

Improving Access to Universal Maternal and Child Health Services for Aboriginal Families: Self-Identification



Why is Self-Identification Important for MCH workers and Aboriginal families

Statistically Aboriginal women access mainstream MCH services less than non-Aboriginal women and if they do, they access at later stage.¹ In universal services there is a general trend of a decrease in participation rates after 8 month check. This is not the same for MCH services at Victorian Aboriginal Health service (VAHS) an Aboriginal Community Controlled organisation.² There are reported lower breast-feeding rates, immunization rates for Aboriginal families in Victoria. Out of Home Care(OoHC) children particularly vulnerable target group (Taskforce 1000).

What will we achieve by appropriately identifying Aboriginal children and families.

- Provide culturally appropriate service delivery – eg communication, understanding family structure.
- Be able to offer services that are specifically designed to support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people or offer Aboriginal-specific service options. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander status may be linked to Priority of Access and other specific programs.
- Improve data and evidence which will assist in MCH service planning and delivery

The Collection of Indigenous Status-Correct use of wording

Adherence to national standards for items in data collection helps to ensure consistency and promote confidence that the same concept is being measured in each collection. Self-report is the most accurate means of ascertaining an individual's Indigenous or non-Indigenous status, and a standard item is used to collect this information in the Census. Practices need to correctly and consistently record the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status of all persons. All people need to be asked the same question – it isn't just about asking Aboriginal people if they are Aboriginal, it is about making sure that every patient has been given an opportunity to identify if they are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin.

Asking the question: Are you (is the person) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Origin?

The standard Indigenous status question should be asked of all clients to establish their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous status. Standard response options are:

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander

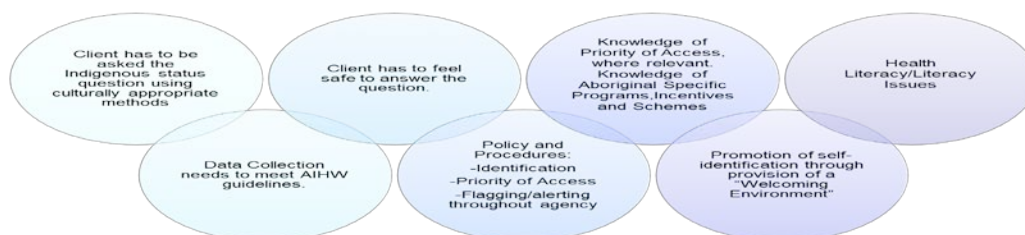
For clients of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status – both boxes are marked or if a fourth response is provided

- Yes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

After many years of promoting /highlighting identity why is this still an issue?

- Consumer needs to feel safe enough to identify
- Service needs to ask question
- Service needs to have a process of identification that is flagged/alerted within their Client Management System -once initial data is entered in system at initial contact

Complexity of Issues Affecting 'asking the question'.



¹ VACCHO (2015) Aboriginal families' engagement in Maternal and Child Health services Phase One: Project Report [draft]

² Strong Culture, Strong Future WG Minutes November 2015.

Some Issues Affecting the collection of Indigenous information

- Workers lack confidence or had no training in 'asking the question'.
- Staff reluctant to ask the question, possibly due to negative prior experience or do not know Aboriginal-specific services that they can offer as options to the person.
- Client refusal to answer question (possible negative prior experience or confidentiality reasons).
- Staff perceptions about Aboriginal clients not wanting to disclose their status
- Staff perceptions about what an Aboriginal person looks like
- Workers do not understand 'why' they are asking the question and its importance
- Staff think the question is discriminatory

After many years of promoting /highlighting identity why is this still an issue in MCH space?

- Transition from hospital to community-identity 'lost'/not transferred or not recorded
- Service has no process/policy to re-ask question
- Fear associated with historical experience of child removal within acute settings. (Collecting Stories)
- Past history/discrimination (Collecting Stories video)
- Diversity of families. One partner not Aboriginal so not "asked the question"(Stereotypes)
- Mother not Aboriginal. So presumption father is not.
- Baby's status not recorded as Indigenous even when one parent Aboriginal.
- Women not feeling comfortable to identify-can change status later (AIHW Guidelines, p.15)

What can MCH Services do to improve self-identification of Aboriginal children and families.

- ✓ Engagement = Increased identification
- ✓ Audit- Access Points-Is each access point asking the question using culturally appropriate methods
- ✓ Training- Provide staff training on self-identification issues and culturally appropriate methods for asking consumers around Indigenous status.
- ✓ Embed importance of self-identification in Orientation for all new staff. Ensure they have access to self-identification training on-line resources.
- ✓ Develop Policy and Procedures specific to Self-Identification of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander consumers/Priority of Access and Health Literacy/Public Communications
- ✓ Develop an agency resource that lists Aboriginal specific schemes, incentives, programs and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal-specific workers located in mainstream agencies.
- ✓ Make your agency more 'welcoming' through the display of a variety of symbols of welcome.
- ✓ Display Aboriginal-specific identification posters in areas of prominent view
- ✓ Display resources promoting self-identification in work spaces as on-going prompt to ensure 'the question' continues to be asked.

Self-Identification Resources:

North East PCP-Resources include: sample policy/posters/Tip sheet etc..(Website currently being updated)

Resource Pack: Have you asked the question? "Are You of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Origin?": A5 booklet, mouse-mat, computer monitor sticker and phone sticker.

Consumer Reflections- 'Collecting Stories'- Aboriginal Experiences of the Primary Health Care System in Northern Melbourne on You Tube: <http://youtu.be/-x1HPd663QU>

Self-Identification On-line Training and Videos

- **VACCHO:Recording Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Status.**
Segment 1: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P110TACQJZs>
Segment 2: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRDiOU0Llcg>
Segment 3: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8NCQ95zyicg>
- **Queensland Health:** Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WN0Gf7yj2Eq>
- **INWPCP: Asking the Question Training** at <http://inwpcp.org.au/resources/closing-the-health-gap-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people/asking-the-question-training-package>



- 15 MCH Services have implemented Resources across State.
- Photo(Left) : City of Ballarat Maternal and child Health Service using resources.

Guidelines:

National Best Practice Guidelines for collecting Indigenous status in health data sets (Download or request hard copy) <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=6442458760>

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