organization. *Communicating Risk in Public Health Emergencies: A WHO Guideline for Emergency Risk Communication (ERC) Policy and Practice*. Geneva (CHE): WHO; 2017.
- Jones SC, Waters L, Holland O, Bevins J, Iverson DC. Developing pandemic communication strategies: Preparation without panic. *J Bus Res*. 2010;63(2):126-132.
- Australian Department of Health. Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19). Canberra (AUST): Government of Australia; 2020.
- Vallesi S, Wood L, Dimer L, Zada M. "In Their Own Voice"-Incorporating underlying social determinants into Aboriginal Health Promotion Programs. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2018;15(7):1514.
- Genat B, Browne J, Thorpe S, MacDonald C. 'Sectoral system capacity development in health promotion: Evaluation of an Aboriginal nutrition program.' *Health Promot J Austr*. 2016;27(3):236-42.
- Heymann D, Shindo N. COVID-19: What is next for public health? *Lancet*. 2020;395(10224):542-5.
- Fang L, Karakiulakis G, Roth M. Are patients with hypertension and diabetes mellitus at increased risk for COVID-19? *Lancet Respir Med*. 2020;8(4):e21
- Australian Department of Health. Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): Government of Australia; 2020 [cited 2020 May 14]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/management-plan-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-populations>
- Australian Department of Health. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Advice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Remote Communities*. Canberra (AUST): Government of Australia; 2020 [cited 2020 May 14]. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/news/health-alerts/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov-health-alert/advice-for-people-at-risk-of-coronavirus-covid-19/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-remote-communities#why-remote-communities-are-at-risk>
- Wyndow P, Walker R, Reibel T. 'A novel approach to transforming smoking cessation practice for pregnant Aboriginal women and girls living in the Pilbara.' *Healthcare (Basel)*. 2018;6(1):10.
- Wise M, Massi L, Rose M, Nancarrow H, Conigrave K, Bauman A, et al. 'Developing and implementing a state-wide Aboriginal health promotion program: The process and factors influencing successful delivery.' *Health Promot J Austr*. 2012;23(1):25-9.
- Arabena K, Rowley K, MacLean S. 'Building evidence about effective health promotion in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.' *Aust J Prim Health*. 2014;20(4):317-8.
- Smith JA, Judd J. COVID-19: Vulnerability and the power of privilege in a pandemic. *Health Promot J Austr*. 2020;31(2):158-160.
- Harfield SG, Davy C, McArthur A, Munn Z, Brown B, Brown N. Characteristics of Indigenous primary health care service delivery models: A systematic scoping review. *Global Health*. 2018;14(1):12.
- Genat B. Evaluation of the Smoke Free Mob Initiative. Victoria University, Melbourne (AUST); 2012.
- Poder N, Khan RJ, Kovai V, Robinson L, Wright D, Spinks M, et al. 'Evaluating an Aboriginal tobacco social marketing project in Sydney, Australia.' *Health Promot J Austr*. 2020;31(1):26-37.
- World Health Organization. *Rolling Updates on Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)* [Internet]. Geneva (CHE): WHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/events-as-they-happen>
- Madill J, Wallace L, Goneau-Lessard K, Stuart MacDonald R, Dion C. "Best practices in social marketing among Aboriginal people". *J Soc Mark*. 2014;4(2):155-75.
- Campbell MA, Finlay S, Lucas K, Neal N, Williams R. Kick the habit: A social marketing campaign by Aboriginal communities in NSW. *Aust J Prim Health*. 2014;20(4):327-33.
- Gould GS, McEwen A, Watters T, Clough AR, van der Zwan R. Should anti-tobacco media messages be culturally targeted for Indigenous populations? A systematic review and narrative synthesis. *Tob Control*. 2012;22(4):e7.
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *About* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): AH&MRC; [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.ahmrc.org.au/about/>
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *COVID-19 Outbreak* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): AH&MRC; [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.ahmrc.org.au/coronavirus/>
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *Facebook AH&MRC of NSW* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): Facebook; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/AHMRCNSW/>
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *Twitter AH&MRC of NSW* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): Twitter; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: https://twitter.com/ahmrc?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *YouTube AH&MRC of NSW* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): YouTube; 2009 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.youtube.com/user/ahmrc/about>
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *Instagram AH&MRC of NSW* [Internet]. Sydney (AUST): Instagram; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: https://www.instagram.com/ahmrc_nsw/?hl=en
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW. *Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services Pandemic Response Toolkit Preparing a Comprehensive Plan and Response to Pandemics*. Sydney (AUST): AH&MRC of NSW; 2020.
- Apunipima Cape York Health Council. *About* [Internet]. Cairns (AUST): ACYHC; ND [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <http://apunipima.org.au/about>
- Apunipima Cape York Health Council. *Facebook Apunipima Cape York Health Council* [Internet]. Cairns (AUST): ACYHC; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: https://www.facebook.com/Apunipima/?__tn__=%2Cd%2CP-R&eid=ARBEzXb0NmLXQ2x2CA8aMFn5TLif-e8laNcpkwYc4UDyJlUICx0mUgoabQR6ILK9L1wZGZUjta0ly-7MM&redirect=false
- Apunipima Cape York Health Council. *Facebook Apunipima Cape York Health Council - Protect Yourself from COVID-19 Step 1: Wash Your Hands Regularly* [Internet]. Cairns (AUST): ACYHC; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/h?v=2549027435366588>
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. *About Us* [Internet]. Cairns (AUST): AHCWA; 2019 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.ahcwa.org.au/about>
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. *Facebook Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia* [Internet]. Perth (AUST): AHCWA; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/AHCWA/photos/a.261307820729076/130225723330791/?type=3&theater>
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. *Coronavirus Updates*. Perth (AUST): AHCWA; 2020.
- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia. *Facebook AHCWA - COVID-19 Symptoms: Look After Yourself & Your Community* [Internet]. Perth (AUST): AHCWA; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/AHCWA/photos/rpp.239183092941549/1303181136541734/?type=3&theater>
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. *About* [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): NACCHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.naccho.org.au/about/>
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. *Coronavirus (COVID-19) Updates and Information* [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): NACCHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.naccho.org.au/home/aboriginal-health-alets-coronavirus-covid-19/>
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. *NACCHO Communiqué* [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): NACCHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://nacchocommunique.com>
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. *Facebook NACCHO - NACCHO Aboriginal Health Australia* [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): NACCHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: <https://www.facebook.com/NacchoAboriginalHealth/>
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. *Twitter NACCHO - Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands* [Internet]. Canberra (AUST): NACCHO; 2020 [cited 2020 Mar 25]. Available from: https://twitter.com/NACCHOAustralia?ref_src=twsrc%5Egoogle%7Ctwcamp%5Eserp%7Ctwgr%5Eauthor
- Gomersall JS, Gibson O, Dwyer J, O'Donnell K, Stephenson M, Carter D, et al. What Indigenous Australian clients value about primary health care: A systematic review of qualitative evidence. *Aust N Z J Public Health*. 2017;41(4):417-23.
- Panaretto KS, Wenitong M, Button S, Ring IT. Aboriginal community-controlled health services: Leading the way in primary care. *Med J Aust*. 2014;200(11):649-52.

Correspondence to: Summer Finlay, School of Health and Society, University of Wollongong, New South Wales; e-mail: summermayfinlay@gmail.com