

Summary

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) are one of the largest employers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are critical to the foundational principles and operations of ACCHOs since they bring lived experience and community knowledge, community connection and engagement, and capacity across a range of professional disciplines and leadership roles. ACCHO workforce can be strengthened through targeted recruitment strategies, valuing and support, training and capacity building, and leadership pathways. Programs to promote wellbeing, respect, team building, connection and equal opportunity also create a harmonious workforce and ACCHO environment. ACCHOs face a range of challenges in relation to strengthening their workforce, particularly in relation to time, resources and funding.

The ACCHO Workforce Capacity Building and Leadership Model



Outcomes

Workforce capacity building and leadership strategies benefit workforce and also build culturally safe environments, enable the holistic health needs of community to be met according to cultural protocols and clinical standards, and benefit services through staff retention and maintained organisational culture.

Enablers

ACCHO workforce capacity development strategies are enabled by effective ACCHO governance, a supportive organisational culture, clear and supportive policies and procedures, use of culturally appropriate recruitment and interview processes, funding for capacity building and professional development initiatives, and strong partnerships with schools, peak bodies, registered training organisations and universities.

Challenges and Policy implications

The ACCHO sector faces several challenges in relation to workforce recruitment, retention and capacity building. The table over the page describes some of these challenges and poses potential policy level responses to strengthen the ACCHO sector.

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	Challenge	Potential policy level response
Workforce supply shortage	Shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in clinical roles (e.g. psychologists, counsellors, GPs) and specialist roles (e.g. aged care workforce).	Greater investment in a range of targeted workforce initiatives is needed to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce across disciplines (e.g. psychologists, GPs, aged care workers).
Funding of ACCHOs	<p>Funding that is insufficient, short term or insecure can lead to non-competitive staff salaries, job insecurity, staff turnover, lost corporate knowledge and community connections. Delays in funding announcements cause staff to leave ACCHOs.</p> <p>Some ACCHOs who are Registered Training Organisations (RTO) cannot secure funding for training of Aboriginal Health Practitioners.</p>	<p>Funding agreements to provide greater resourcing for ACCHO programs, indexed to inflation, so staff can be competitively remunerated in line with other sectors (e.g. government health services). Long-term funding of programs is needed to promote job security and retained corporate knowledge.</p> <p>ACCHOs with RTOs to be funded to deliver Certificate training for Aboriginal Health Practitioners. The ACCHO sector requires long-term sustainable funding for practice-based Aboriginal Health Practitioner training so that graduates have both theoretical knowledge and practical skills in ACCHO ways of working.</p>
Workforce capacity building	<p>To facilitate the development of a culturally responsive health system, ACCHOs invest in strengthening the capacity of ACCHO staff including mentorship of non-Indigenous staff around cultural ways of working.</p> <p>ACCHOs invest considerable time and resources in seeking funding for workforce training and capacity building initiatives. ACCHO managers often face barriers to accessing suitable management training. Some smaller ACCHOs struggle when staff are on leave to attend professional development training.</p> <p>There can be misunderstandings in non-Indigenous ACCHO workforce about the capacity building opportunities provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.</p>	<p>Funding agreements to recognise and resource ACCHOs for their key role in strengthening the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and non-Indigenous workforce.</p> <p>NACCHO and other training organisations to be funded to develop professional development and capacity building initiatives for ACCHO workforce at all levels, including leadership. A locum service may be needed in some jurisdictions to backfill staff attending professional development activities.</p> <p>ACCHO management to be transparent about the key role ACCHOs play in building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capacity and the obligations of non-Indigenous staff to support capacity building activities in the ACCHO.</p>
Workforce stress	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce juggle family, community and work commitments which leads to stress and burn out if staff aren't adequately supported.	Wellbeing initiatives for ACCHO workforce to be developed and resourced when implementing strategic documents such as the 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2016-2023'.

The content within this policy brief was drawn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led research undertaken by the Centre of Research Excellence in Aboriginal Chronic Disease Knowledge Translation and Exchange (CREATE), Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity, South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute.