

CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Starlight's Healthier Futures Initiative: A partnership model supporting health care delivery to Indigenous children and adolescents

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The Starlight Children's Foundation (Starlight) works closely with health professionals to develop programs that have a positive impact on seriously ill children, adolescents and their families. Working in both hospitals and the community, Starlight is now recognised as an integral part of the Australian healthcare system. In 2013, Starlight joined forces with health professionals to develop the Healthier Futures Initiative to help children in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through an integrated care approach. By engaging them through song, dance and storytelling, Starlight has helped improve health clinic attendance, promoting prevention and early intervention. The rapport built with children and families has also been reported to alleviate anxiety in children who travel from community to be hospitalised, with the highly visible Captain Starlights providing a much-needed sense of connection and familiarity.

This presentation will discuss the collaborative nature of the Healthier Futures Initiative. It will outline a number of case studies including the key example of this integrated care approach, a partnership with the Earbus Foundation of WA (Earbus) servicing children in rural and remote Western Australia. Since early 2015, Earbus and Starlight have travelled together to Indigenous communities, the Earbus team providing ear screening, surveillance and treatments whilst Captain Starlights attract children to clinics, and provide opportunities for entertainment and play for those waiting to be seen by the clinical team.

Feedback from clinicians indicates the benefits of this integrated approach as a drawcard for increased attendance and a mechanism for reducing anxiety in children. Without the engagement or distraction provided by the Captain Starlights, children often leave prematurely, not receiving the full range of appointments or treatment they require. Captain Starlights also help enhance the relationship between the Indigenous community and health professionals. By working with the youngest members of the community, the program aims to facilitate a change in attitude towards healthcare, creating a positive, anxiety-free healthcare experience.

After working with Starlight, Earbus has achieved a reduction in referrals for Otitis Media and the level of Chronic Ear Disease has fallen below the WHO benchmark for the first time. Earbus and Starlight have also noted additional benefits from integrating care and collaborating with

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each other, including the ability to pool limited resources, increased credibility, and enhanced awareness of both organisations across the regions.

In 2016, Captain Starlight worked alongside health professionals to make clinic visits a more positive experience for 8,667 children living in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in WA and NT. Between the various programs, Starlight now spends 300 days per year visiting remote communities as part of an integrated care model. Recognising the benefits of combining expertise, the organisation is committed to building further partnerships and impacting the lives and health care outcomes of more Indigenous children and their families.

Keywords: indigenous; collaboration; children; adolescent; healthcare
