

Case study 4: Research Our Way – Aboriginal Health Research Strategy

Shifting the way research is conceptualised, governed and used to create change

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the Hunter and New England regions experience persistent health inequities, driven by systemic barriers, historical trauma, racism and a lack of culturally safe care. For too long, health research has been conducted on communities without their leadership or consent, resulting in limited community benefit, research fatigue, and mistrust. There has been a clear need to shift research power, purpose, and practice.

Research Our Way is a region-first Aboriginal Health Research Strategy grounded in the principle of Strength to Sovereignty, returning authority to Aboriginal communities to lead the research that impacts their lives. The strategy was co-developed by the University of Newcastle in partnership with Awabakal Ltd, Hunter New England Local Health District, and HMRI.

At the Strategy's core is Wukul Yabang – Aboriginal Health Research Community Panel – an independent, community-led group that reviews all research involving Aboriginal peoples in the region. Its role is to ensure research is ethically sound, culturally respectful, and aligned with community priorities and Aboriginal knowledge systems. The Panel is comprised of Elders, knowledge holders, academics, and health professionals, who assess proposals for cultural appropriateness, ethical rigour, and community benefit. They actively support researchers and ensure the community's voice is central in all stages of 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)

Through Wukul Yabang's leadership and deep community partnerships, the strategy is fostering trust, strengthening research relevance, and creating outcomes that reflect and respect Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

Importantly, the strategy also upholds Aboriginal data sovereignty, ensuring that Aboriginal people have control over how data about them is collected, accessed, stored and used. This principle is embedded in the governance of the strategy, and guarantees that data practices are culturally appropriate, ethically sound, and aligned with community expectations. By placing decision-making power in the hands of Aboriginal communities, the strategy protects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights to data and knowledge and supports self-determination in research.

Research Our Way Strategy at a glance

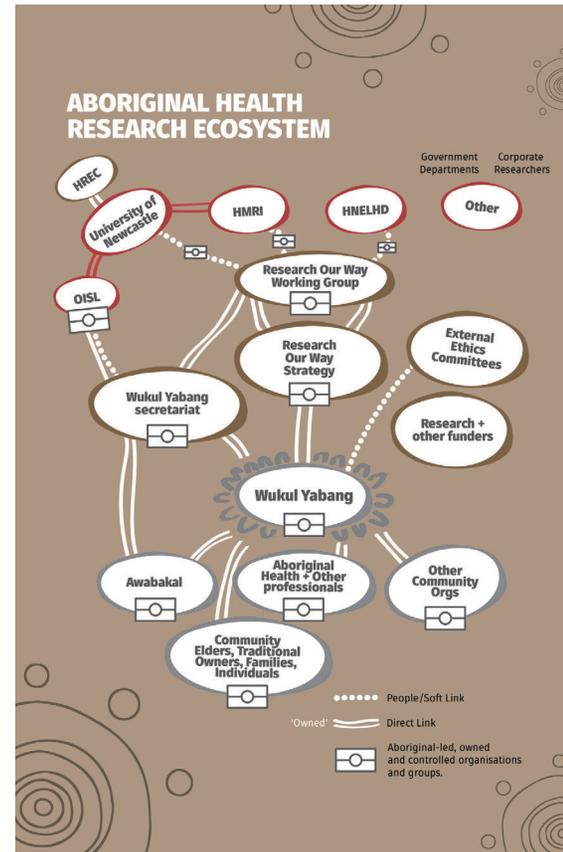
Launched: 2021

Funding: Approximately \$3 million awarded via the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) to support Aboriginal health research projects

Scope: Wukul Yabang – Aboriginal Health Research Community Panel reviews all Aboriginal health research involving Hunter and New England Aboriginal communities

Timeline: Five-year strategy with annual review checkpoints

Scan to learn more about the [Aboriginal Health Research Strategy](#) & Wukul Yabang



Scan to watch [Research Our Way](#) video



Figure 18. *Aboriginal Health Research Ecosystem Diagram*, Wukul Yabang Aboriginal Health Research Panel. Figures 19. and 20. Images from the 'Research Our Way' Video in Worimi Country, featuring Jamie Tarrant and Yeena Thompson.