COMMUNICATIONS BRIEF #1

Hearing and Honouring Aboriginal Voices: Community feedback about Aboriginal family research and policy priorities in South Australia

The Aboriginal Communities and Families Health Research Alliance (ACRA), within the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), facilitates community-driven, culturally respectful research to benefit the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities in South Australia (SA) and beyond. ACRA comprises research projects, staff and a governance structure (called the Alliance) that brings together researchers, community members, policy and service providers. Launched in 2017, there have been over 20 research projects focussing on youth, parents (mothers and fathers) and families in areas of pregnancy, nutrition and feeding, lateral violence and social and emotional wellbeing. The conception of most of these projects has stemmed from community voices during Alliance events, community engagement activities, specific governance groups (such as our ACRA Youth Advisory Group) and our Community Accountability Forums.

Our Community Accountability Forums are held every two years and provide an opportunity to update the community on ACRA research activities, findings, outcomes, and policy connections. In 2025, Western Adelaide (Tauondi College), Southern Adelaide (Neporendi), Mount Gambier (Pangula Mannamurna Aboriginal Health Service) and Ceduna (Mint Bush Art Gallery/Ceduna Aboriginal Corporation) hosted the ACRA team and community members for a discussion on what research matters to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. At each site, community members were shown a presentation of ACRA's past and present research projects and asked to rank them via a list of research priorities/themes. Out of these priorities (27 in total), eleven were identified as urgent and help us determine where we direct our research planning, collaborations and grant applications.

The top 11 research priorities	Their alignment with past, present & future ACRA projects
Fathers needing support	• *Keeping Dads Strong for Families* current • *Strong Dads Strong Futures (SDSF)* past
Specific programs for young parents	• *Keeping Dads Strong for Families* current • *Gumnuts parenting* current • *Lateral violence and empowerment (young people)* current
Justice system reform-trauma on young people	• Added to project plans/grant applications future
Alcohol and any other drugs	• *Corka bubs, Deadly mums and Strong families. Connecting pregnant woman with support for stress, yarndi & alcohol* past • *Co-designed Perinatal and early years care, self-determined by Aboriginal women, Resulting in policy and practice transformation and Exceptional service (ICARE)* current • Added to project plans/grant applications future
Housing	• *ICARE* current • *Aboriginal Families Study waves 2* past *and 3* current • Added to project plans/grant applications future
Trauma responsive	• *Aboriginal Families Study waves 2* past and *3* current • *ICARE* current • Added to project plans/grant applications future
Cultural therapeutic interventions	• *Keeping Dads Strong for Families* current • *Gumnuts parenting* current • *Lateral violence and empowerment* current • Added to project plans/grant applications future
Addressing family affordability of food	• *Aboriginal family and baby bundles (ABFABB)* past • *Feeding Practices & Anaemia Rates of South Australian Aboriginal Infants & Young Children living in SA* past
Building shared understanding of raising kids	• *Aboriginal Families Study waves 2* past *and 3* current
Safety (cultural, emotional & clinical) support in families	• *Protocol–Systems change to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Maternal & Child Health Continuity of Care* past • Added to project plans/grant applications future
Support for families post child removal	• ACRA collaboration on external projects past, current & future

Community feedback on wider needs

New priorities suggested by community members include art therapy; learning disability; preventing child removal pre-removal; Autism/FASD; School; and Identity. These new priorities, along with all feedback and commentary during the Forums, were analysed using NVIVO 15 to reflect the collective needs of the community members:

Healthy living support

- Finances are a barrier to accessing healthcare
- Healthy, affordable and cultural food is needed
- Housing support is essential (public and private)
- More transport services for Elders and parents

Supporting parents and caregivers

- Support for families across all stages of child removal (prevention, while children are in care and the return of children)
- More classes and social activities for parents
- Assistance for pregnant women and mothers (e.g. in prison, homeless, pregnancy loss, returning to work)
- Provide support to and understand the different types of father roles and experiences

Service and Organisation safety and access

- Improve barriers in accessing services
- Advocate for mainstream services to better support Aboriginal peoples
- Improvement of communication and information sharing between organisations and services
- Improve cultural competency, safety and access (including skilled workers)
- Provide safe spaces and safe yarning opportunities

Wellbeing and cultural support

- Increase ways to connect to community, culture and Country
- Suggested strategies include art (understanding and participating), bush tucker, camps, spending time with Elders out bush, being on Country (in person or via technology) and groups (men's and women's)
- Additional men's shelters and rehabilitation facilities needed
- More trauma, healing, drug and alcohol and mental health supports and services

Supporting children and young people

- Increase access and support for children and young people with disabilities and developmental issues (for instance, autism)
- More research on young people and their mobile phone use (TikTok, Snapchat, etc)
- More support for incarcerated young people's mental health and wellbeing (including after release)
- Understand the role of intergenerational trauma to break cycles and strengthen relationships

Future work

Our Forums are a significant reciprocal practice of Aboriginal research and knowledge translation within ACRA and received generally positive feedback from the community. The responses provided within these events helps us to make improvements to the accountability process, but most of all it enhances understanding about how our work impacts the community and propels us into action on the next steps. Moving forward, ACRA aims to:

- disseminate the findings back to the four community sites, through newsletters, briefs, forums, conferences and posters;
- apply for appropriate grants to address new or expanded priorities and resources (i.e. wellbeing tools and interventions) over the next two years;
- circulate information at various forums, events and conferences; and
- invite community members to be part of ACRA's practices, such as governance structures, other forums and conferences.

We look forward to engaging and consulting with community members at the next Community Accountability Forum in 2027. We also hope the broader feedback shared addresses community concerns, stimulates discussion and shapes beneficial opportunities that ensure Aboriginal families and communities can flourish, heal and be supported in the future.

Acknowledgements

We express our deep thanks and gratitude to our community members and stakeholders who support our work and provide feedback, direction, and accountability for our research projects. We acknowledge that we primarily work on Kaurna Country and pay respect to them as the Traditional Custodians of the Adelaide Plains region. We also acknowledge Boandik, Mirning, Kokatha and Wirangu Countries as important sites in our community feedback process.

Citation for this policy brief

Glover K, Clark T, Talukder MR, Thornthwaite N, Elovaris R, Brass A, Nikolof A, Jordan R, & Clark Y. *Communications Brief #1 Hearing and Honouring Community Voices: Aboriginal feedback about Aboriginal family research and policy priorities in South Australia*. South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI), 2026.

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