

“Exploring the role of rising living costs and unmet social and cultural needs: At what cost to Aboriginal equity?”

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Abstract

Introduction: The increasing cost of living is making it more unattainable for people to meet their basic needs, generating higher demand on community services. This presentation will explore how low incomes and rising living costs are impacting on social, health and cultural needs of Aboriginal South Australians.

Approach: Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity (SAHMRI) has developed the Cultural Pathways Program; funded by the Wyatt Trust. This is a research pilot program which aims to respond to needs and inform evidence on how to take action on the social determinants of health with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Program is a Facilitator-led process employing strengths-based practice to enhance opportunities for individuals and families to achieve health equity.

Analyses include three sources: 1) Participants’ identified areas of unmet social and cultural need from the Program’s unique assessment tool, 2) Documented case notes outlining participants experiences in goal setting and navigating services, and 3) Program indicators highlighting goal achievements such as successfully navigating financial crisis, reducing financial stress and worry, and brokering connections to essential services.

Results: To-date, the Cultural Pathways Program has completed 100 screening tools with Program participants, of which 45% of participants have identified financial insecurity. Associated factors identified include delaying payments on important expenditures e.g. utility bills or going without essential items like food and medication. Participants report that living on government welfare interventions such as Newstart allowance impact on their ability to meet financial obligations and are forced to choose between paying utility bills, maintaining a home or purchasing medication.

Conclusion: The increasing cost of living is potentially widening the gap between Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous Australians. There are multiple factors, including social policies, potentially contributing to significant financial insecurity, ultimately creating barriers to affording essential items that most people take for granted.