

## WOMen's action for Mums and Bubs (WOMB): A pragmatic trial of participatory women's groups to improve Indigenous maternal and child health

### Aim

To test the effectiveness of a participatory women's group intervention to improve the quality of maternal and child health care and outcomes.

### Overview

*Background:* There is persuasive international research illustrating the effectiveness of participatory women's groups (PWGs) in improving maternal and child health (MCH) outcomes via improved quality of care, women's empowerment and new learning. There is also considerable evidence in Australian Indigenous settings, that the empowerment of women is achieved through participation in PWGs. Despite the published benefits of community participation, few quality improvement interventions in Indigenous primary health care (PHC) have focused on factors beyond services; nor have any explicitly tested community participation aimed at enhancing citizen engagement with health care, or the cost effectiveness of such participation in light of MCH improvements.

*Project description:* This project will draw on collaborations in continuous quality improvement in Indigenous PHC, and best evidence about community participation in co-design of health services, to test the effectiveness of a PWG intervention to improve the quality of MCH care and outcomes.

The project's key research question is: Do participatory women's groups, as an intervention, improve the quality of Indigenous maternal and child health care? To answer this question, the project must determine:

- + The effectiveness of PWGs in improving quality of care and intermediate outcomes in MCH.
- + The cost-effectiveness of PWGs for improving quality of MCH care.
- + The degree to which PWGs are associated with a change in global empowerment measure scores.

### Outputs to date

Drawing on participatory principles and a strengths-based approach involving two-way learning and capacity building, the team will work with 10 Indigenous PHC services in Queensland, New South Wales, Northern Territory, South Australia and Western Australia. PHC services, in association with community women's groups, will nominate two individuals to work as facilitators and attend training workshops. These will involve sharing information about facilitation skills, MCH audit data and working in partnership.

The investigator team has agreed on the project steering committee membership and governance structures. Six Indigenous PHC services across Queensland and northern New South Wales have already agreed to participate, and four other services have expressed interest.

### Next steps

Following the workshops, the facilitators will work with the women's groups and health care staff to prioritise action, plan strategies, and develop an MCH improvement plan, which will be co-implemented with progress evaluated through the annual audit cycles. PWGs will share local knowledge and perspectives, focus on building community expectations, encourage community ownership of services, and engage in activism for quality care.

The primary outcome measure for this project is the MCH quality of care index (%) calculated from audit data indicating overall adherence to delivering recommended services.

Secondary outcome measures will include:

- + Percentage of pregnant women having their first antenatal visit before 13 weeks.
- + Mean birthweight.
- + Evaluation of the participatory planning process in terms of women's empowerment, cost effectiveness and cost consequence of the intervention, and satisfaction with the process.

The first investigator face-to-face meeting and facilitator training will take place in Brisbane on 22–26 October 2018.

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<i>Project status</i>	Current
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<i>Dates</i>	2017 – 2022
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