

The Connection between Participative Community Singing and Mental and Physical Health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Population: Voices United for Harmony Project

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Introduction and Objectives There is increasing interest in the Australia in the idea that participative community singing is beneficial for wellbeing and health, both in promoting and maintaining health for people who are otherwise free from health problems, but most especially, for those whose physical and mental health is compromised in some way. Voices United for Harmony project is a joint initiative of Griffith University and Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council. Through this project, an account is given of the development of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island singing groups and the benefits which mental health service users, have gained from being part of singing groups: Warwick, Ipswich, Gold Coast, Brisbane, and Toowoomba groups.

Approaches and Findings A qualitative research method was used to collect data. Focus group interview were conducted with eight groups consisting of conductors and leaders, controlled health service coordinators, Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council stakeholders, and four participant focus groups. Thematic data analysis was used to analyse the data. Findings from the interview data indicate that singing benefits health through promoting social and emotional wellbeing, improving sense of social interaction and connectedness, promoting respiratory health and improving asthma conditions, and preventing chronic conditions such as stroke, heart diseases.

Conclusions Engagement with creative activities, such as community signing, has the potential to contribute toward reducing stress and depression, improving social connectedness and can serve as a vehicle for alleviating the burden of chronic disease.

Future direction This study is one of the first that attempts to explore a culturally appropriate intervention to promote social and emotional wellbeing and prevent mental illness in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and provide a potential avenue to prevent chronic diseases and promote physiological and physical health in this population.

Opportunities for Collaborations in Health The potential collaboration opportunities in health areas include: intervention programs on prevention of mental illnesses and chronic diseases in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community settings, collaboration with non-government organisations, and government agencies, and academic institutions to close the gap in health disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and other Australians.