Developing an innovative, best-practice approach to ear and hearing care for Indigenous children in Australia

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Abstract

Middle ear disease (otitis media, OM) disproportionally affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait children and has significant long-term developmental, educational, and social impacts. This disparity, in part, is due to and perpetuated by systemic breakdowns in the ear and hearing care (EHC) system and pathways. Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) are uniquely positioned to deliver services that are culturally-safe, holistic and meet the needs and priorities of Communities. Health care reform in Australia must strengthen ACCHOs and build the Indigenous workforce to see improved health systems and patient outcomes. High quality, culturally safe EHC services can reduce the impacts of OM and improve health and life outcomes.

Imagine
To build an understanding of the context, levers and constraints of the Australian and New South Wales (NSW) health system which will impact the development of any new EHC approach, a targeted literature review analysed current EHC policy instruments. Learnings from this review were used to build a Functional Resonance Analysis Method (FRAM) model depicting a 'work-as-prescribed' model. This model demonstrates the inherent dependencies, variability and vulnerabilities of how EHC is delivered in NSW currently and the context for reform and innovation.

Innovate
A focus group with ear health workers from ACCHOs across NSW was conducted to identify barriers faced and to imagine innovative solutions to strengthen EHC services delivered through ACCHOs by an Indigenous work-force. One the of the solutions proposed by the participants, a digital data management system, was developed. Researchers engaged with industry partners, ACCHO partners, and clinical experts from across Australia to co-design and collaboratively develop a prototype. The resulting prototype is a data management solution which digitally captures audiometric results and case information and supports clinical decision making and referral.

Implement
The final phase, describes the process and by which the innovative data solution can be contextualised and then implement into clinical practice in ACCHOs. This implementation process follows the Practical, Robust Implementation and Sustainability Model (PRISM) framework.