



## Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health

The agenda of research reform is about:

- focus on research that can be transferred into practice, to make a difference to the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Indigenous control of research priorities and processes
- development of research capacity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community
- improved processes for consultation and negotiation of research, and for quality control (Harrison 2009:3)

## part a: supervision issues and approaches

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## part b: workplace strategies and resources

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**Ricky Mentha**  
Photo: Michael Howard

### Case story—An emerging researcher and work planning

**Ricky Mentha** is an Indigenous Research Fellow at the Baker IDI (Heart and Diabetes Institute) based in Alice Springs. He has worked as an Aboriginal Health Worker, community development officer and an academic researcher. His current focus is on chronic disease management and prevention, particularly cardiology.

*During my time as a trainee researcher at the Centre for Remote Health, John Wakeman was my primary supervisor. He gave me great support and spent a lot of one-on-one time with me. Weekly supervisor meetings helped to plan work and identify and target areas of developing professional capacity and research terminology and meaning. He pushed me to explore and relate research knowledge then use it to teach by facilitating research workshops in partnership with more experienced non-Indigenous and Indigenous researchers.*

**John Wakeman**  
Photo: National Rural Health Alliance

**John Wakeman** is Professor and Inaugural Director of the Centre for Remote Health, a joint centre of Flinders University and Charles Darwin University, in Alice Springs. He is a Public Health Medicine specialist and general practitioner, with extensive experience in remote primary health care services as a medical practitioner, senior manager, researcher and advocate.

*When Ricky started as a research trainee, we were starting a "reasonable drinking" research project with Australian Football League (AFL) Central Australia. We were able to link his on-the-job training plan with the research project plan and cover a range of research topics, from research design through to feedback and analysis. He also attended research training workshops in Port Augusta, offered by the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia.*

*Ricky and I had regular planning meetings when we would talk about how things were going with the project and what was happening. Having regular meetings is very important. Being available at other times is important, too, so you can respond quickly to questions and issues. Ricky brought his expertise and long experience with (Central Australian) body to the planning and research. I incorporated training as we went—for example, looking at data sets; explaining why we designed the project as we did; what were the "confounders" in the data and how to deal with them; how to tell if there was a causative relationship between the variables we were measuring. I would talk about the theory of what we were doing as we went along and link it to the research processes. I always tried to stretch Ricky and push him to new heights and it worked well for us. Ricky studied in the Master of Bioculture.*



Carolyn Thompson and Tricia Nagel

### Case story – On-the-job learning

The following case story by **Carolyn Thompson** describes how learning tasks are set and the level of skill and knowledge tracked on-the-job. The tasks focus on ways to build on the theory learned through formal study.

Carolyn is an Indigenous Research Officer and a member of the Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative (AIMH) team in the Northern Territory. Her supervisor is Tricia Nagel, who is Chief Investigator for the Northern Territory Indigenous AIMH project and Leader, Healing and Resilience Research Division, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin.

*Over the last two years I've learned how to do literature research, learned how to do a project proposal and how to fill out forms for funding, and a little bit of basics on ethics, and project monitoring and then presenting it all the end. I've... done a lot of this through use and now I want to practice it a little bit... So Tricia did up this form of what's required within the project and in our area. She put all these things down and she's marking off how much of it I've done or whether I've just got an awareness and understanding or I actually did it. So we've made up this form with all these things and just slowly... approach each*

## What we learnt about processes

- The initial round of consultation meetings was a good investment of time and money
- We needed to keep researchers engaged throughout the project
- Flexible timelines were essential
- A lot of benefit came from having a large number of reviewers and allowing adequate time (for reading and for alterations)
- The rigorous, lengthy processes of consultation, collaboration and review resulted in a product that was acceptable and useful to a wide audience

## What we learnt about researchers

- There are excellent examples of good practice supervision of emerging Indigenous health researchers
- There are many different ways of providing quality supervision and training for emerging researchers
- Researchers are committed to improving Indigenous health, through quality research and workplace relationships
- Researchers in Indigenous health are generous about sharing their stories, resources, ideas and experiences for the benefit of other researchers

