

Cooperative Research Centre for
Aboriginal Health

Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Strategy

March 2006

Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Strategy

Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health

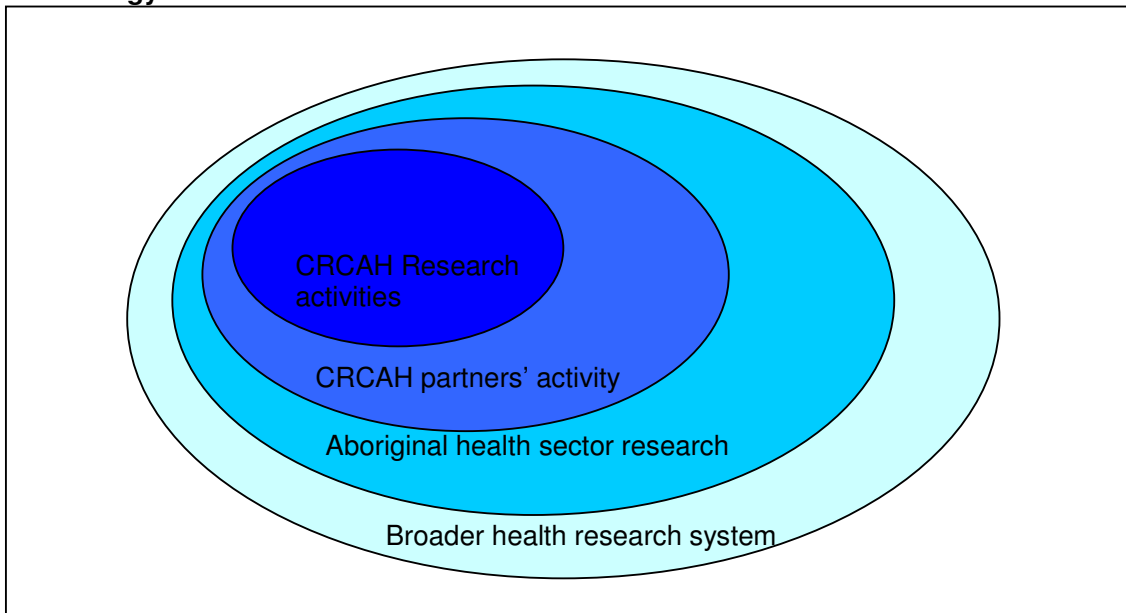
March 2006

1. Purpose

This document outlines strategies to develop Aboriginal health research capacity

- a. Within the CRCAH's own research activities
- b. Within CRCAH partners
- c. Within the Aboriginal health sector
- d. Within the broader health research system.

Diagram 1: Research arenas targeted within the CRCAH capacity development strategy.



2. Background

A review of the CRCAH's education and training activities was carried out during 2005. This review was prompted by the CRCAH's shift to a programmatic approach. This shift included a greater integration of education and training activities within the CRCAH's research programs, and an expressed direction from the Board and CEO that there be a shift away from the administration of individual education and training support towards a broader and more strategic approach to capacity development at organizational and system levels. Given this direction, the review particularly looked at opportunities for building the capacity of the Aboriginal health sector to use and participate in research in order to improve Aboriginal health, along with the overall capacity of the Aboriginal health research sector.

The review was undertaken in line with the CRCAH commitment to work collaboratively with all core and associate partners. Face-to-face meetings were undertaken, plus interviews and a survey about Aboriginal capacity development activities currently provided by each organisation (such as courses, student support units, scholarships etc).

Thirty-four interview sessions were held, which ranged from individual meetings to forums of more than eleven participants.

There was a high degree of consistency of responses from participants across the different CRCAH partners. Those interviewed included academics, management, policy makers, practitioners, course developers, students and public servants. In addition, feedback from a number of Aboriginal health service peak bodies informed the review. Key findings were aggregated into three priority areas:

Priority Area	Key Issues
Priority Area 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Insufficient financial support discourages many Aboriginal people (from both research and industry backgrounds) from commencing or continuing study. 2. More effective and flexible structures are required to support, develop and retain Aboriginal students who undertake higher education research study. 3. Existing courses to help train Aboriginal researchers could be more accessible to and attract more Aboriginal students if offered through more flexible delivery methods and through better coordination and promotion.
Priority Area 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Ensuring Aboriginal research leadership and involvement in CRCAH research. 5. Building research capacity in communities and community organisations. 6. Aboriginal people's knowledge, life experiences and contributions are often undervalued in the research process. 7. The CRCAH has a coordination, communication and brokering role in collating and disseminating information about best practice models and methodologies in Aboriginal health research activity.
Priority Area 3	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 8. The uptake of research outcomes by health service managers and policy makers is hampered by a lack of understanding and connection between researchers and these decision-makers. 9. Many health service managers and middle-managers would like better skills in using their own organisation's data sets for quality improvement purposes, and in how to implement change based on evidence and analysis. 10. Non-Aboriginal people involved in research activity need to understand and respect Aboriginal cultures and ways of working, and be able to work collaboratively in Aboriginal health contexts.
Relevant to All Priority Areas	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 11. Quality control, monitoring and evaluation systems must be in place to oversee all CRCAH education and training activities. 12. Information about employment and training opportunities in Aboriginal health is messy and difficult for students to navigate. 13. There are low numbers of Aboriginal students entering higher education in health research related courses.

The CRCAH Board considered the findings of the review at its meeting in November 2005, and directed development of an operational plan outlining how the findings might be implemented.

3. Capacity development and the CRCAH context

3.1 Capacity development in the CRCAH

The CRCAH uses the term capacity development to refer to the process of building skills, knowledge and capability. Capacity development incorporates both formal and informal education and training, and other more flexible, experiential and often opportunistic models of development. Some people prefer the term capacity exchange, feeling this reflects the two-way process of

learning that occurs, particularly in cross-cultural contexts. However as an over-arching term, capacity development incorporates both capacity exchange, and education and training.

In the CRC AH context, most resources are directed towards supporting the development of Aboriginal research capacity – in both research and industry sectors – as this is one of the key objectives of the organisation. However, there is also a clear need for capacity development among non-Aboriginal people to be able to work effectively in Aboriginal health contexts.

3.2 The CRC AH's operational context

There are particular elements of the CRC AH's approach to the development, conduct and transfer of research into Aboriginal health which have implications for this capacity development activity. This approach is fast attracting national and international attention for pushing the boundaries of how research can be carried out to best achieve outcomes in policy and practice.

The key elements in the CRC AH context relevant to the capacity development strategy include:

- Aboriginal direction of research
- The programmatic approach
- Outcomes focused research and research transfer
- The facilitated development of research
- Staff roles
- Internal and external communications

This section of the strategy outlines the elements of the CRC AH approach that relate to capacity development in Aboriginal health research, in order to show how the proposed strategies intersect with the broader organisational context and priorities.

3.2.1 Aboriginal direction of research

Work carried out by the CRC AH's predecessor, the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health, showed that Aboriginal direction of and participation in the whole research process was a vital part of making sure that health research was relevant and meaningful for Aboriginal people, and would be conducted ethically and appropriately in the Aboriginal health context.

In the CRC AH, Aboriginal direction of the research agenda is achieved by:

- An Aboriginal majority Board, which includes Aboriginal health leaders.
- The Board setting priorities for research, based on consultations with key Aboriginal health organisations and other industry stakeholders.
- Resourcing Aboriginal organisations to advise on and participate in research.
- CRC AH Programs Leaders and Program Managers facilitating the development of research projects, to ensure that research involvement reflects the right balance with the involvement of Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal health sector.
- Ensuring high level involvement and skill development of Aboriginal researchers and research leaders.

3.2.2 The programmatic approach

In September 2004, the Board of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health endorsed a change to the way the Centre undertook its research activity. A number of research priorities were identified and five research programs were subsequently approved for development.

A CRC AH program is a strategic body of research work with specific research and health goals aimed at producing important outcomes for Aboriginal health. It comprises a number of related research projects as well as research transfer and capacity development activities; that together

form a coherent approach to addressing areas in which improvements in knowledge or its uptake may lead to health gains.

In bringing together the combined efforts of a range of funded and in-kind projects, the programmatic approach also provides greater opportunity for effective targeted transfer of research findings into policy and practice through a synthesis of a range of evidence/knowledge.

3.2.3 Outcomes focused research and research transfer

With its focus on Aboriginal health, the CRCAH has a driving imperative to ensure that research that is carried out is likely to produce real outcomes in improving Aboriginal health. This has focussed the CRCAH on two key areas of research: setting research priorities that meet the identified priorities of the Aboriginal health sector; and, ensuring that research is done in a way that makes it most likely to be of use – and to be used – to bring about positive change.

Understanding about how best to achieve successful research transfer has grown under the CRCATH and CRCAH, drawing on international literature and work carried out under by the CRCAH and its predecessor. This has led to a shift from the dissemination of projects findings to a concerted focus at the beginning of the project to ensure the project is designed to maximise its likelihood of translating into policy and practice. This includes:

- Making sure the potential users of research are involved in project planning, conduct and dissemination.
- Ensuring the research questions and methodologies will result in findings that are useful and credible to the Aboriginal health sector.

While it is essential that research transfer planning is carried out for each project to maximise its likely impact, evidence strongly suggests that the most effective research transfer occurs around the synthesis of larger bodies of work, rather than individual projects. This knowledge informed the development of the programmatic approach, and links directly to the importance of Aboriginal direction of the research agenda outlined in section 3.2.1

3.2.4 Facilitated development of research

The programmatic approach also required a different approach to the development of research if it was to achieve the CRCAH's goals. The CRCAH facilitated process of project development is very different to the 'traditional' way research is developed. Rather than groups of researchers putting forward proposals, the CRCAH works with industry to identify broad research issues (indicative research questions) and then brings together researcher and industry partners in cross-disciplinary and cross-institutional project teams, to design conduct and disseminate the research. The aim of the facilitated research project development process is to create an environment that is collaborative and developmental, whilst still focussing on the priorities identified by the Aboriginal health sector – and doing high quality research. This facilitated development approach has also been described by participants as 'a hybrid of commissioned and investigator driven research', as it focuses research activities on industry priorities, but relies on the creative work of researchers to respond to those priorities within defined parameters.

3.2.5 Staff roles

The programmatic approach was a significant change to the operations of the CRCAH and had implications for the organisational structure, personnel and resourcing of the Centre. To address these issues a staffing review was undertaken in early 2005 with a number of positions created to facilitate this programmatic approach. Two key positions important to the implementation of this capacity development strategy were identified:

a. Program Managers

The programmatic approach would require a much more intensive coordination and developmental role for the CRCAH than in traditional research development. It is highly

resource intensive to facilitate project development, bring together projects to maximize their outcomes, integrate research transfer and capacity development with research, and identify priorities. It was apparent that new roles were required. The position of Program Managers were developed to carry out these roles, and fulfill a vital role in supporting the engagement and participation of the Aboriginal health sector.

b. Capacity Development Officer

The former Education and Training Function of the CRCATH and CRCAH had a focus on the development of individuals through formal and informal education and training. The change of title to 'Capacity Development Officer' reflects a broader and more flexible approach. This position still administers student and trainee support, but also engages directly with project and program development to ensure that capacity development opportunities are maximised within research.

In addition to these paid roles, in-kind roles of Program Leaders were established to provide both research and industry leadership and guidance for each program.

3.2.6 Internal and external communications

A key part of the programmatic approach is the concept of a 'network of interest' which brings together researchers, students, the Aboriginal health sector and other interested parties in a circle of communication. This network enables communication to flow directly and responsively between the disparate members of the CRCAH community. Tools used to facilitate and maintain the network of interest include:

- A list serv for interactive email communication between network members
- Gwalwa Gai - An electronic newsletter
- The annual Convocation and SME Forum
- Seminars, workshops, and showcases
- The CRCAH website www.crcah.org.au
- Industry roundtables and other processes for the development of research
- Biennial workshops on key methodological issues confronting each program area.

The other key tool for communication within the CRCAH community is the Link Group, who provide the main conduit for communication to and from the CRCAH and each partner organisation. Members of the Link Group meet regularly with the CRCAH management and staff, and provide a vital mechanism for alerting the CRC to needs and for engaging partner organizations in research development, access to capacity development opportunities, and dissemination. [i.e. its two way]

The CRCAH also uses targeted mailing lists, advertising and media releases to communicate beyond the CRCAH partners to the wider Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities.

4. Operationalising the findings of the Education and Training Review

Following the Board's direction to develop an operational plan, the findings of the Education and Training Review (section 2) have now been distilled into achievable outcomes and matched against the objectives identified within the CRC AH Commonwealth Agreement.

Objectives within CRC AH Commonwealth Agreement	Desired outcomes arising from Education and Training Review findings	Focus of activity
Aboriginal participation in the Centre, Board, Executive, Research and Development leadership, and research and other projects.	Aboriginal people lead the development of CRC AH research priorities and are fully involved in the CRC AH's research activities at all levels.	Aboriginal people within or engaging with the CRC AH.
Strengthen capacity of and develop career pathways for Aboriginal people in health research and related areas and increase capacity of Aboriginal health research workforce.	Aboriginal people are encouraged and supported to undertake studies within the CRC AH community through VET, undergraduate and post-graduate studies.	Aboriginal people within or engaging with the CRC AH.
	A larger workforce of highly skilled Aboriginal researchers.	Aboriginal people in the broader system of health research.
	A health research workforce carrying out high quality, high impact, culturally appropriate research in Aboriginal health.	Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the broader system of health research.
Link Core Partners and SME stakeholders with expertise and information required to ensure improved Aboriginal health outcomes.	Aboriginal community organisations and governments are supported to be able to use research information and data to improve their policy and practice.	Aboriginal health services and government agencies involved in Aboriginal health or related sectors.

Appendix A: CRC AH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan details the strategies and specific capacity development activities that will be used to achieve each outcome, and some performance measures to assess whether the steps required to lead to those outcomes are being achieved. As with all the CRC AH's work, assessing the actual impact of those activities is a much more complex process. A plan for a thorough evaluation of the programmatic approach – including capacity development – is currently under development. This plan will look at how to measure the impact of these strategies to see if the desired outcomes are being achieved.

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
<p>Aboriginal people lead the development of CRCAH research priorities and are fully involved in the CRCAH's research activities at all levels.</p>	<p>All research development, conduct, and transfer and dissemination processes, including priority setting and quality assurance, involve Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>CRCAH Program Managers facilitate the involvement and meaningful input of Aboriginal participants in the development of projects and programs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of Aboriginal people involved in development of projects • Numbers of Aboriginal people involved in conduct of research • Numbers involved in quality assurance processes. • Satisfaction with involvement (links involvement with the notion of meaningful input)
		<p>That the CRCAH will plan and resource capacity development opportunities for Aboriginal individuals, communities and organisations in all research programs and projects.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Numbers of Aboriginal people, communities or organisations involved in capacity development activities within research programs and projects.
	<p>Fast-track the development of Aboriginal research leadership within the CRCAH.</p>	<p>Support 3-6 month placements of high performing Aboriginal researchers to shadow the CRCAH Research Director or Program Leaders, and support the conduct of CRCAH work. These placements would provide experience of high level research planning (ie research design meetings involving the Research Director and Program Leaders), and management.</p> <p>Facilitate a Young Leaders in Aboriginal Health Forum, in conjunction with the Convocation.</p>	<p>Number of Aboriginal researchers involved.</p>

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
	<p>The skills and knowledge of Aboriginal researchers are recognized and remunerated appropriately within CRCAH projects.</p>	<p>The CRCAH will develop a process of recognition of prior learning that takes into account Aboriginal knowledges, and appropriate pay scales, to ensure that the skills, knowledge and experience of Aboriginal researchers working on CRCAH projects are recognized and remunerated appropriately.</p>	

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
<p>Aboriginal people are encouraged and supported to undertake studies within the CRCAH community through VET, undergraduate and post-graduate studies.</p>	<p>The CRCAH provides flexible financial and other support¹ to Aboriginal students undertaking studies within CRCAH partners.</p>	<p>CRCAH programs and projects will support Aboriginal students to undertake studies, through the provision of flexible scholarships, which might include full scholarships, top-ups, employment on projects, assistance with project costs, attendance at professional development opportunities such as the ASSA Summer School.</p> <p>The Capacity Development Officer will work with CRCAH scholarship students to transfer them into mainstream scholarship programs wherever possible. The CRCAH will continue to provide top-up funding to students on a case by case basis.</p>	<p>Number of Aboriginal students commenced, completed involved in CRC programs.</p>
		<p>The CRCAH will continue to negotiate with Core Partners to offer Cadetships under the National Indigenous Cadetship Program, run a traineeship program with Core Partner AMSs, and other scholarship support (for example, flexible scholarship arrangements such as those offered by the CRCAH and DHCS).</p>	<p>Number of Aboriginal students commenced, completed involved in CRC programs.</p>

¹ One of the findings of the Education and Training Review was that financial support for Aboriginal higher education students requires greater flexibility to encourage students to take up and complete their studies. As a consequence, the CRCAH is shifting its scholarship program from a rigid program supporting full-time, post-graduate studies only, to a more flexible program incorporating a range of different ways of supporting students. These include supporting students to cover the costs of carrying out research projects, paying fees, providing short-term paid study time, supporting professional development activity, etc.

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
	<p>CRCAH students receive quality supervision and mentoring.</p>	<p>Support attendance of CRCAH Aboriginal students and their supervisors at the ASSA Summer School each year.</p> <p>Use the CRCAH Network of Interest to assist potential students to identify potential supervisors and mentors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Number of students attending Summer School. • Students report satisfaction with supervision and mentoring. (student surveys) • Number of students requesting linkage with mentors. • Number of linkages made. • Number of students reporting satisfaction with mentoring and supervision.

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
<p>A larger workforce of highly skilled Aboriginal researchers.</p>	<p>Mainstream scholarship programs become more accessible to Aboriginal people.</p>	<p>Lobby scholarship funding bodies to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish an adapted version of the Career Development Award for Aboriginal people (from both research and industry backgrounds) • Increase the flexibility and stipend value for Aboriginal scholarships • Establish scholarships for Aboriginal Honours students. <p>Lobby DEST and/or OATSIH to develop, resource and maintain a national Aboriginal health education and training access and information website dedicated to Aboriginal health research courses and scholarships.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence or meetings with NHMRC and other funding bodies • CRC documents circulated to key bodies • Testimonials • Changes in NHMRC policy • Number of funding organisations increasing stipend value. • Honours scholarships established • Aboriginal Health Education and Training access and information website set up.
	<p>More Aboriginal people take up careers in health research or health generally.</p>	<p>Lobby DEST, OATSIH or OIPC to fund the development of an advertising campaign promoting the success of Aboriginal health services, health research and promoting careers in the Aboriginal health workforce and/or Aboriginal health research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Correspondence or meetings with potential funding bodies. • Advertising campaign conducted.

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
	Universities provide quality supervision and mentoring of Aboriginal students.	<p>Document and promote principles and best practice in the supervision and mentoring of Aboriginal students, drawing on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ASSA Summer School participants (students and supervisors, past and current) • Aboriginal research units • And/or Aboriginal student support units. <p>Set up Supervisor of the Year Award. Provide publication to Aboriginal research units and student support units of Core Partners.</p>	<p>Production of publication.</p> <p>Distribution to students, supervisors, mentors, support units.</p> <p>Establishment of award.</p>
	Increase the accessibility of higher education research training to Aboriginal students.	Develop a collaborative consortium between Core Partners currently delivering higher education Aboriginal health research courses, with an aim to maximising quality, efficiency and accessibility of courses to Aboriginal students.	<p>Development of consortium</p> <p>Adaption of courses</p> <p>Increased Aboriginal enrolments</p>
	There are educational pathways to take Aboriginal health research students from entry level to higher education.	Develop or adapt learning modules with partners/other providers to support the training of Aboriginal community-based or industry-based researchers, with pathways to link to further study or employment.	<p>Learning modules developed</p> <p>Workshops delivered within CRCAH projects.</p>

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
<p>A health research workforce carrying out high quality, high impact, culturally appropriate research in Aboriginal health.</p>	<p>Develop and promote leading edge practice in Aboriginal health research (and Aboriginal research generally).</p>	<p>Initiate the development of a unit of learning (of a semester length) to promote leading edge research practice. The unit will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • include an Aboriginal health focus but may be used more broadly; • be developed collaboratively between CRCAH Core Partners currently delivering higher education Aboriginal health research courses; • be delivered in flexible modes; • include topics such as priority setting, outcomes focused research, research transfer, capacity development, working collaboratively, etc; and • be suitable for accreditation and inclusion within existing Masters level programs. • The CRCAH should explore funding options to support the attendance of CRCAH students undertaking this unit. 	<p>Unit developed, implemented</p>
		<p>Within the Programmatic Approach, each Program will hold biennial (once every two years) workshops on developing methodology required in the Program, and CRCAH students be encouraged/supported to attend.</p>	<p>Number of workshops held. Number of students attending such workshops.</p>
	<p>Best-practice ethical research in Aboriginal health is promoted throughout the health research and other research sectors.</p>	<p>Document examples of best practice in Aboriginal health research, and promote the use of the NHMRC Guidelines, and Links Monograph series.</p>	<p>Production and distribution of publication.</p>

Appendix A: CRCAH Aboriginal Health Research Capacity Development Operational Plan

Outcome	Strategies	Capacity development activities	Key Performance Measures
<p>Aboriginal community organisations and governments are able to use research information and data to improve their policy and practice.</p>	<p>Build capacity of Aboriginal health and government services in the use of research.</p>	<p>Expose decision makers, managers and staff to research processes and build capacity in how to engage with research, by involving them in the development and conduct of CRCAH research projects and programs.</p>	<p>Outcomes of the programmatic approach, as shown by evaluation.</p>
	<p>Develop and implement half or one day modules for health service managers and middle-managers to support the development of their skills in the use of basic data organisation and analysis.</p>	<p>Identify partner/s with expertise in this field and fund the development, adaptation or collation of appropriate modules. This can be carried out as part of the capacity development activities of the PHC Program.</p> <p>Lobby OATSIH and/or other funders (eg PHCRED) to support the ongoing delivery of the training above, the upgrading of data within Aboriginal health services, and increasing involvement of Aboriginal health services in research.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modules developed • Training implemented • Funds allocated by other funding organisations. • Number of Aboriginal health services taking up training.
	<p>Exchanges or secondments between research, government and health service organisations encourage better understanding and networking.</p>	<p>The CRCAH and Core Partners work to reduce the barriers to exchanges and secondments.</p>	<p>Number of secondments or exchanges between research and industry sectors.</p>