THE COMMUNICATE STUDY PARTNERSHIP NEWSLETTER

March 2026

Dear colleagues, collaborators and friends,

Welcome to 2026! It has already been a productive start to the year for the Communicate Study Partnership, with our team continuing activities aiming to strengthen collaboration across research, training, and health system partnerships in the Northern Territory.

Our training and workforce development activities have continued to grow. Earlier this year, we delivered a six-week Intercultural Communication Training program at Royal Darwin Hospital, providing healthcare staff with an opportunity to reflect on communication practices, interpreter use, and culturally safe care. We are continuing to work with NT Health to expand access to this training through a MyLearning booking portal so that more clinicians across the Territory can participate. Building on this momentum, additional training sessions are already being planned with a range of clinical teams.

Recently, members of the team shared their work nationally, including presenting at the Australian & Aotearoa New Zealand Communication Association (AANZCA) Conference where the panel explored how Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu researchers can work together by respecting gurrutu—the Yolŋu system of relationships that guides trust, responsibility, and ethical collaboration.



The Communicate Study Partnership Staff

Our research and knowledge-sharing activities continue to grow.

- The Communicate Team recently presented at the Menzies Monthly Seminar Series, about methods for collecting and analysing stories about cultural safety in the workplace for First Nations staff.
- Christopher Davis delivered sessions on Culturally Safe Intercultural Communication to CDU medical students and visiting healthcare professionals from Timor-Leste.
- We are also pleased to share a new publication exploring language as a pillar of cultural safety in East Arnhem Land.
- Our team members have started production of new episodes of the award-winning Ask the Specialist podcast, focusing on Central Australia and featuring First Nations leaders providing practical guidance for clinicians.
- In parallel, we continue collaborating with NT Health governance groups to share emerging insights on interpreter use, language documentation, and communication practices across hospitals.

We are delighted to welcome new team members: Christopher Davis as First Nations Research Officer, Dr Arvie Rodriguez Abiero as Project Manager, and Rebecca Lillico as Project Officer at Alice Springs Hospital, bringing valuable experience to support Communicate Study activities. We also celebrate Dr Harshana Mungasinghe's completion of her PhD. And finally, a very big thank you to Nicole Nobbs for her contributions as she transitions to a new role with NT Health.

Thank you to everyone contributing to this work.

Warm regards,
Professor Anna Ralph
Program Lead, Communicate Study Partnership

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HREC 22-4297

Turning the Tides: Communicate Study Partnership at Australian & Aotearoa New Zealand Communication Association Conference (AANZCA) 2025

From 26–28 November 2025, the Communicate Study Partnership proudly participated in the AANZCA 2025 conference at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Queensland. The conference theme, "Turning the Tides," invited reflection on contemporary challenges and opportunities in communication scholarship. The program featured keynote speakers, including Professor Crystal Abidin and Professor Karin Wahl-Jorgensen, sparking conversations across diverse fields.

Our team — Rarrtjiwuy Melanie Herdman (Djalkiri Foundation), Brenda Muthamuluwuy (First Nations Sovereignty and Diplomacy Centre, Charles Darwin University), Emily Armstrong (Molly Wardaguga Institute for First Nations Birth Rights, CDU), and Vicki Kerrigan (Swinburne University of Technology, Honorary at Menzies School of Health Research) — presented a 1.5-hour panel titled "Yolŋu and non-Yolŋu working together to build understanding by respecting gurrutu."



Panel at AANZCA 2025 (L-R): Vicki Kerrigan, Rarrtjiwuy Melanie Herdman, Emily Armstrong, Brenda 'Mutha' Muthamuluwuy



(L-R): Emily Armstrong, Brenda 'Mutha' Muthamuluwuy, Rarrtjiwuy Melanie Herdman and Vicki Kerrigan

The panelists Rarrtjiwuy and Brenda discussed how the Yolŋu concept of gurrutu which is the foundation of relationships, respect, and ethical collaboration guides our research practices. Panelists shared examples from projects across health, education, community management, early childhood, and university teaching, including the Communicate Study and Djäkamirr (Yolŋu Doulas) project.

As Rarrtjiwuy and Brenda explained, gurrutu underpins trust in all interactions: "If you don't have gurrutu, then we don't trust you." The panel highlighted how respecting these relational frameworks requires researchers to challenge assumptions, decolonise systems, and prioritise culturally safe and ethical collaboration.

Attending AANZCA offered more than a platform to present our work, it was a space for dialogue and reflection. Engaging with researchers, journalists, social media specialists, PhD students, and AI analysts from across Australia and Southeast Asia helped our team consider how intercultural communication and strong collaborative relationships can resonate beyond North East Arnhem Land.

As Mutha reflected, **"The exciting part was presenting as a team and sharing our approach with such a diverse audience. It was also a chance to strengthen our own relationships and prompt deeper thinking within our team."**

We look forward to continuing this collaboration, and sharing our insights on culturally safe and relational research practices more broadly.

The panel was supported by the Communicate Study at Menzies School of Health Research, CDU First Nations Sovereignty and Diplomacy Centre, and Swinburne University of Technology.

Culturally Safe Workplaces for First Nations Staff – Alice Springs Workshop 2025

On 3rd of December 2025, the Communicate Study hosted a Culturally Safe Workplaces workshop in Alice Springs for First Nations interpreters, Aboriginal Liaison Officers, and health professionals. Facilitated by Daniel Fejo, Leisa McCarthy, and Donna Lemon, the session provided a supportive space for participants to share their experiences working within mainstream institutions. Participants discussed the challenges of balancing workplace expectations with cultural responsibilities and highlighted key issues around recognition, respect, and building culturally safe systems. The afternoon also included a narrative therapy session, offering tailored wellbeing support for attendees. We extend our sincere thanks to the generous collaboration of NT Health and Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) staff in Alice Springs for their critical role in coordinating and contributing to this workshop.

We are now finalising a report for NT Health and other stakeholders, to share insights from both the Darwin and Alice Springs workshops. As part of the analysis of the workshops, we are: 1.) Describing workshop methods 2.) Outlining our analysis approach 3.) Presenting key findings from the workshops 4.) Developing practical recommendations

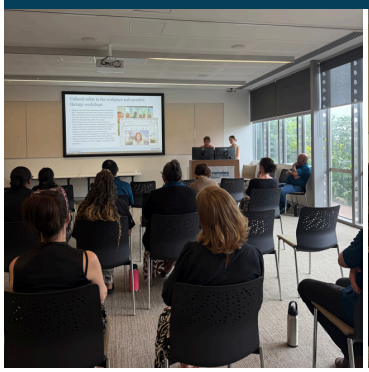
We hope to submit a publication from this work, so watch this space for updates on our research into culturally safe workplaces for First Nations professionals working across NT Health.

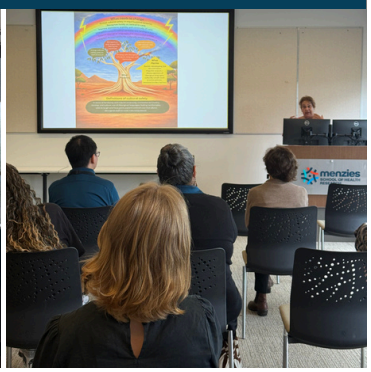
Communicate Team Presents at EMCR Monthly Seminar Series

Members of the Communicate Study Partnership presented at the EMCR (Early and Mid-Career Researcher) Monthly Seminar Series hosted by Menzies School of Health Research on 12th of March 2026. In this session, Aunty Amanda (Mandy) Ahmat, Christopher Davis, and Dr. Beatriz Cardona shared the Team's work titled "Methodological considerations in the design, collection and analysis of stories and experiences of Cultural Safety of First Nations interpreters and health professionals." The seminar was attended by around 40 participants, both in person and online.



The Communicate Team Amanda (Mandy) Ahmat, Christopher Davis, and Dr Beatriz Cardona presenting on the design, collection, and analysis of narratives and lived experiences relating to cultural safety among First Nations interpreters and health professionals.





The seminar explored key methodological approaches to collecting and analysing stories and lived experiences related to cultural safety in healthcare. The presenters discussed the importance of culturally appropriate and ethical research practices when engaging with First Nations interpreters and health professionals, and how narrative-based approaches can help deepen understanding of communication and cultural safety within health systems. The presentation sparked thoughtful discussion among attendees in the room and online, highlighting the value of collaborative and culturally grounded research approaches. This seminar forms part of the EMCR Monthly Seminar Series, which provides a platform for researchers to share emerging work, exchange ideas, and strengthen collaboration across the research community.

Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH) Intercultural Communication Training Updates: Learning, Reflecting, Growing

We recently concluded our six-week Intercultural Communication Training at Royal Darwin Hospital (RDH), held every Monday from 8:30–9:30 AM between 12th of January and 23rd of February 2026. The training was delivered by our Senior Educator and Training Facilitator, Mario Faggion, together with First Nations Research Officer, Christopher Davis. This intensive course covered key topics including:

- Getting to know your patient
- Communicating with your patient
- Working with interpreters and patients
- Patient-centred care
- Informed consent
- Recognising and addressing racism

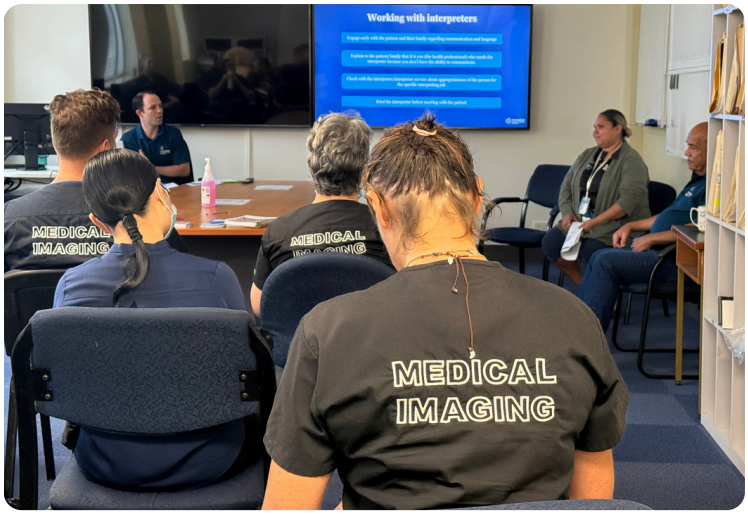


Mario Faggion and Christopher Davis delivering the training.

The training provided a space for open dialogue about biases, self-reflection, and personal growth, allowing participants to explore how their behaviours impact patient care and how they can continue to improve in their everyday practice.

Participant feedback from post-training surveys highlighted the value of the sessions:
"Make it Mandatory."
"Mario and Christopher were very engaging and kept the conversation going."
"Yes, I would recommend to anyone wanting to improve their practice and connect with their patients."
Participants also suggested:
"Longer sessions to really get into the discussions and sharing of experiences and learning, and discuss ways to overcome problems and improve skills in their space."





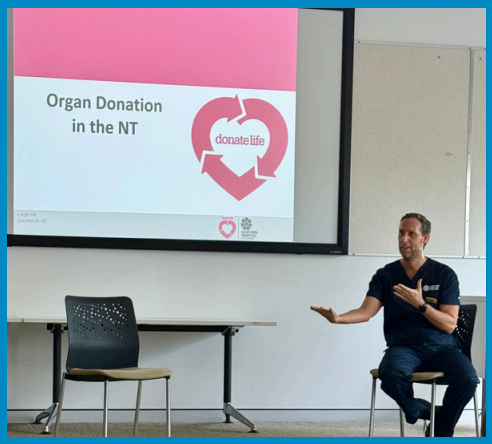
As this work continues to grow, additional training sessions are being planned with a variety of clinical teams, including Allied Health (Speech Pathology), Obstetrics and Gynaecology, Oral Health, Infectious Diseases and Endocrinology, Interns and Resident Medical Officers (RMOs), and Primary Healthcare teams including nurses and doctors working in remote community clinics, so definitely watch out this space!

Through our partnership with Clinical Learning Education & Research Service (CLEaRS) at NT Health, we are now in the final stages of launching a MyLearning booking portal for future Intercultural Communication Training sessions. In addition, Mario Faggion and Anna Ralph presented the training program at the NT Health Educators Network Meeting on 17th of February 2026. We are excited for the platform to be available by mid-2026, making it easier for healthcare professionals across the NT to access this essential training and continue building culturally safe practices.

Health Education Session: Strengthening Communication in Organ Donation Conversations

On Wednesday 11th of March 2026, from 1:00pm–3:30pm, a health education session was held in the Menzies Seminar Room, bringing together interpreters and DonateLife staff for a practical and culturally responsive learning experience focused on conversations about organ donation and transplantation. These sessions are designed as a two-way learning space where interpreters and health professionals can share knowledge, build understanding, and strengthen collaboration in clinical communication.

The session began with a review of organ donation and transplant processes, helping to build shared understanding before moving into interactive role-plays centred on the consent process. These conversations often take place at deeply emotional times for families, and the session focused on ensuring they are approached with clarity, compassion, and cultural respect particularly when working with First Nations families. The session supported professional development of interpreters by providing opportunities to practise interpreting in complex health contexts. Through role-play and discussion, interpreters were able to build confidence in navigating sensitive clinical conversations while working alongside healthcare staff. In addition, interpreters had the opportunity to provide feedback to DonateLife practitioners to help strengthen their communication approaches and skills when engaging with First Nations families.





Leigh Hill delivering a session on organ donation together with Aboriginal Interpreter Services and RDPH-based interpreters.

Please email: Leigh.Hill@nt.gov.au or mario.faggion@menzies.edu.au if you are a clinician or medical professional interested in facilitating a health education session with interpreters.

Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) – Expressions of Interest

An Indigenous Reference Group (IRG) meeting for the Communicate Study Partnership will be held in May or June 2026, and we are inviting expressions of interest from those who would like to join.

The IRG provides high-level cultural advice and guidance to support the study's vision: ensuring more First Nations patients receive culturally safe healthcare and improved health outcomes. The partnership includes Menzies School of Health Research, NT Health, NT AIS, NAATI, Swinburne University of Technology, and First Nations leaders, health professionals and educators across the NT.

Role of IRG members includes:

- Providing advice on cultural safety and Indigenous health research
- Contributing to research design, implementation and evaluation
- Advising on community impact and culturally safe practice
- Supporting knowledge sharing with Indigenous communities
- Strengthening First Nations workforce capacity
- Contributing to development of health communication resources

If you would like to become a member of the IRG, please email: christopher.davis@menzies.edu.au

Upcoming Ask the Specialist Podcast Episodes: Central Australia (In Development)

We are thrilled to announce that new episodes of the multi-award-winning podcast, Ask the Specialist, are in development, this time with a focus on Central Australia.

Responding to strong interest from healthcare professionals in the region, these episodes will feature First Nations leaders sharing their lived experiences, insights, and practical guidance for providing culturally safe and respectful care. Produced through the Communicate Study Partnership, in collaboration with Purple House and 8CCC Community Radio, recording began in early February 2026. Aboriginal leaders responded to anonymous questions from healthcare workers, offering real-world advice on building trust, understanding, and effective communication with Aboriginal patients and communities.



(L-R): Will Tinapple, Donna Lemon, Katie Merriman, Isobel Major

Ask the Specialist



Ken Lechleitner, Mario Faggion, Will Tinapple



Isobel Major with podcast co-host Donna Lemon

These episodes are not just informative, they are an opportunity to shape the future of the Northern Territory, informing training, resources, and strategies that strengthen intercultural communication across healthcare services. They are designed to support clinicians and health teams in delivering culturally safe, patient-centered care, while embedding the voices of First Nations communities at the heart of practice. More recordings are planned to complete production of the episodes. In the meantime, catch up on existing episodes via Spotify or Apple Podcasts.

Evaluating the Plain English Health Dictionary

We are pleased to share that Madelyn Hay, Research Assistant of the Communicate Study Partnership, has recently completed an evaluation report on the Plain English Health Dictionary for the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS). This work represents an important step in understanding how the resource supports clearer communication between healthcare providers, interpreters, and patients. The report reflects the valuable contributions of many people. In particular, we would like to acknowledge the significant input from Aunty Amanda (Mandy) Ahmat, as well as Vicki Kerrigan, Anna Ralph, and Anne Lowell, whose insights and support have been instrumental throughout the process. Their contributions have helped ensure the evaluation reflects the needs and experiences of those working closely with communities and interpreters.

This work is part of our broader commitment to improving communication in healthcare and supporting tools that help make health information clearer, more accessible, and more meaningful for patients and communities.

We hope to submit a publication from this work, so watch this space for updates!

Sharing Knowledge: Culturally Safe Intercultural Communication in the NT

Our First Nations Research Officer, Christopher Davis, recently delivered two sessions on Culturally Safe Intercultural Communication in the Northern Territory as part of the Communicate Study Partnership's commitment to sharing evidence-based knowledge with partners and learners.

On 27th of February 2026, Christopher presented to 40+ first-year medical students during an Introduction to Clinical Medicine (ICM) session at the Charles Darwin University medical program. As CDU's first-ever medical program, it is exciting to contribute to teaching the next generation of doctors about culturally safe communication and the broader social and cultural factors shaping healthcare in the Top End. The students were highly engaged and actively participated in discussions.

On 6th of March 2026, Christopher also delivered a session for five healthcare professionals and administrators from Timor-Leste visiting the Northern Territory for ICU and ED clinical observation rounds. The group shared that many of the issues discussed were similar to those in their own country and expressed interest in applying these learnings to their work back home.



Christopher Davis together with the visiting healthcare professionals from Timor-Leste



Christopher Davis delivering a talk to CDU medical students

These sessions highlight our ongoing commitment to knowledge sharing and research translation, ensuring that our work supports culturally safe healthcare practice.

Continuing Our Work with NT Health Safety and Quality Committees

As part of our ongoing efforts to strengthen culturally safe communication across the health system, the Communicate Study Team continues to engage with NT Health governance groups to share emerging insights and data. On 5th of March 2026, Anna Ralph, the Program Lead of the Communicate Study Team, presented recent findings to the NT Health National Safety and Quality Committees in relation to Standard 6: Communicating for Safety. This presentation forms part of our continuing collaboration with these committees, as we regularly share updates and contribute to discussions about improving communication practices across NT Health.

These presentations provide an important opportunity to reflect on how communication practices are currently working across the system and where improvements can be made. By sharing data and experiences with NT Health leaders and quality committees, the Communicate Study Team is helping to spark conversations around practical strategies to strengthen cultural safety, support clinicians in their communication with patients, and ensure interpreter services are used effectively. Through this continued engagement, we aim to support ongoing quality improvement initiatives and contribute to building a healthcare environment where communication is clear, respectful, and responsive to the needs of First Nations patients. Regularly presenting our findings also helps expand awareness of the Communicate Study's work within NT Health and strengthens collaboration with teams committed to improving patient care across the NT.

New Publication: Language as a Pillar of Cultural Safety



We are pleased to share the publication of a new research article, "Language as a pillar of cultural safety: evaluating hospital-based healthcare workers' knowledge of First Nations languages and interpreter services in East Arnhem Land, Australia," published in BMC Health Services Research.

This study explored how well hospital staff understand the First Nations languages spoken by patients in East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory, and how often professional interpreters are used in healthcare settings. The research was conducted at Gove District Hospital, which provides care for many remote communities across the region.

East Arnhem Land is one of the most linguistically diverse regions in Australia. Around 91% of First Nations patients speak an ancestral language as their first language, rather than English. The most widely spoken language group is Yolŋu Matha, although other languages such as Anindilyakwa and Burarra are also spoken. This means that many patients are receiving healthcare in a language that is not their first language, which can make communication more challenging.

To better understand these challenges, researchers surveyed doctors, nurses, and allied health professionals about their knowledge of local languages and their experience using interpreter services. While many staff recognised that multiple First Nations languages are spoken in the region, the study found important gaps in language awareness and communication support.
Key findings from the study include:

- Some healthcare workers were unsure about the correct names, pronunciation, or dialects of local languages.
- Not all staff knew how to access or arrange professional interpreter services.
- Interpreter services were not always used consistently, even when staff recognised their value.
- In some situations, clinicians relied on informal communication, such as asking family members or Aboriginal Liaison Officers to interpret.

While these informal approaches may help in urgent situations, they can also lead to misunderstandings, privacy concerns, and incomplete communication about diagnoses or treatment options.

The study highlights that language is a key foundation of culturally safe healthcare. Recognising and respecting a patient's first language can help build trust, improve understanding, and support better health outcomes.

The authors recommend improving language documentation in medical records, increasing access to trained interpreters, and providing healthcare workers with more training in intercultural communication and local language awareness to support more culturally safe care.



Read the full article: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-025-13837-9

Staff News – Welcome and Congratulations!

We are thrilled to welcome Christopher Davis, Dr Arvie Rodriguez Abiero, and Rebecca Lillico to the Communicate Study Partnership team!



Christopher Davis joins us as First Nations Research Officer. His mob are Kubirriwarra clan within the Kuku Yalanji nation from Cape York Peninsula. Christopher holds formal qualifications in Health Science and is nearing submission of his PhD. He brings extensive experience as a team leader, researcher, and lecturer in health and community development. As Research Officer, Christopher will collaborate with stakeholders to support the implementation of culturally safe research activities, including qualitative data collection and analysis, and ensure that study procedures reflect First Nations perspectives.



Dr Arvie Rodriguez Abiero joins as Project Manager. Born and raised in the Philippines, Arvie holds a PhD in Neuroscience and has managed complex, multi-site research projects across institutions in Australia, South Korea, and the Philippines with a strong focus on mental health and neuroscience. Arvie has published 18 peer-reviewed articles and received multiple international awards. A long-standing advocate for equity, diversity, inclusion, and mental health awareness, he has promoted inclusive research practices, mentored students from culturally diverse backgrounds, and delivered community-focused science communication talks in multiple languages. His commitment to equitable health systems, cultural safety, and community-engaged research strongly aligns with the mission of the Communicate Study Partnership.



Rebecca Lillico joins us as Project Officer at Alice Springs Hospital. She has lived and worked in Alice Springs for most of her life, with firsthand experience of local culture, language, and traditions. Over the past two years, she worked at Menzies Remote Health and Climate Change Centre (RHC3) in Mparntwe, supporting qualitative and quantitative projects that are operationally sound and culturally respectful. With over 20 years' experience in events management, finance, and strategic business management, she is also completing a Project Management degree at Curtin University. Rebecca is passionate about supporting community-led research that benefits people and Country she calls home.

Celebrating Milestones and Farewells

We are thrilled to celebrate with Dr Harshana Mungasinghe, who recently successfully defended her PhD thesis. Harshana completed her PhD in Medical Statistics, jointly undertaken at the University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka, and University College London (UCL), UK. This is an outstanding achievement and a testament to her dedication, perseverance, and hard work. Congratulations on reaching this major milestone. We are incredibly proud of you!





We also say farewell and best wishes to Nicole Nobbs, who after more than a year with the Communicate Study Partnership, has taken up a new role with NT Health in Darwin. As Project Officer at Gove District Hospital, Nicole played a pivotal role in delivering training and supporting key initiatives. She brought wonderful resourcefulness, enthusiasm and deep understanding to the role. We are deeply grateful for her contributions, commitment, and the positive impact she has had on our team. We wish her every success in this exciting next chapter of her career.

Publications

Language as a pillar of cultural safety: evaluating hospital-based healthcare workers' knowledge of First Nations languages and interpreter services in East Arnhem Land, Australia | BMC Health Services Research | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-025-13837-9

"If They Help Us, We Can Help Them": First Nations Peoples Identify Intercultural Health Communication Problems and Solutions in Hospital in Northern Australia | Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1007/s40615-024-02160-4

Defining narrative change: a case study of the decolonising podcast Ask the Specialist: Larrakia, Tiwi and Yolŋu stories to inspire better healthcare | Media Practice and Education | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/25741136.2024.2341526

Evaluating the impact of 'Ask the Specialist Plus': a training program for improving cultural safety and communication in hospital-based healthcare | BMC Health Services Research | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-024-10565-4

Improving outcomes for hospitalised First Nations peoples though greater cultural safety and better communication: the Communicate Study Partnership study protocol | Implementation Science | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s13012-023-01276-1

Does improved interpreter uptake reduce self-discharge rates in hospitalized patients? A successful hospital intervention explained | PLOS One | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0257825

"The talking bit of medicine, that's the most important bit": doctors and Aboriginal interpreters collaborate to transform culturally competent hospital care | International Journal for Equity in Health | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-021-01507-1

From "stuck" to satisfied: Aboriginal people's experience of culturally safe care with interpreters in a Northern Territory hospital | BMC Health Services Research | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-021-06564-4

Aboriginal patient and interpreter perspectives on the delivery of culturally safe hospital-based care | Hospital Promotion Journal of Australia | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.415

Improving communication with Aboriginal hospital inpatients: a quasi-experimental interventional study | The Medical Journal of Australia | DOI: https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.50700

"How can I do more?" Cultural awareness training for hospital-based healthcare providers working with high Aboriginal caseload | BMC Medical Education | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02086-5

Low uptake of Aboriginal interpreters in healthcare: exploration of current use in Australia's Northern Territory | BMC Health Services Research | DOI: https://doi.org/10.1186/s12913-017-2689-y

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