

MU Murdoch
University



**NGANGK
YIRA**



Annual Report
Jan 2024 – Jun 2025

Ngala kwop biddi.
Building a brighter future, together.



Ngangk Yira Institute for Change



**Wongi mi bardup –
doing it our way.
Together we have
the solutions.**

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar Nation as the traditional custodians of the land on which Murdoch University stands and pay respect to Elders past, present and future.

We recognise the long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. In doing this, we acknowledge that the past is not just the past but continues to impact on the present and the future.

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Professor Rhonda Marriott AM
Pro Vice Chancellor
Ngangk Yira Institute for Change

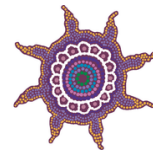
Pro Vice Chancellor's Foreword

It is with great pride and deep respect that I present the inaugural Annual Report of the Ngangk Yira Institute for Change (NYIC). This milestone reflects not only the growth of our Institute since its founding in 2022, but also the enduring strength and wisdom of the Aboriginal communities we serve.

The journey from a research centre in 2018 to an Institute in 2022 has been guided by our commitment to cultural security, community-led research, and the principle of Wongi Mi Bardup – doing it our way. The name Ngangk Yira, gifted by Whadjuk Elder Aunty Marie Taylor, continues to inspire our work as it symbolises the rising sun and the giving of life. It reminds us daily of our responsibility to uplift Aboriginal women, men, young people, children, families and communities through research that is grounded in respect, equity, and cultural integrity.

This report captures the key achievements of the Ngangk Yira Institute and our three research and advocacy centres, Yorga Maaman Koolanga, Coolamon, and Yawardani Jan-ga, each of which embodies a unique focus while sharing a common goal: improving life outcomes for Aboriginal people. It also reflects our strategic partnerships, and our efforts to embed cultural solutions into all systems that Aboriginal people intersect with, whether that be for health care, housing, social services, justice, and many others that pose possible bureaucratic barriers.

As we reflect on our progress and prepare for the future, I extend my heartfelt thanks to our staff, collaborators, Elders, communities and to all the funders who believe in the research and advocacy work we undertake each day. Your voices, leadership, and resilience shape everything we do. Together, we continue to walk a path of change, guided by culture, knowledge, and hope.



Our Vision

We hold an enduring commitment to our key message which is Wongi Mi Bardup (doing it our way) for cultural solutions for Aboriginal families' and communities' futures, because together we have the solutions!

To realise a shared and enduring commitment to:

- Transformational research that has the power to bring about change for Aboriginal families and communities
- Collaborative research that is led by Aboriginal people and speaks to a shared commitment for sustainable change.
- Translational research with a narrative of outcomes that are meaningful, respectful and enhance Aboriginal people's lives.

Our Mission

Our Values and the Ngangk Yira Way

Ngangk Yira fully aligns with MU's Values of authenticity, integrity, respect, inclusivity and openness.

In addition to these, Ngangk Yira's Values (the Ngangk Yira Way) are:

- Data Sovereignty and Governance
- Applied Expertise and Co-design
- Community Empowerment
- Decolonising Research and Evaluation
- Upscaling Evidence
- Collaborative Sustainability

Growth of Ngangk Yira Institute for Change

Since its founding, the Ngangk Yira Institute for Change has experienced a remarkable growth trajectory, evolving from a single research centre in 2018 into a nationally recognised Institute in 2022, and then establishing three distinct but interconnected Research and Advocacy Centres in 2023. Under the leadership of Pro Vice Chancellor Rhonda Marriott, the Institute has expanded its scope and impact, launching the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre to support culturally secure services for Aboriginal women and families, the Yawardani Jan-ga Centre to deliver experiential wellbeing programs for Aboriginal youth, and the Coolamon Centre to address climate-related health, wellbeing and social challenges. This strategic expansion reflects Ngangk Yira's commitment to transformational, translational, and collaborative research, grounded in Aboriginal leadership and cultural knowledge. The Institute's rapid development has been marked by increased staffing, new partnerships, and a growing portfolio of community-led initiatives, positioning Ngangk Yira as a leading force in Aboriginal health and social equity research. This report summarises the key activities from Jan 2024 – June 2025, with future reports to cover a 12 month financial year.

Systems and Policy

As a vital part of Ngangk Yira's growth, in November 2024, the Institute's Systems and Policy Unit was established under the leadership of Professor Tracy Reibel, previously Principal Research Fellow (2017–2022), who rejoined the Institute in May 2024 as an Interim Co-Director of the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Research and Advocacy Centre.

When Ngangk Yira was established in 2022 as the fourth Murdoch University research intensive Institute, systems and policy was one of four pillars articulated as drivers of the Institute's existing and future research agenda. Ngangk Yira's vision of societal and institutional changes which benefit Aboriginal people and communities relies on translational research undertaken across a diverse array of fields and reflecting the priorities of Aboriginal people. These include in health and human services, the environment, and the self-determination of Aboriginal families and communities.

The Systems and Policy Unit is a vehicle that will continue with the strong advocacy undertaken by Ngangk Yira over the previous decade. Drawing on strong relationships with key decision makers across a variety of government departments, collaborations with other Universities in WA and nationally, and linkages with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, Ngangk Yira is well placed to continue its efforts in contributing to improvements in the health, wellbeing and futures of Aboriginal people.

Achievements and Impact

Jan 2024–June 2025



PUBLICATIONS
Total publications
excluding adjunct publications

74



CITATIONS

Academics

112,084 citations*

h-index – 81

Adjuncts

26,724 citations*

h-index – 81

*based on best available data on Scopus – Oct 2025



Higher Degree Research

Awarded

8*

*based on best available data



NEW FUNDING AWARDS

(income to MU involving a NYIC Chief Investigator)

Awarded

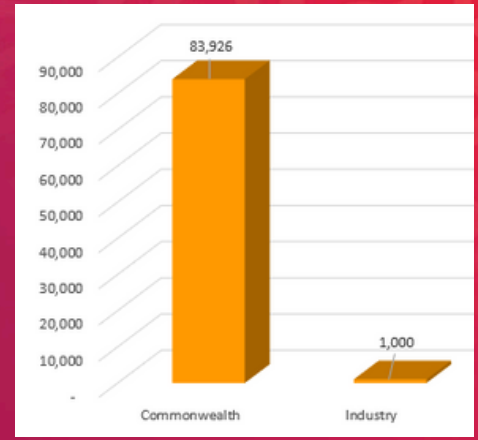
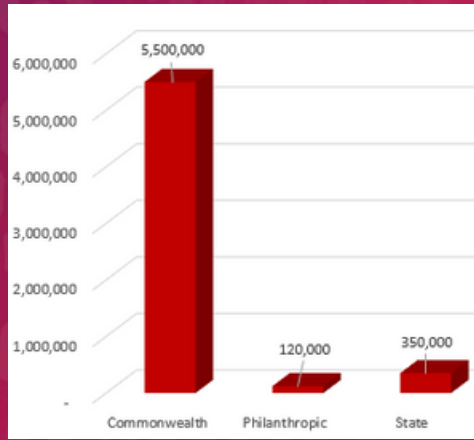
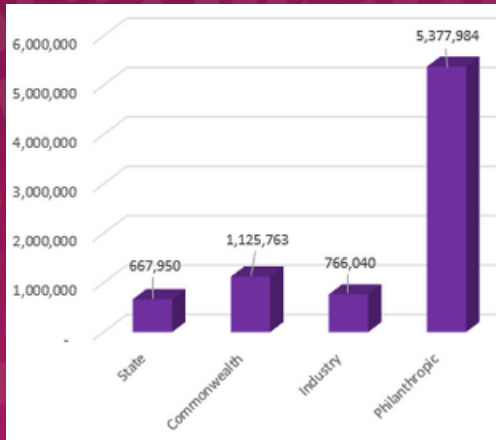
\$7,937,737

Pending

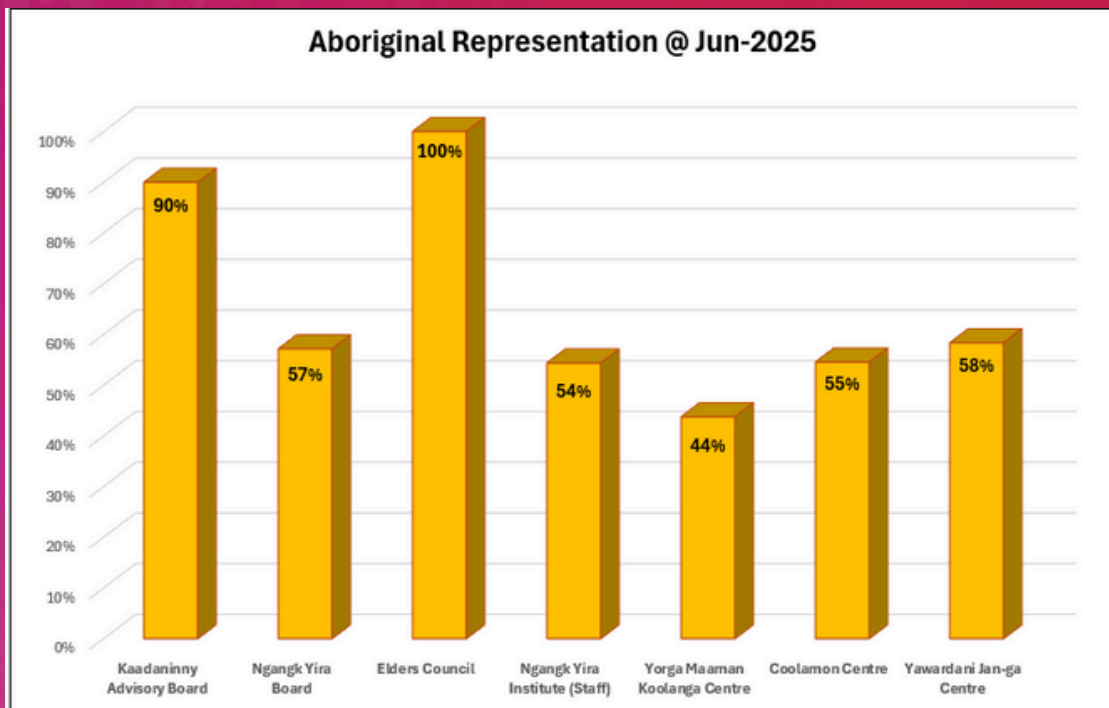
\$5,970,000

Completed

\$84,926



Aboriginal Representation



Our Structure



The Ngangk Yira Institute for Change (NYIC) is structured to reflect its commitment to culturally secure, community-led research and advocacy. Led by Pro Vice Chancellor Rhonda Marriott, NYIC comprises three core centres: the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre, focused on Aboriginal women and families; the Yawardani Jan-ga Centre, supporting Aboriginal youth wellbeing; and the Coolamon Centre, addressing climate, health, and social equity. Each centre is guided by Aboriginal leadership and supported by a multidisciplinary team of researchers, Elders, and community advocates and advisors. Our governance structure comprises of The Council of Elders, providing cultural guidance and wisdom, shaping the Institute's research priorities and ensuring that all activities are grounded in respect for Aboriginal knowledge and traditions. The Kaadininny Advisory Board serves as a key forum for cultural governance, meeting regularly to offer expert advice and guidance to research staff on project development and implementation. The NYIC Advisory Board oversees strategic direction, accountability, and reporting, supporting the Institute's mission to drive impactful research and positive change for Aboriginal communities. Together, our governance bodies ensure strategic alignment and cultural integrity across all initiatives. This structure enables NYIC to deliver transformative research and policy impact while remaining deeply connected to the communities it serves.





OUR RESEARCH

Yorga Maaman Koolanga (YMK) Research and Advocacy Centre



“

“The first ‘1000 days’ presents an ideal opportunity for midwives, child health nurses and other health professionals to build respectful and authentic relationships with Aboriginal mothers, fathers and their families. When this is done well, with cultural safety at the forefront, the potential is created for positive engagement by Aboriginal families with health services. If we can get maternity care and child health care right – it is the beginning of something much bigger!”

”

This photo was taken in 2018 at the launch of the Ngangk Yira Research Centre, now the babies in this are now 7 years of age!

The Ngangk Yira Institute’s mantra is “Nothing about us without us!”. This drives the co-designed translational research of the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Research and Advocacy Centre in understanding the major contemporary issues and challenges that face the health and resilience of Aboriginal women, men, children, families and communities. There is an urgent need for research evidence to support change and a more integrated, community led, strength based, health systems approach, not just for Wadjuk Country but across Western Australia and our vast nation that is Australia.

The Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre’s research is deeply embedded in Aboriginal-led translational research, to turn evidence into real-world impact. We collaborate with Elders, clinicians, researchers, policymakers, and community members to co-design culturally secure health and social service systems. Our research is framed by Indigenous research methodologies, self-determination, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles.

The Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre will consolidate evidence from translational research programs on the critical importance of a solid start for a healthy and resilient future, and the urgent need for research translation to support Aboriginal women’, men’s and families’ ease of access to culturally secure health and social service systems, and for delivery from those systems to respond flexibly to families’ changing needs when social and emotional wellbeing, health and social support is needed.

The Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre also works closely with the WA Government and health services to ensure our research supports Closing the Gap strategic targets 2, 4, 12, and 13 (to improve maternal and infant health outcomes, reduce preventable stillbirths, and reduce the risk of infants being removed from families, and to ensure families and households are safe).

Through its research and advocacy work, the Yorga, Maaman and Koolanga Centre is centering Aboriginal voices and lived experiences, toward equity, empowerment, and cultural respect, and the creation of systems that truly serve the people they’re meant to support.





OUR RESEARCH

Yorga Maaman Koolanga (YMK) Research and Advocacy Centre



A strong start in Aboriginal women's and men's connected life course from the woman's pregnancy to parenthood and their children's early years is fundamental to the future of healthy and resilient children, parents, families, and communities. The holistic, translational research evidence from this Centre will empower women, men and families, and support practitioners' knowledge to ensure culturally secure wrap around social and emotional wellbeing, health, and social services for the benefit of Aboriginal women, men, children, and families.

In 2023, **Baby Coming You Ready (BCYR)** was elected as an Innovative Research Universities (IRU) impact case study for the IRU 20th anniversary celebrations.

BCYR is a celebration of the cultural wisdom, relational collaboration, and ongoing support through an empowered yarning process for Aboriginal mothers. BCYR was developed through the core principles of co-design and self-determination by a multi-sector collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people from government and non-government health and research sectors. The collaboration included Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers at its core. BCYR combines assessment and the opportunity for therapeutic perinatal intervention/s, thus promoting ongoing woman-centered care.

BCYR is presented on an iPad and is a digitised social, emotional, spiritual, and cultural assessment. Touchscreen images, depicting common life events and experiences that can be hard to discuss, allow the woman to safely select those to which she relates. It includes perinatal screens for social and emotional wellbeing, psychological distress, health, alcohol, other drugs of addiction, tobacco, family and domestic violence, and presence (and perceived effectiveness) of supportive ongoing follow-up/care. Aboriginal voice-overs guide the woman and her care provider through a 'yarning' style self-reflective assessment.

Introduced in a standalone appointment within days of her initial presentation, BCYR is used throughout the woman's perinatal journey, ensuring a culturally contextualised family-centred management plan focused around her needs and is regularly reviewed and reassessed.

Professional training support has been developed by the BCYR team for complex trauma, motivational interviewing, dealing with disclosure, goal setting, self-reflective practice, and practice change. The training is mandatory for clinicians using BCYR to ensure clinicians honour the principles of cultural safety.

Conducted over two years, the BCYR Pilot evaluation established the functionality of the digitised assessment platform and the feasibility of integrating BCYR into routine antenatal and early postnatal services. Over 280 Aboriginal women participated in the Pilot, introduced in four metropolitan health services and four health services in the Wheatbelt region. Analysis of deidentified data automatically collected by the BCYR platform has demonstrated good fidelity, with core data fields showing high rates of completion during social and emotional wellbeing assessments. Importantly, analysis indicated where adjustments are required in the platform to improve performance. The evaluation also collected qualitative data with analysis demonstrating the assessment process has a high level of acceptability and useability as experienced by Aboriginal women and midwives and child health nurses. The first phase BCYR Pilot evaluation has been successful, clearly demonstrating that co-designed and culturally informed clinical assessment tools are relevant and beneficial in the conduct of perinatal health care. The second phase of BCYR rollout will commence in 2026 at an increased number of Western Australia metropolitan and regional health services, a small number of interstate sites, and with ongoing evaluation focused on clinical outcomes, impact and economic benefit.

YMK Key Project Highlights

FEALING Program

Family Empowerment Across Life - Indigenous Growth (the FEALING Program) is funded by the Ian Potter Foundation's Major Grants Program supporting the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Centre to capacity build Aboriginal researchers to develop initiatives which will contribute to self-determination, through research evidence to promote Aboriginal communities' ongoing social and emotional wellbeing, redress existing inequities and promote reconciliation. Critical to the FEALING program's success is leveraging funding with another philanthropic funding partners. Program funding is currently directed towards:

- A Men's Healing Project is led by Senior Maaman Rohan Collard, and the untold roles of fathers in pregnancy support and child rearing is simultaneously being explored.
- Janinne Gliddon (former Aboriginal Senior Research Fellow staff member, and Masters student) is exploring knowledge for doula education and family empowerment.
- Building capacity of Aboriginal academics and mentoring the next generation of Aboriginal Researchers to develop Aboriginal led solutions for culturally safe health care for Aboriginal families.

In 2026, Program funding will support a Postdoc to validate an Aboriginal adaptation of a tool for parenting self-efficacy (TOPSE). This project will provide a unique culturally appropriate tool for Aboriginal parents across Australia.

Mums and Bubs Deadly Diets is a research project led by the University of Queensland in partnership with Ngangk Yira Institute for Change. This is a cross-centre collaboration with Yorga, Maaman and Koolanga Research and Advocacy Centre and the Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre. Professors Rhonda Marriott and Professor Roz Walker have worked with Senior Aboriginal Research Fellow Janinne Gliddon and Researcher Serena St Clair to determine the dietary intake of Aboriginal pregnant women and young mothers, recognising that a healthy diet is important during pregnancy for optimal infant outcomes. Aboriginal mothers, Elders and health practitioners were interviewed in WA and Queensland to determine current diet practices, barriers to health foods (Phase One) and what women would like to know about and how they would like this information to be provided (Phase Two). Both Phase One and Phase Two of the Mums and Bubs Deadly Diet project have been completed and the findings have contributed to the development of a website link, several journal articles, fact sheets and a final report.

BCYR Next Steps:

BCYR utilises digital technology that supports culturally safe practice change and knowledge translation. Plans to embed BCYR into routine midwifery clinical practice into the 6 pilot sites is underway, as well as implementation into a further 18 clinical sites across WA with the relaunch of BCYR set for later this year.

BCYR is foundational to three major NHMRC projects worth almost \$10m with \$2.9M coming to Murdoch University (MU). The projects are: the iCARE funded project in collaboration with South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute; the Replanting the Birthing Trees funded project with Melbourne University; and the MMRF funded Upstream proposal through Puntukurnu Aboriginal Medical Service. These three projects provide the opportunity to test the performance of BCYR in conjunction with other maternal and parental interventions aligned to the diverse goals of each project.

In a cross institutional collaboration with MU's School of Information Technology, Dr Guanjin Wang, has applied artificial intelligence (AI) to analyse deidentified BCYR pilot data to identify expected and unexpected themes in common protective and risk factors. Based on the outcomes, a clinical prediction model to support professionals' clinical judgment is being tested in non-clinical workshop settings with midwives for acceptability and accuracy of prediction. If successful, there is potential to pilot test the impact of using AI to augment midwives' clinical judgments when using BCYR in real clinical settings.

In recognition of the importance of the role of fathers in ante-natal care, YMK is also evolving the platform through the BCYR Maaman Project to be inclusive of male care giver roles. This includes the establishment of a Maaman reference group to oversee the project to ensure Maaman voices in fathering are captured.



**Baby Coming
You Ready?**

Wongi Mi Bardup Strengthening Family Futures

Funding from the Stan Perron Charitable Foundation is ensuring a strong and sustainable Aboriginal led Centre focused on Aboriginal children, families and communities. Capacity building Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal positions is future-proofing the significant research and advocacy work of the Yorga, Maaman and Koolanga Centre, and Ngangk Yira Institute for Change. Critical to the success of funding from the Stan Perron Charitable Foundation is leveraging funding with another philanthropic funding partners for significant project directions.

Consultancy: STILL AWARE's 'Winds of Change' Project

The Still Aware project completed its funding in 2024 and synthesised First Nations populations' perceptions, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and myths about stillbirth as this population to develop prevention strategies.

Rhonda Marriott, Trish Ratajczak and Bridgette Kelly from the Yorga, Maaman and Koolanga Centre were engaged to consult with Aboriginal Elders, and Noongar community members to explore their understandings of Stillbirth prevention strategies and to develop suitable health promotion resources.

YMK Key Project Highlights

Maaman Waankiny Wur Walbriny Project – Lowitja Major Grant

NYIC in partnership with Gorenang Moortabiin were successful in obtaining a Major Lowitja Research Grant 2025 – 2027 to lead the Maaman Waankiny Wur Walbriny Project.

The Maaman Waankiny Wur Walbriny (Men Talking and Healing) Project led by Principal Research Fellow Rohan Collard seeks to undertake a feasibility study into how cultural healing activities on Country supports for Maaman, offered through Gorenang Moortabiin, can strengthen the cultural determinants of Maaman Aboriginal health, spirit and wellbeing. We will use co-design and Aboriginal participatory action research, in an Indigenous methodological framework to undertake consultation. The Project seeks to evidence that creating a space for culturally secure healing and cultural connection to land, culture and spirituality through access to culturally secure services, Maaman can develop strengths in overcoming entrenched inequalities often faced by Aboriginal Maaman leading to positive life outcomes and healing.

The project aims to evidence that by providing culturally secure services and supports for Aboriginal Maaman that focuses on strengthening and protecting our knowledge systems is integral to ensuring that Maaman have a strong spirit leading to improved health and wellbeing. Cultural determinants of Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, seek to recognise the importance and relatedness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural determinants and knowledge systems as an integral part in building strong health, strong spirit and wellbeing.

This project will focus on:

- Culturally safe and secure services for Maaman – Improved health and wellbeing for Maaman
- Preserving culture for Maaman
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in design, delivery and governance
- Increasing workforce capacity and capability building activities such as employment opportunities for Maaman participating in the project
- Enhancing skills in research for Gorenang Moortabiin Aboriginal Corporation to strengthen the organisations skills and knowledge in research

First Nations Men's Involvement in Antenatal Care – partnership with Curtin University

The overall vision of the project is to implement an Elder and community led, codesigned process to build a foundation of knowledge on Aboriginal men's involvement in antenatal care (ANC) for stillbirth prevention in the Noongar Boodjar region. Rohan Collard is co-researcher with Dr Bernado Dewey from Curtin University. This is the first study on Aboriginal men's involvement in antenatal care for stillbirth prevention and is consistent with the 2020 National Stillbirth Action and Implementation Plan and the National Men's Health Strategy 2020-2030 priorities.



YMK Collaborations with Australian Universities

Jinda Maawit: New Insights for Reducing Aboriginal Stillbirth

Led by Professor Carrington Shepherd and Dr Bernado Dewey at Curtin University, this 4-year project is now in its 3rd year and partners with NYIC (Professor Rhonda Marriott, Professor Roz Walker, Professor Tracy Reibel, and Rohan Collard). Using co-design, the project is building evidence for preventative population health strategies to reduce stillbirth among Aboriginal populations.

Strong Aboriginal governance is fundamental to the project design and is led by NYIC to ensure that Aboriginal Elders, communities, and service providers are partners in all research activities. Aboriginal governance is guiding multi-dimensional mixed methods to investigate Aboriginal stillbirth, advance knowledge of the population-level risks to Aboriginal stillbirth; develop a foundational understanding of knowledge, perceptions and beliefs about stillbirth risks among Aboriginal families, communities and care providers; and investigate Aboriginal-specific intervention strategies to support stillbirth education and awareness.

iCARE: It's Time to Flourish

Led by Karen Glover, Yvonne Clark, Odette Pearson and Tamara McKeen at SAMHRI and the University of South Australia, they have partnered with NYIC (Rhonda Marriott, Roz Walker, Trish Ratajczak and Bridgette Kelly). This five year project seeks to improve perinatal outcome measures - a reduction in preterm birth, length of hospital stay, birthweight, long-term breastfeeding, and developmental concerns. A key plank of the program intervention is the use of the Baby Coming You Ready assessment rubric.

The long-term goal is to reverse health and well-being inequity and ensure early child development is on track, by offering accessible, safe, and tailored support early through a Coolamon Navigator role. A robust evaluation framework encompasses five research streams, with accountability ensured through internal and external governance.

Replanting the Birthing Trees Project

Led by Professor Catherine Chamberlain (University of Melbourne) with Professor Rhonda Marriott (CIB), Professor Roz Walker, Trish Ratajczak, and Paola Vasquez along with 42 other investigators, this highly innovative First Nations-led project is funded by MRFF and builds on community-co-design, strong evidence and existing successful perinatal care program models. The project aims to transform compounding cycles of intergenerational trauma and harm to positively reinforce cycles of intergenerational nurturing and recovery for First Nations parents and babies.

The team of community leaders, peak bodies, health and social care services, education providers, mental and family health clinicians, researchers, and consumers are collaborating to address critical and documented gaps in perinatal mental health care, drive health system reform and establish a transformative shift in health policies and practice. This will enable scale up of culturally grounded, safe, holistic, trauma-integrated, transdisciplinary continuity-of-care in the first 2000 days to ensure all First Nations babies have the best possible start to life.

In September 2024, the team led by Paola Vasquez, visited the Wheatbelt region and met with key stakeholders in Merredin, Moora, Narrogin, and Northam to inform them of the study and to invite them to be part of the **Site Implementation Team (SIT)**. During these meetings, the team mapped out and identified health services' challenges in providing culturally appropriate health services to Aboriginal families. The SIT in the Wheatbelt was established in October 2024 with active engagement from its members.

In November 2024, YMK launched the RBT Trauma Aware Healing Informed Training program with the support of the Melbourne RBT team. The training consisted of three sessions - two at Murdoch University and one in Northam.

In June 2025, we completed the first round of the **RBT Trauma Aware Healing Informed Training program** in the Wheatbelt region. We conducted one session per site (Northam, Narrogin, Moora, and Merredin) with a total of 50 participants. The Wheatbelt WA Country Health Executive Director, Danny Rogers, was one of the participants in the session delivered in Moora. We have the privilege of having one Aboriginal Elder per site, who Welcomed us to Country, making us feel safe and proud of this project.





OUR RESEARCH

Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre



Professor Roz Walker

Centre Director for Coolamon
Research and Advocacy Centre

Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre undertakes research to understand the widespread and cumulative effects of climate change, and the social, cultural and environmental factors impacting the lives of Aboriginal families and communities.

The work of this Centre focuses on identifying and implementing solutions to close the gap on a range of physical health, social and emotional wellbeing and environmental outcomes.

Over the past 18 months the Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre, Ngangk Yira Institute for Change, has demonstrated a strong commitment to Aboriginal-led scholarship and policy influence bringing together interdisciplinary teams of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers, and community advocates to generate evidence-based research recommendations. Coolamon's projects have involved over 400 participants, fostering networks that bridge Aboriginal communities, academia, and policymakers. Coolamon Centre researchers have co-published over 50 peer-reviewed articles, and secured funding from philanthropic partners (ARYZTA, Alcoa, Munderoo) and government programs (NDRR, Consumer Community Involvement Program (CCIP)) and competitive grants (NHMRC and ARC).

Inspired by the coolamon's role in nurturing life, the Centre tackles the cumulative effects of climate change - most notably increasing heatwave intensity - and critical water quality issues in remote homelands. Projects related its five interconnected research themes - Care for Country, Curation on Country, Cultivation on Country, Connection to Country, and Interconnections of culture, Country and health and wellbeing - are developed in partnership with Aboriginal communities, industry, government and research allies. Through initiatives like the Wakuthuni Heatwaves Project and water-quality assessments in Western Australian homelands, Coolamon is building the evidence base needed to safeguard both ecological health and social and emotional wellbeing.

“We're proud to have built strong partnerships that elevate community voices and deliver meaningful impact - from climate resilience to cultural revitalisation. Our work honours Country, strengthens wellbeing, and places Aboriginal knowledge and leadership at the heart of every solution.”

Coolamon is involved with several noteworthy projects that span climate impact and culture (Changes to Country), extreme-heat mitigation (Wakuthuni Heatwaves Project), advocacy (Homelands Advocacy Hub, links to the WA Health, Environment and Living (HEAL) network), community engagement for the development of a Strep A vaccine strategy (Australian Strep A Vaccine Initiative), maternal and child nutrition (Mums & Bubs Deadly Diets), and nutrition education (Deadly Koolinga Chefs). These projects reflect significant progress towards empowering healthy families, sustaining cultural practices, and influencing policy at regional and national levels.

Securing funding in January 2025 from the CCIP in full to host a Water Roundtable in July 2025 was a notable achievement. It will enable the Centre to bring together Aboriginal communities, Elders, researchers, policymakers, health professionals, and industry partners to address water security and quality in Aboriginal homelands. It will provide a platform for Aboriginal voices to lead the conversation, ensuring that lived experience and traditional knowledge are central to shaping solutions to address complex problems.

Coolamon Key Project Highlights

The **Changes to Country Project** is an Elder and community led project focusing on how changes to Country (climate change) is impacting Noongar people. This project has 2 phases. The first phase includes in-depth yarns with Elders and other community members capturing their observations of environmental changes on Country and how these changes impact the social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) of Aboriginal people.

In addition to these culturally grounded conversations, phase 2 of the project delivers three Elder and community-led cultural programs.

The first one is underway and involves a series of Bush Tucker Workshops across Perth. These provide Aboriginal participants with cultural knowledge about traditional bush foods, explore concepts of culture, identity and SEWB as well as share insights about climate change from an Aboriginal perspective.

The other two cultural programs are in the co-design stage and will be delivered in 2026.

All cultural programs are Elder and community designed and led, and for Aboriginal community members to attend. They foster a culturally safe space for sharing culture, experiences and intergenerational learning, often involving up to three generations. The project aims to promote strong SEWB through culture in the context of a changing climate.

Australian Strep A Vaccine Initiative (ASAVI)

is a collaboration between the Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre and The Kids Research Institute Australia, to establish a blueprint for vaccine trials in Aboriginal communities. In this Australian-led global initiative, ASAVI aims to reduce the disease burden caused by Strep A infections through effective vaccination. Over 62 people have participated in focus groups or one to one interviews with Aboriginal community members and health professionals throughout the Perth metropolitan area and in Cairns and Yarrabah in Queensland. Further focus groups are in the planning stages for young people in Darwin and with the Miwatj Aboriginal Health corporation in Northern Territory for 2025.

The Deadly Koolinga Chefs Program (DKCP), is a collaborative food literacy project between Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre and Murdoch's School of Nursing. DKCP has received funding to continue cooking classes in schools in the Peel region. Led by Associate Professor Caroline Nilson, the program focusses on kitchen safety, meal planning and budgeting, cooking and food storage – and includes Traditional Bush Foods. ARYZTA International Bakery is the foundational sponsor for the Deadly Koolinga Chefs Program and has signed an agreement with Murdoch University to continue funding through 2025.

The continued success of the Deadly Koolinga Chefs Program in the Murray Shire has seen the introduction of the program into three more schools in 2024 and a fourth school in 2025, with funding from Alcoa of Australia. The introduction of the program in these additional partner schools highlights the importance of children's food literacy development as a life skill.



The Young Indigenous Peoples Resilience and Wellbeing study, funded by an ARC Indigenous Discovery grant was conducted between 2021 and 2023. However, the final research outputs of the study at Ngangk Yira were completed in 2024. This study confirmed the complexity of wellbeing and resilience for Aboriginal young people in two study sites, Perth WA and a rural site in NSW. The study confirmed that 'belonging', 'being strong', 'recognising risk' and 'maintaining positivity' were important to Aboriginal young people along with the importance of connections, culture, and community. The study showed that some Aboriginal young people also experience distress due to the loss of relationships and connections. As part of the broader study, Phd Candidate, Ella Gorman investigated the useability and validity of the three instruments used in the study survey. Using a Rasch modelling approach to assess psychometric properties of the constructs of resilience and SEWB, her study revealed the limitations and challenges of instruments developed to measure the effectiveness of programs and services designed to promote resilience and wellbeing in Aboriginal young people. Ella's PhD found that contemporary measures of SEWB (Strong Souls) and resilience (Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale) require further research before being recommended for use with Aboriginal young people by clinicians and researchers in Australia. Ella's PhD was awarded in 2024 and nominated for an award. Three papers were also published that provide new information about the potential challenges in using these existing instruments. These findings acknowledge the diversity among 'Indigenous Australian youth, who have varied and unique cultural beliefs and practices, histories, and experiences of colonization that influence their wellbeing and the need for greater understanding of youth resilience through using qualitative research and constructivist methods that enable young people to share their understanding and experiences. The findings reinforce the importance of qualitative research to contribute to the interpretation and analysis of findings when exploring such critical concepts as resilience and social and emotional wellbeing.

Coolamon Key Project Highlights

Wakuthin Heatwave Project

The Coolamon Research and Advocacy Centre (Roz Walker, Victoria Stroud) partnered with CI's Angus Cook, Judy Katzenellebogen and Peter Franklin in School of Population and Global Health, University of Western Australia, and Dr Georgia Chaseling, thermal physicist, University of Sydney and the Wakuthuni community led by Aunty Joyce Drummond, to address the challenges of climate change. Wakuthuni Aboriginal community is located in the Pilbara, 30 kilometers from Tom Price, one of the hottest places in Australia. The project 'Partnering for Proactive Strategies to Address the Impacts of Extreme Heat Events in an Aboriginal Community in the Pilbara' was funded by Department of Fire and Emergency Services. The Wakuthuni Heat Waves Project aimed to protect Aboriginal homelands communities in the Pilbara from the health and social impacts of heatwaves—a growing concern for under-resourced regions in WA.



Conducted over twelve months the first phase of the project focused on building trust and visibility through monthly visits, informal yarns, a Steering Committee workshop with senior Aboriginal leadership, and the development of newsletters and project information sheets and project T-shirts. Establishing a local office in Tom Price further strengthened our presence. Throughout Phase II, the project team delivered co-designed, community-led activities to enhance resilience and wellbeing. These included heat preparedness workshops with expert input from Dr Georgia Chaseling, citizen science initiatives to monitor temperature and humidity, water quality testing and monitoring, with issues raised at the Centre's Homeland Advocacy Hub and participation in the Boola Kep, Boola Moort- Many Waters, Many Hearts Roundtable. The community also co-designed a 'Beat the Heat' video resource and at the community's request, distributed fan water bottles, supported practical responses for at-risk community members.

Phase III focused on community and stakeholder dissemination through local feedback sessions, international conference presentations, and community representation in broader advocacy conversations.

This pilot project has demonstrated the value of proactive, co-designed strategies in homelands communities. It has increased awareness, confidence, and local ownership, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive approaches to climate adaptation and emergency preparedness. Plans are in place with local organisations to continue the momentum. The project undertook strategic research to build knowledge, community action to build our partnership, learn more about cultural, local solutions, to build relevant and sustainable outcomes. This approach also improved decision-making in relation to heat preparedness and resilience, particularly in the face of climate change. Working with community meant engaging and sharing knowledges – two-way learning, which encouraged and validated community members to stand by their traditions, law, and local ways. Besides engagement with the Wakuthuni community, the team engaged with organisations across multiple sectors, including non-governmental organisations (i.e. Nintirri, Ashburton Aboriginal Corporation - AAC), Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (i.e. Gumala, IBN, Yinhawangka Aboriginal Corporation - YAC), the WA Country Health Service, and the Ashburton Shire. These organisations have now committed to formal partnerships into the future, as shown in an Australian Research Council - Linkage grant application.



OUR RESEARCH

Yawardani Jan-ga Research and Advocacy Centre



Professor Juli Coffin

Centre Director for Yawardani Jan-ga
Research and Advocacy Centre

“ YJG is more than just a life skills training program. It is a testament to our commitment to culturally secure research and service delivery with strong community engagement ”

The Yawardani Jan-ga (YJG) Centre, within the Ngangk Yira Institute for Change, has developed and delivered an Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) program designed to support the wellbeing of Aboriginal young people across the Kimberley. This innovative approach has been particularly effective because of its cultural appropriateness, flexible delivery, and strong resonance with community, producing significant positive outcomes for participants and their families.

The Yawardani Jan-ga program stands out with its culturally secure EAL approach, a program that is not only owned, developed, and implemented by community members on Country, but also delivered by certified local EAL Aboriginal practitioners. This unique program encourages young people to interact with horses, fostering new insights and transferable skills such as self-awareness, self-regulation, emotional awareness, positive relationships, healthy boundaries, problem-solving, feeling valued and seen and confidence. It specifically caters to the needs of disengaged youth, those facing significant leadership pressure, and those who have experienced trauma, addressing each individual's SEWB areas and supporting engagement in learning and thriving in life.

Yawardani Jan-ga is more than just a life skills training program. It is a testament to our commitment to culturally secure research and service delivery with strong community engagement. We employ a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, ensuring that community groups and individuals within each community are not just involved but are the driving force behind program implementation and evaluation. This unwavering commitment to community engagement is the cornerstone of our culturally secure methodology and the program's sustainability. The research that sits alongside Yawardani Jan-ga demonstrates the need and outcomes of the EAL program.

The Centre's work has attracted substantial philanthropic and government support. Philanthropic investment has come from Mary MacKillop Today, Mineral Resources, and the Channel 7 Telethon Trust, in addition to partnerships with the Kimberley Foundation and Telethon. Government grants, particularly from the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and Healthway have also funded the program.



Yawardani Jan-ga Project Highlights



Derby Site

EAL sessions officially commenced in July 2024, following the successful preparation and clearance of the site. Ongoing efforts are focused on strengthening community engagement and establishing sustainable referral pathways to enhance program participation and effectiveness.

The program has provided Yawardani Jan-ga Equine Assisted Learning (EAL) training. This continuous upskilling and support has been accessed by six FTE local Aboriginal employees (referred to as EAL practitioners) across the Kimberley Region. This has provided important opportunities for the local community and encourages the community engagement and leadership of the project.

Fitzroy Crossing Site

Discussions and consultations are actively ongoing with the Foot Soldiers, reflecting increasing community concerns and recognition of the urgent need for the Yawardani Jan-ga EAL program.

Strong collaborations continue among Nindilingarr Cultural Health Service, Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation, and Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC).

Although KALACC has allocated land for the program, commencement has been delayed due to ongoing issues related to land tenure.



Broome Operations:

Operations in Broome are consolidated, with five full-time staff members on board enabling the program to consistently deliver approximately 30 EAL sessions per week. The program remains committed to analysing outcomes and publishing empirical evidence to support its efficacy and inform continuous improvement and wider disseminations and scaling.

Referrals made to Yawardani Jan-ga EAL services between July 2024 and June 2025

EAL services have supported over 422 Aboriginal children, young people, and community members across its Broome and Derby sites through established referral pathways, structured group sessions, and targeted community engagement activities.

YJG's session-based EAL referrals are divided into two categories:

1. Trauma and Healing focused EAL sessions: Minimum dose of 10 sessions, with one 60-minute session/week.
2. Leadership and capacity-focused EAL sessions. These are typically run over 5-8 weeks and include one 60-90-minute session/week.

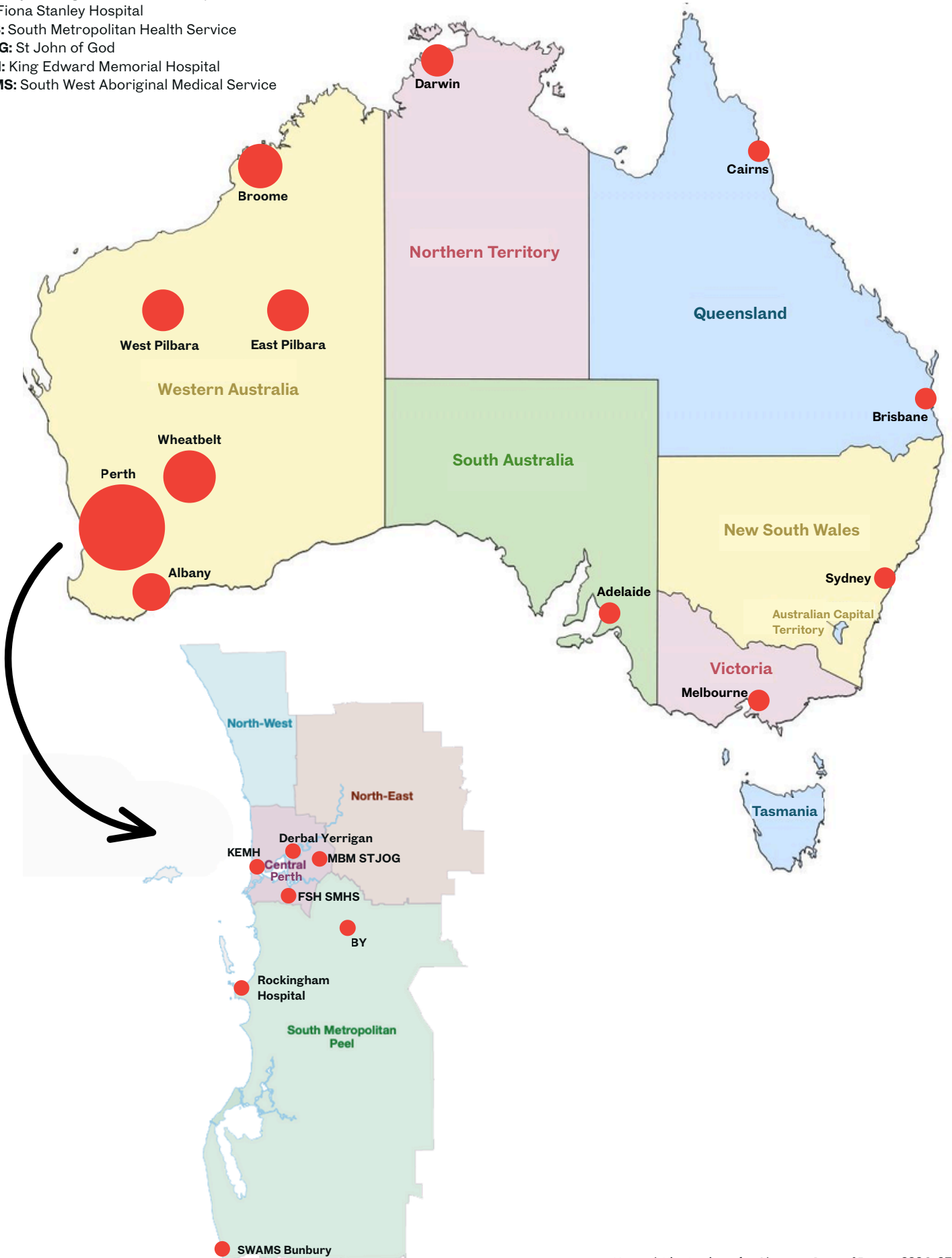
Between July 2024 and June 2025, 144 children and young people aged 6-26 years were referred to Yawardani Jan-ga EAL for one-on-one Trauma and Healing focused EAL services. 78% of all referrals (113 out of 144) were in Broome, and the remaining 22% were from Derby.

The program relocated to a new permanent site in Broome. The set up of the new site is naturally a significant process, impacted by the welfare of the horses and wet season rains. The new site is has been operational in 2025 but with ongoing development that will continue to take place through 2025-2026.

NYIC Collaboration Map

Abbreviations

- MBM:** Moort Boodjari Mia - St John of God
- BY:** Boodjari Yorgas - Armadale Hospital
- FSH:** Fiona Stanley Hospital
- SMHS:** South Metropolitan Health Service
- STJOG:** St John of God
- KEMH:** King Edward Memorial Hospital
- SWAMS:** South West Aboriginal Medical Service



Events

Major Partnership to develop culturally safe healthcare for Aboriginal families

In March 2025, Ngangk Yira Institute for Change at Murdoch University partnered with Minderoo Foundation on a \$3 million program over three years to create a culturally safe health pathway for Aboriginal children and their families in Western Australia.

The major funding from Minderoo will allow Professor Rhonda Marriott and her team at Ngangk Yira to build on more than a decade of research that's already brought about new maternity practices, innovative models of patient engagement and valuable health resources for Aboriginal families.

"This partnership is a testament to our commitment to improving the health outcomes of Aboriginal families," Professor Marriott said. *"It is about continuing to strive for a healthcare system that respects and integrates cultural practices."*

The partnership will expand Ngangk Yira's existing initiatives, such as perinatal assessment tool 'Baby Coming You Ready' and wrap-around maternal health program ICARE, as well as see the development of new Aboriginal health research programs and an expansion of the Ngangk Yira team.

Minderoo Foundation CEO John Hartman said the partnership would ensure the maternal and child health system helped close the equity gap for First Nations children and families.

"Minderoo's vision is for all children in Australia to reach their full potential in thriving communities, and it is vital that First Nations children and their families can access the health system in culturally safe ways," Mr Hartman said. *"This has been an enduring focus of Minderoo since it was founded more than 20 years ago. We deeply appreciate the opportunity to partner with the Ngangk Yira Institute for Change to tackle this important work together."*

The collaboration will involve key stakeholders from across the health system, including the State Government's South Metropolitan Health Service, Aboriginal community representatives and services offering pregnancy and early childhood care in the region.

"This collaboration is a unique opportunity to bring together various stakeholders to create a healthcare system that truly serves the needs of Aboriginal families. It is about working together to make a real difference," Professor Marriott said.



The partnership aims to contribute to Minderoo's Communities outcomes, which include ensuring young children are developmentally on track and experiencing strong wellbeing, empowering families and caregivers to foster their young child's holistic development, and enabling communities to accelerate progress on the things that matter most to them.

Vice Chancellor Professor Andrew Deeks said there was much to be gained from the two organisations working together.

"The outstanding work happening at Ngangk Yira goes to the heart of what we are striving for at Murdoch University – impactful and progressive research that makes a tangible difference to the society we serve," Professor Deeks said.

This new collaboration between Ngangk Yira and Minderoo will allow the Institute to resource new programs of work which focus on culturally appropriate health care for Indigenous young people, their families and caregivers. The grant will support the increased capacity of the Institute's leadership team and program development, including the appointment of several key roles such as a Principal Research Fellow for the BCYR Program, a Senior Research Fellow Systems and Policy, and Senior Research Fellow Evaluation Specialist. Additionally, the grant will fund the development and implementation of two new programs; 'Bubba Here What Now' to support families in the child's first few years of life and 'Maaman Baby Coming You Ready,' which is focused on preparing First Nations men for fatherhood.

There is also renewed focus on impact measurement, evaluation, and learning. This includes the development of evaluation plans for all new projects, setting evaluation frameworks, and identifying evaluation capacity-building opportunities for early and mid-career researchers.

"Our goal is to ensure that our programs are effective and sustainable. By focusing on evaluation and learning, we can continuously improve and adapt our strategies to meet the needs of Aboriginal families," Professor Marriott said.

This ambitious project represents a significant step forward in creating a culturally safe healthcare system for Aboriginal families in Western Australia, ensuring that their health and wellbeing are prioritised and respected.

The Ngangk Yira Institute for Change Symposium

The Ngangk Yira Institute for Change (NYIC) Symposium, held on 15-16 July 2024, was a vibrant and collaborative event that brought together researchers, community members, and partners to celebrate and reflect on the Institute's impactful work. The symposium provided an excellent platform for sharing good practice, showcasing key projects from NYIC's three research centres, and collectively considering research outcomes, community priorities, and the influence of NYIC's work on health services and policy change. Attendees reported that the event was invaluable for expanding their understanding of the breadth and depth of research at Ngangk Yira, and for strengthening connections across the community.



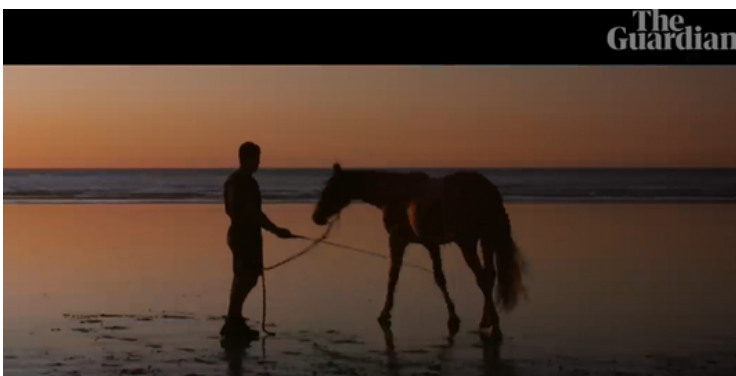
Smoking Ceremony – July 2024

To celebrate the investment in and completion of the newly renovated NYIC offices, a traditional Smoking Ceremony and Welcome to Country were held on 24 July 2024 in the new Yarning Circle at Ngangk Yira. Led by respected Whadjuk Noongar Elder Aunty Marie Taylor and Principal Research Fellow Rohan Collard. The ceremony brought together staff, community members, and special guests including Vice Chancellor Andrew Deeks.

The smoking ceremony, one of the oldest living cultural practices in the world, was performed to cleanse the new space, acknowledge Country, and mark a new chapter for the Institute. This significant event reflected NYIC's ongoing commitment to honouring Aboriginal culture and fostering a culturally safe and welcoming environment for all.



The Guardian Documentary – YJG, April 2024



In June 2024, the Yawardani Jan-ga program was featured in a powerful short documentary produced by The Guardian, which was screened at Sun Pictures in Broome. The film highlights Professor Juli Coffin's innovative equine-assisted learning program, which uses the healing power of horses to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal young people in the Kimberley. Through culturally secure, country-based sessions, the program fosters hope, resilience, and connection, offering a strengths-based approach to healing childhood trauma.

The documentary draws you into the deep meaning of the project in a way that words can't.

Yarning Circle on Maaman Involvement in Antenatal Care – Dec 2024

In December 2024, the Yorga Maaman Koolanga Research and Advocacy Centre (Murdoch University) and the Indigenous Health Research Program (Curtin University) hosted an important yarning circle focusing on the critical role of Aboriginal fathers' involvement in antenatal care.

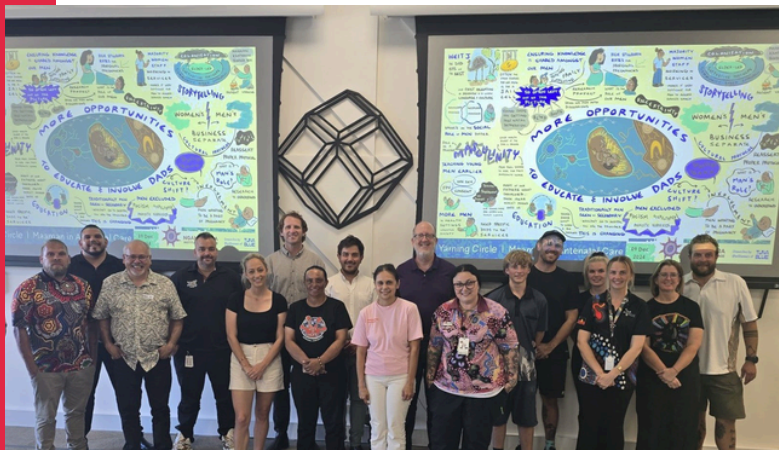
This event is part of our ongoing consultation on our project "Understanding Aboriginal Men's Involvement in Antenatal Care for Stillbirth Prevention", funded by the Women and Infant Research Foundation and led by Bernardo Dewey, Rohan Collard, Carolyn M. Lewis, Christine Parry, Danielle Pollock, Rhonda Marriott AM, and Carrington Shepherd.

In this initial yarn, we had the opportunity to engage with Aboriginal leading researchers, healthcare practitioners from south, east, and north metro areas, and community representatives currently doing important work with Maaman. We had a rich discussion on community views around Maaman involvement in pregnancy, as well as existing opportunities, challenges, and key research priorities.



At the start of 2025, Professor Roz Walker, a co-editor of the milestone book 'Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice' participated in several webinars and a video to celebrate the significant impact of the book over the past decade. The video was created by the School of Indigenous Studies Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing to hear reflections from the editors, Professors Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy and Roz Walker, and a small handful of inspirational authors and readers regarding the book's transformative impact, and how Aboriginal mental health practices have evolved over the past 10 years.

One of the highlights of the celebration was a webinar presented by Professors Rhonda Marriott, Dawn Bessarab and Roz Walker. Over 300 students, social workers, health professionals and a range of stakeholders enrolled in the webinar which generated extensive and interactive discussions regarding the importance of an interdisciplinary approach in working with Aboriginal people with mental health and wellbeing issues.



Replanting the Birthing Trees Resource hub launch

In May 2025, we proudly gathered on Noongar Country at NYIC, in collaboration with the University of Melbourne, to launch the Replanting the Birthing Trees Resource Hub in Western Australia. The hub combines resources for Aboriginal perinatal care that both community and service providers can utilise.

This special event brought together the Aboriginal community members, health professionals, managers, and executives from various health services in Perth.





Awards



Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue Leadership Award

Professor Rhonda Marriott received the inaugural Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue Leadership Award at the CATSINaM Awards held in Fremantle in Oct 2024. This prestigious award recognises exceptional leadership, advancing system changes within the health service and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Professor Marriott was recognised for her contributions to nursing and midwifery and her dedication, innovation and excellence in the community.

Professor Juli Coffin was awarded the 2024 Australian Mental Health Prize by the University of New South Wales, celebrating the significant impact of her leadership and dedication to improving the mental health of Aboriginal youth, at a community and national level.

Professor Juli Coffin has also had the honour of being awarded the Churchill Fellow Award. This not only recognises the positive impact the work at YJG is having on Australian society, it will also support the opportunity for Juli and her team to expand their research globally, to investigate and validate an Aboriginality designed, culturally secure, Equine Assisted Learning program.

In addition to these awards, in March 2025, Professor Coffin was inducted into the WA Women's Hall of Fame. Professor Coffin has been recognised for being the first Aboriginal water polo player to represent Australia nationally and for being the founder of world-first wellbeing program, Yawardani Jan-ga.



Employee Engagement Survey

The 2024 Employee Engagement Survey provided valuable insights into the experiences, motivations, and perspectives of staff at the Ngangk Yira Institute for Change. Conducted as part of our ongoing commitment to fostering a positive and inclusive workplace, the survey measured key aspects of engagement, workplace culture, and organisational wellbeing. By benchmarking our results against both the wider university and the higher education sector, we have identified our strengths and opportunities for growth. The findings from this survey will inform our priorities and actions in the year ahead, ensuring that Ngangk Yira continues to be a place where staff feel valued, supported, and empowered to make a meaningful impact.

Key Strengths

Staff reported exceptionally high levels of pride in their work and a strong sense of purpose, with 100% of respondents recognising the importance of their contributions and valuing the diversity fostered at Murdoch University. Leadership communication was identified as a particular strength, with significant improvements compared to sector benchmarks. Employees also expressed confidence that their feedback would lead to meaningful action, and reported high levels of energy and motivation to overcome challenges. These results reflect a positive and inclusive workplace culture, underpinned by strong leadership and a shared commitment to the Institute's goals.

OFFICIAL Strengths

| Highest 3 Scores | | Highest 3 Scores vs. Benchmark | |
|---|-------------|--|----------------|
| Murdoch University values diversity | 100% | When it is clear that someone is not delivering in their role we do something about it | +40 72% |
| The work that we do at Murdoch University is important | 100% | The leaders at Murdoch University have communicated a vision that motivates me | +27 78% |
| I usually have enough energy to overcome challenges at work | 94% | I believe action will take place as a result of this survey | +22 67% |

Opportunities for Improvement

The 2024 Employee Engagement Survey also identified several important opportunities for improvement at NYIC. Notably, 39% of staff reported rarely feeling overstressed by their work, highlighting the need to address workload and wellbeing. Areas such as resource allocation towards university goals and the fair division of administrative tasks received lower scores, indicating a need for clearer processes and support. The survey also revealed that a sense of belonging and collaboration across departments could be strengthened, with both areas scoring below sector benchmarks. Addressing these opportunities will be essential to fostering a more supportive, equitable, and connected workplace environment.

Next steps

The Senior Leadership Team have collaborated with our PCO partners to share this information with our staff team. Three focus areas have been identified, being leadership, communication and collaboration, and staff wellbeing. Staff are being consulted in the next steps process to ensure their voices are heard on the pathway to improving these areas and developing an action plan.

Publications

Researchers across the institute have published a diverse and impactful body of work, reflecting our commitment to advancing knowledge and practice across health, wellbeing, Indigenous research, and social justice. This publications list showcases collaborative efforts spanning peer-reviewed journal articles, systematic reviews, protocols and chapters, with a strong emphasis on community engagement, culturally secure methodologies, and translational impact. Our work continues to address pressing challenges in child and family health, Indigenous sovereignty, climate justice, and health technology, demonstrating leadership and innovation in partnership with communities and stakeholders. The following section highlights these achievements, underscoring our dedication to evidence-informed practice and meaningful change.

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