



DRAFT

RESEARCH OUR WAY

Aboriginal Health Research Strategy for
the Hunter and New England regions



awabakal
OUR PEOPLE



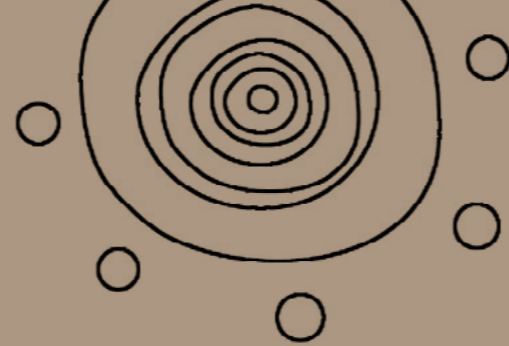
Hunter New England
Local Health District

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Country is the land, water, sky and all the living things that occupy those spaces. It also refers to the spiritual connections that exist between all those things. For us, Country is our mother. We are Country. It is inseparable from our spirit and the spirit of our ancestors.

Our health has always been, and always will be, linked to Country. We are healthy when Country is healthy.

We acknowledge Country to pay respect - to the wisdom of our Elders past and present. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands on which this Aboriginal Health Research Strategy was created.



INSTITUTIONAL SUPPORT

"RESEARCH OUR WAY" IS ABORIGINAL-LED AND SUPPORTED BY KEY INSTITUTIONS IN THE REGION.

Our strategy has been created by local Aboriginal Communities and Aboriginal people from many countries living in and around Awabakal and Worimi land. This includes collaboration between local Aboriginal Community Elders, Traditional Owners, and Community members as well as those from our Communities who are, Aboriginal health workers and health practitioners.

We have had four founding organisations, and institutions, back this strategy from day one. Awabakal Limited, the University of Newcastle, Hunter Medical Research Institute and the Hunter and New England Local Health District are all founding partners.

In 2021 key leaders came together to talk about the need to change the way Aboriginal health research is done so that Aboriginal people, families and Communities have better health outcomes. This vision included:

- Flipping the power dynamic to ensure power is held by Aboriginal people. This means Aboriginal people determining research priorities, topics, methods and decision making.
- A single pathway for research in the region which will improve research ethics, practice and the translation of research to outcomes.



Jason Smith
CEO
Awabakal

Knowing that there is a group of diverse Aboriginal people who have expertise in health, that researchers and Aboriginal Health organisations have access to will make a huge difference in how Mob can benefit from research.



Yeena Thompson
Aboriginal Health
Research Partner
Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor, Indigenous Strategy and Leadership
University of Newcastle

The history of research is that Aboriginal people have been researched for a long time and we have other people telling us what is best for us. I think the tide is turning. People are starting to realise that there is a value to learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that there are knowledge systems that they can learn from. Aboriginal people are the best people to talk to when we are talking about their health outcomes.



Professor Kelvin Kong (AM)
University of Newcastle and Hunter Medical Research Institute

Research is the armamentarium of us to get the knowledge base and share our Indigenous knowledge and make it better for our communities, we want outcomes. A better way to do research is Community engagement and Community involvement.



Raylene Gordon
Executive Director
Aboriginal Health
Hunter New England Health

Research Our Way allows for us to get a better understanding of Community priorities and what researchers need to make health research better for Aboriginal people. I like that the community panel is representative of individuals and not necessarily just organisations. This way Community can bring their lived experience and issues that are important to them to research. This can impact the way research is done now and into the future.



HOLISTIC VIEW OF HEALTH AND HEALTH RESEARCH

“Health research takes in everything - health leads back to a way of life. Everything is connected. Everything is connected to the land, to Country. Health research should result in better living, better health and longer lives for Aboriginal people.”

(Aboriginal Community Member)

WHAT IS HEALTH RESEARCH?

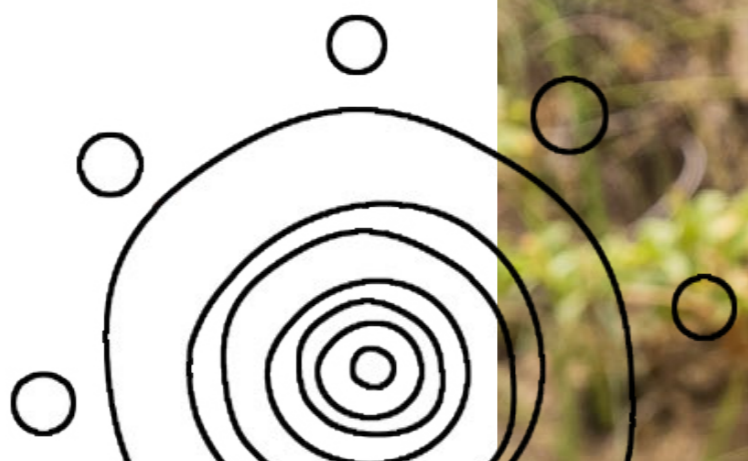
For Aboriginal people health research is much broader than “medical research”. Our concept of health is inseparable from, and entwined with, Country, family, spirituality and cultural practices.

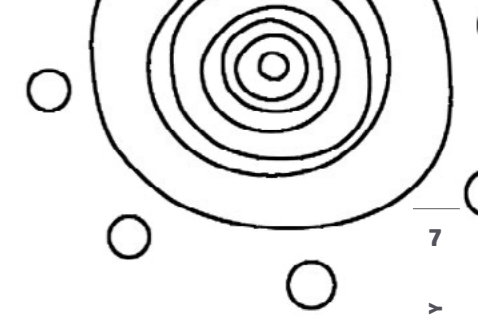
HEALTH RESEARCH FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE INCLUDES RESEARCH INTO:

- Medical
- Medicine and pharmacy
- Allied health
- Health of Country
- Family and community services
- Mental health
- Drugs and alcohol
- Justice
- Education
- Housing

‘Cultural practices are the way forward for our people to heal themselves (body, mind and spirit) as well as our lands, waters and skies.’

(Aboriginal Elder and Wukul Yabang member)





DEFINITIONS

DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESEARCH

Research into the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes, but is not limited to, research focused on medical, medicine and pharmacy, allied health, health of Country, families, family and community services, mental health, drugs and alcohol, justice, education and housing.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESEARCHER

The term "Aboriginal Health Researcher" can mean several things.

Primarily, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person conducting research. This includes "community researchers".

Additionally, it can mean a non-Indigenous person conducting research that may be about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Communities and Country.

CULTURAL GOVERNANCE

"Cultural governance is having the right representatives from communities who can speak on behalf of the community, not because they're in a position where they are CEO or Manager, or the squeakiest wheel, but the one who holds respect. Sometimes that's hard to find out, you have to live in the community, and it takes time." (Contributor to From Strength to Sovereignty).

HMRI

Hunter Medical Research Institute

HNELHD

Hunter New England Local Health District

ICIP

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property

PLACE-BASED

Place, for Indigenous people is a foundational element of sovereignty – communities arise from and are tied to place. A place-based approach respects local, regional and National Indigenous autonomy, regional and National Indigenous autonomy. (From Strength to Sovereignty)

PROPER WAY

Things being done in a way that follows Aboriginal culture. Key principles include relationships, respect, reciprocity, care for Country and Mother, kinship and valuing traditional knowledges. In Research Our Way the following principles guide "proper way": sovereignty as authority and accountability, place, people, knowledge and race.

RESEARCH OUR WAY

This strategy.



STRENGTH TO SOVEREIGNTY

VALUING SOVEREIGNTY

Research Our Way is fundamentally about ensuring that Aboriginal people have ownership of their own information. This includes Cultural and Intellectual Property as well as data.

INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Indigenous Intellectual and Cultural Property (ICIP) are the rights, moral and legal, to the ownership, management and use of Indigenous people's own cultural, traditional and "ways" of knowing. It refers to "the rights that Indigenous peoples have in relation to all aspects of their heritage, knowledge and cultural expressions."

Research undertaken in the region, and in collaboration with the Wukul Yabang Aboriginal Health Research Community Panel, will uphold ICIP.

"The Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol sets out how ethical and respectful research is to be conducted across all academic (and research) activity, while the community guide includes a checklist for understanding their rights and key legal issues to look out for to ensure intellectual and cultural property is protected."

(University of Newcastle ICIP Protocol and Community Guide)

To access the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol and Community Guide visit the University of Newcastle website at newcastle.edu.au/icip

DATA SOVEREIGNTY

"Indigenous Data Sovereignty is the right of Indigenous peoples to govern the collection, ownership and application of data about Indigenous communities, peoples, lands, and resources."

(AIATSIS)

Ownership of data that relates to individuals and Communities is a principle that this strategy and Wukul Yabang upholds.

"The Aboriginal Health Research Initiative is underpinned by strong values which privilege Aboriginal voices and Indigenous data sovereignty to ensure health research within the region is culturally appropriate and benefits Aboriginal community."

(Aboriginal Health Program Manager, NSW government and Wukul Yabang member)

THE OPPORTUNITY

Research Our Way describes a new way of ensuring Aboriginal health research is led by, with and for our local Aboriginal community.

Research Our Way ensures that health benefits promised by researchers are implemented back into our communities.

The purpose of this innovative strategy is to ensure our mob have a say on who, what and where research is conducted, how we use it and store it.

It will provide a vehicle to empower local Aboriginal communities to lead and participate in Health Research. It will flip the power dynamic in existing research and ensure power (research direction and topics, funds and decision making) will be held by Aboriginal people.

Doing research 'proper-way' will set us on a path for success.

“This is an amazing process, not only to have research done Proper Way, it gives Aboriginal people a voice into the research that will affect our Aboriginal community. It makes researchers more accountable to Aboriginal people and Communities.”

(Aboriginal Health Practitioner and Wukul Yabang member)

VALUES IN OUR REGION THAT GUIDE OUR APPROACH TO ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESEARCH

- **Sovereignty as authority and accountability**
‘research done right way’ Sovereignty recognises the authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people culturally, intellectually and politically. It also recognises the existing power imbalances in existing Indigenous health research investments and institutions. As a value, it translates to the need for authoritative, legitimate Indigenous cultural governance structures.
- **Place**
‘sometimes people forget the power of the land’ Place holds value for Indigenous peoples in varying ways and demands of Indigenous health research investment a reorienting toward place, rather than a focus on illness, behaviours and systems.
- **People**
‘I don’t think like a whitefulla’ Indigenous peoples seen not simply as subjects of research, but the architects of Indigenous health advancement and excellence.
- **Knowledge**
‘research must make things better for mob’ It means valuing Indigenous knowledges, focusing on knowledge production for change not for academic recognition, and research that goes beyond intellectual curiosity to solve problems in and advance interests in Indigenous communities.
- **Race**
‘Indigenouness as excellence’ Race has been central to the exploitation of Indigenous peoples via health research, in projecting deficit, and pathologizing Indigeneity. This research strategy is a site of excellence – and draws excellence to itself.

THE BASIS OF OUR STRATEGY: FROM STRENGTH TO SOVEREIGNTY REPORT

In 2021 the Working Group commissioned the Institute for Collaborative Race Research and Professor Chelsea Watego to speak with local Aboriginal people and community organisations to understand the opportunity that doing research differently, proper way, can have on health and wellbeing.

“A transformative Indigenous health research strategy must start and end with Aboriginal sovereignty”

(From Strength to Sovereignty, Institute for Collaborative Race Research)

“Over the past year I am excited to see how the research landscape is moving toward research conducted with Aboriginal peoples opposed to research conducted on Aboriginal peoples. Researchers are taking our advice and I can see a shift in research practices that will privilege Aboriginal consumer/patient voices and enrich the findings to support all consumers.”

(Aboriginal Elder and Awabakal Traditional Owner, and Wukul Yabang member)



THE STRATEGY

VISION

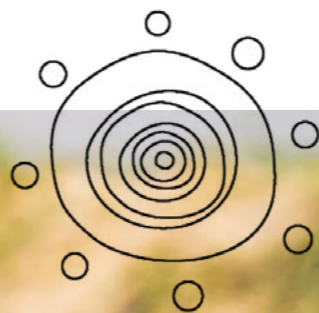
Aboriginal Health Research is actively led-by, with and for our Local Aboriginal Community and People.

OBJECTIVES

- Embed a Community Governance model to provide sovereignty over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research in the Hunter regions in phase 1 with expansion to the New England regions in phase 2.
- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in health research projects and support them to strengthen their capacity, knowledge and skills
- Develop cultural capability expectations and pathways of learning for non-Indigenous researchers
- Establish accountability mechanisms and measures of success for research in our region
- Raise the profile of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and researchers

“Research our way means valuing our way of knowing and doing, educating others to respect this is not something you can do without our people”

Raylene Gordon, Hunter New England Local Health District and former CEO Awabakal Limited.



CONNECTION WITH OTHER RESEARCH BODIES

The following Human Research Ethics Committees (HREC) and institutions are committed to partnering with, and acknowledge the authority of, the Community panel:

- University of Newcastle HREC
- Hunter New England Local Health District
- Hunter Medical Research Institute

The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AHMRC), National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) are aware of the Community Panel in the region.

BENEFITS / IMPACT

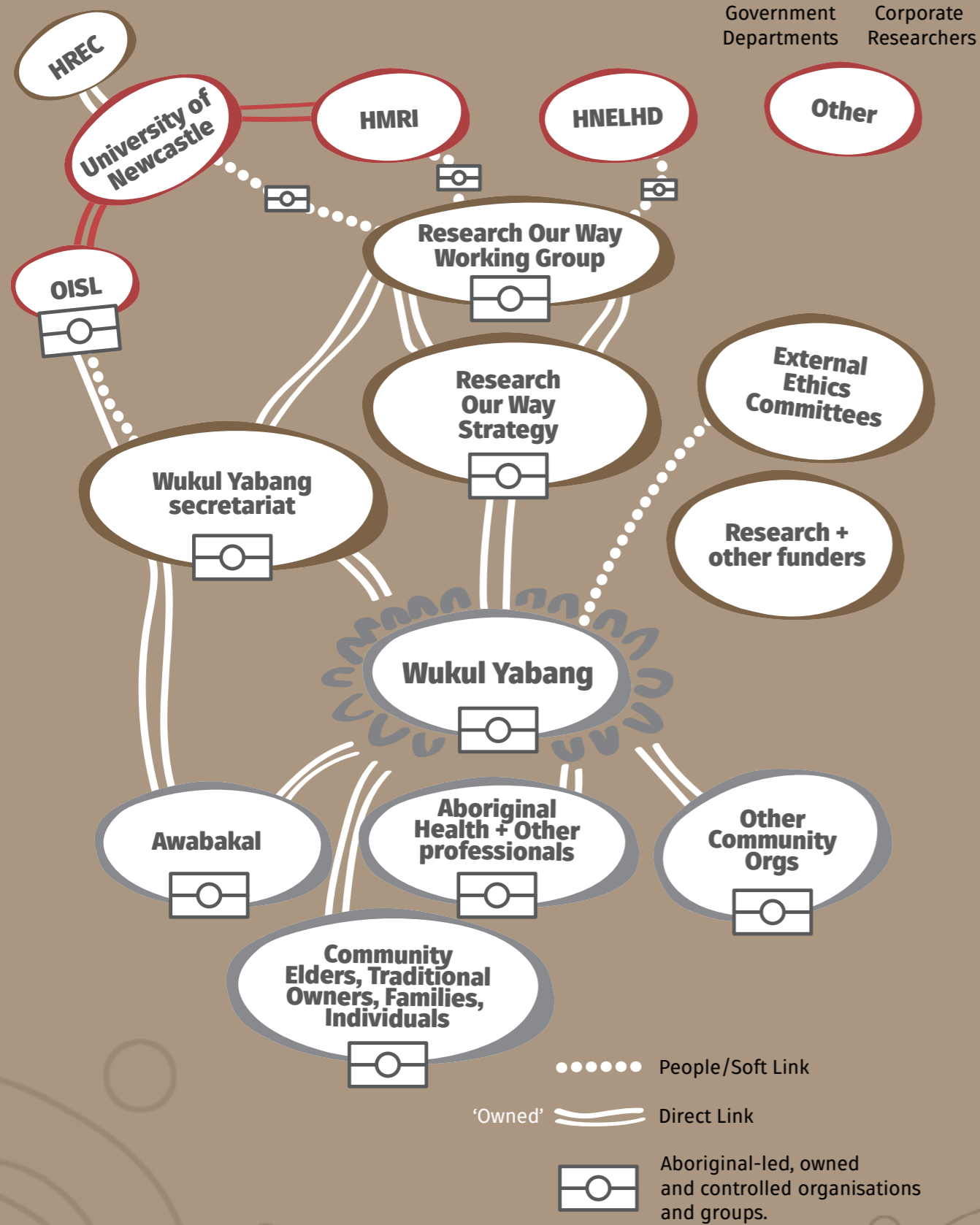
- Enhanced health outcomes and stronger research translation through strong partnerships and knowledge
- Coordinated approach and a single front door for Aboriginal Health Research in the region
- Community voice and input contributing to research priorities, methods, projects, results and application.
- Cultural authority and culturally safe - it takes the pressure off individuals and organisations for approving research for the region
- Local Aboriginal communities prioritise health issues for research and ensure research is culturally responsive
- Influence the national research agenda
- Including, and growing the number of, Aboriginal people contributing as researchers
- Shift, often negative, local community perspectives about research

“This strategy is something that has been desperately needed. It is a real opportunity to change the way mainstream research is conducted from research ON Aboriginal people to research Led by / WITH / FOR Aboriginal people.”

(Aboriginal Health Practitioner and Wukul Yabang member)



ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESEARCH ECOSYSTEM



The photographs in this strategy were taken on Worimi land at Birubi Beach in February 2024.

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land and pay thanks to Worimi Elders and Knowledge Holders for sharing stories of your Country with Wukul Yabang and Research Our Way Working Group members.

The images show the connection between Country, health, healing and wellbeing for our people.



WUKUL YABANG

ABORIGINAL HEALTH RESEARCH COMMUNITY PANEL

Wukul Yabang ensures that Aboriginal people have a say in what is being researched, by who, how, what for, where and when in our Community.

Wukul Yabang ensures research is ethically sound, culturally appropriate, real relevance and potential to benefit the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

All Aboriginal Health Research projects, using the broad definition of Aboriginal Health Research in this strategy, conducted by and through the University of Newcastle, Hunter Medical Research Institute and HNELHD must be approved by Wukul Yabang.

Wukul Yabang is a diverse group of local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with expertise to provide essential research ethics, research methodology, cultural and community oversight.

WHAT DOES WUKUL YABANG DO?

- Support Community members who would like to play a role to feel confident to participate in the Community Panel - everyone is welcome - everyone has knowledge that is relevant.
- Work with Community to identify and inform Community Health Research priorities to then partner with research institutes and other organisations to conduct research.
- Assess new health research proposals and review whether they are responsive to local priorities and respectful of local community cultural processes and protocols, provide feedback and guidance on research approaches and methodology.
- Connect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with relevant expertise and knowledge to research teams - as members of the research team
- Support and guide the research teams - to ensure they remain responsive to their ethical research commitments and adapt to changing circumstances

“The Community Panel has been one of the most amazing things I have had the privilege to be part of. The opportunity to create a process that can be aligned with “Our Way” of doing things has been very humbling. I cannot think of a better way to bring our mob together to have direct input and influence in research. The diverse expertise, lived experience and cultural knowledge is amazing to be a part of.”

(Yeena Thompson, University of Newcastle and Secretariat for the Hunter and Newcastle Region Aboriginal Health Research Strategy and Community Panel)

WHO ARE THE MEMBERS OF WUKUL YABANG?

- Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with specific experience who can be drawn on at relevant times to contribute their knowledge and experience to relevant research.
 - Permanent and specialist panel members
- Contact the Community Panel
Email: AHR@newcastle.edu.au
- Elders, knowledge holders, health professionals, researchers and academics, representatives of local Aboriginal Community Organisations

“This panel allows me as an Aboriginal Health Practitioner to inform researchers of my experience and expertise that can shape the way their research is conducted but also gets the researchers to include Aboriginal Health workers / Practitioners into their research team and / or reference groups.”

(Aboriginal Health Practitioner and Wukul Yabang member)

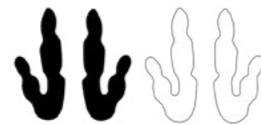


WUKUL YABANG: ABOUT THE ARTWORK



ONE WAY, ONE DIRECTION, ONE PATH

The Circle represents the foundations of our journey. Community, people, mob, country men from all around. At times our work to creating a better controlled pathway will be difficult but also inspirational, moving and rewarding.

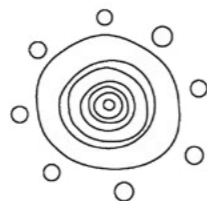


KANGAROO FOOTPRINTS

Did you know that the Kangaroo and Emu are the only two animals in this country that do not walk or take a step backwards.

With this, I see the AHRCP the same. It's about this panel going one way and forward for the better of our community.

The two different colours, the black and white kangaroo footprints, also relate to the two perspectives of our panel. Our perspective and the presenters. And yes, at times we may not be on the same page but that is where we guide, communicate and show that two different footprints can work and come together.



ONE CIRCLE

Represents us, the panel. It represents the community, mob and family that we are also representing. A variety of passionate people coming together for the one cause.



SECOND CIRCLE

Represents those whose are seeking to advance the better of our people and coming to us on the same path for guidance, help and support.

COUNTRY MEN AND WOMEN

With mob from everywhere on this panel, it gives us a broader scope of how different Communities act, think and behave. When researchers come in to present, we cover a vast area of knowledge and wisdom to understand their outcomes for our people.



OCEAN



PLAINS/FLATS



RIVER



MOUNTAINS



COMMUNITIES

This represents the people, the Communities and Mob.

This is our people/Mob and Communities that we are looking after and representing.



WUKUL YABANG

Wukul, pronounced Wuk-Kul means ONE. Our journey is to think, consider and discuss the outcome as best as we can as one.

Yabang, pronounced Ya-bung means path. With the word's way or direction, I went with path. Every journey creates a path. And our journey as the image before shows, there will be highs and lows but as one we can and will achieve our goal not only for our community but as a kangaroo footprint for other communities.

The phrases Wukul Yabang are from the Awabakal language.

Font: The font I've used is called Avenir Next. I chose this font as it has a laid-back warm feeling but also a strong classy look. Just like the group. Laid back, warm, strong and classy.

ABOUT THE ARTIST: ROD SMITH

Born and bred in Newcastle, Rod is an Anaiwan man from his mother's line with his parents from Armidale New England. In the late 1950s Rod's parents, following work on the rail lines, moved to Newcastle.

Youngest of 10 children, Rod has grown up watching his parents and many Elders who have passed on to create the foundations of what Newcastle is today and this drives Rod with his outlook for Newcastle and for art.

Art is something that has been in Rod's family either through music or painting. Rod has had his feet in both with more time now to focus on art than trying to be the next Troy Casser Daley!

Rod has kindly and generously made this artwork, with input from Yeena Thompson, specifically for Wukul Yabang; the Community Panel.

ACTION PLAN & THE ASK

ACTION PLAN 2021 - 2026

2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Concept and high level support from Awabakal, University of Newcastle, HMRI and HNELHD • High level strategy paper From Strength to Sovereignty (Dr Chelsea Watego and the Institute for Collaborative Race Research) based on research on local Community values, priorities and direction for Aboriginal Health Research
2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Group formed to oversee the creation of a Strategy and Community Panel • Develop and operationalise a place-based Aboriginal Health Research Hunter regions in phase 1 • Detailed design with Aboriginal community organisations, Aboriginal people, Awabakal, University of Newcastle, HMRI and HNELHD.
2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community information sessions • Establishment of secretariat, systems and processes • Recruitment and onboarding of the Community Panel • Commencement of Community Panel • Centralised funding distributed to Community Orgs to direct research priorities
2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity to include funding partners and MOU's with ethical research bodies • 18 month operational review and impact summary • Community-led place-based research priorities agreed to direct research by Institutions • Symposium to share learnings with other First Nations peoples, Aboriginal organisations and institutions • Opportunity to collaborate with nearby Aboriginal Nations
2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural capability of institutions and their researchers refined and supported • Expansion • Funding for Community-led, place-based, research priorities deployed • Second Impact summary and proposal for 10-15year sustainability
2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Move to "business as usual" phase • Full impact evaluation

HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

LOCAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

- All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the region are encouraged to get involved. Your lived experience, your families experience, and knowledge are valued.
- Express your interest to be on the Community Panel
- Express your interest to be a "community researcher" on a research project - we will help you!
- Learn more about research and how it is applied in your community
- Pass on information about the health priorities that you want researched

LOCAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

- Sign up to be involved in the Community Panel
- Refer researchers and ethics applications to the Community Panel

ORGANISATIONS UNDERTAKING RESEARCH

- Partner with the Community panel
- Create a Memorandum of Understanding
- Work with the panel to integrate new ways of working with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on research
- Partner with Wukul Yabung to identify specialist Aboriginal researchers, practitioners and knowledge holders to build capacity in your research teams

RESEARCHERS

- Engage with the Community Panel at concept and pre-funding stage to strengthen your proposal, methodology, team and ensure free, prior and informed consent
- Build in engagement protocols that include the Community Panel
- Ensure there is a role, and budget, in your research to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and/or Community researchers

PHILANTHROPISTS AND OTHER ORGANISATIONS WISHING TO PARTNER

- Partnerships to strengthen and fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research that is guided by the community are actively being sought



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OUR PEOPLE



[NEWCASTLE.EDU.AU/INDIGENOUS-COMMITMENT](https://newcastle.edu.au/indigenous-commitment)
AHR@newcastle.edu.au

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Led by local Aboriginal Communities and Aboriginal people from many countries living in and around Awabakal and Worimi lands. Supported by Awabakal Limited, the University of Newcastle, the Hunter Medical Research Institute and the Hunter New England Local Health District.

2021 - 2026