

**EVALUATION OF THE  
NSW HEALTH EDUCATION  
CENTRE AGAINST VIOLENCE,  
ABORIGINAL QUALIFICATIONS**  
**Summary of findings**





## BACKGROUND

**Aboriginal people experience higher rates of domestic and family violence, sexual assault and child abuse than non-Aboriginal people.**<sup>1</sup> These high rates of violence among Aboriginal people must be seen within the context of colonisation, systemic disadvantage, racism, oppression and marginalisation and the intergenerational trauma that these factors have contributed to.<sup>2</sup> This violence has a devastating effect on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities and is made worse for survivors because it is difficult to access

culturally appropriate support services. The strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people and communities has driven culturally appropriate responses to addressing this problem.

**The NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV)** is a state-wide unit that trains the NSW health workforce to prevent and respond to violence, abuse and neglect. ECAV has a specific focus on Aboriginal, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) (2018) *Family, sexual and domestic violence in Australia, 2018*. Cat. no. FDV 2. Canberra: AIHW.

<sup>2</sup> Oberin J (2001). Domestic and family violence: the latest research. In: Out of the fire-domestic violence and homelessness. Parity 2001 supplement 14(2): 25-27 cited in AIHW: Al-Yaman F, Van Doeland M & Wallis M (2006). Family violence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Cat. no. IHW 17. Canberra: AIHW.

## ABOUT THE ABORIGINAL QUALIFICATION PATHWAY

ECAV's Aboriginal Qualification Pathway provides training for Aboriginal people working in the areas of family violence, sexual assault and child protection. It consists of three courses:



Participants must complete the courses in order, but there is no requirement to complete the full Pathway. The courses are delivered through face-to-face blocks in Sydney, self-directed learning and clinical supervision. They are delivered by a combination of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators.

## WHAT WAS DONE IN THE EVALUATION?

The Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate were evaluated from 2017 to 2019. The full Pathway was also considered in the evaluation. The Certificate IV had previously been evaluated in 2010.

### The aims of the evaluation were to:

- examine whether the courses are meeting their objectives
- identify factors that helped or hindered implementation
- describe the number and characteristics of people doing the courses
- assess achievements
- identify ways to improve the training
- describe the costs of implementation.

### The evaluation included:

- a review of documents associated with the courses
- analysis of course participation and financial data
- stakeholder interviews with past course participants, workplace managers, educators, lecturers and clinical supervisors, and Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group (ACMAG) members.

<sup>3</sup>This course was previously referred to as *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health (Family Violence, Sexual Assault & Child Protection [91314NSW])*.

## WHO WAS INVOLVED?

The Ministry of Health engaged Inca Consulting to conduct the evaluation.

Interviews were conducted across three local health districts (LHDs): Hunter New England; Western NSW; and Western Sydney. Ethics approval was obtained from the Hunter New England Local Health District Human Research Ethics Committee and the Aboriginal

Health and Medical Research Council Ethics Committee, and site-specific approval was obtained from each LHD.

**The evaluation was overseen by the ECAV Aboriginal Qualifications Advisory Group, which had representation from the Ministry of Health, Nepean Blue Mountains LHD, Sydney Children's Hospital Network, ECAV and ACMAG.**

## WHAT DID THE EVALUATION FIND?

### WHAT'S WORKING

The evaluation found that **both courses are meeting their objectives to build the skills and capacity of the Aboriginal Family Health workforce in dealing with family violence, sexual assault and child protection.**

Across the full Pathway (including the Certificate IV) there was a graduation rate of 66%. The graduation rate for the Advanced Diploma was 76% and for the Graduate Certificate was 86% (see Table 1). These rates are much higher than the completion rate for Aboriginal university students, which is around 40% nationally.<sup>4</sup>

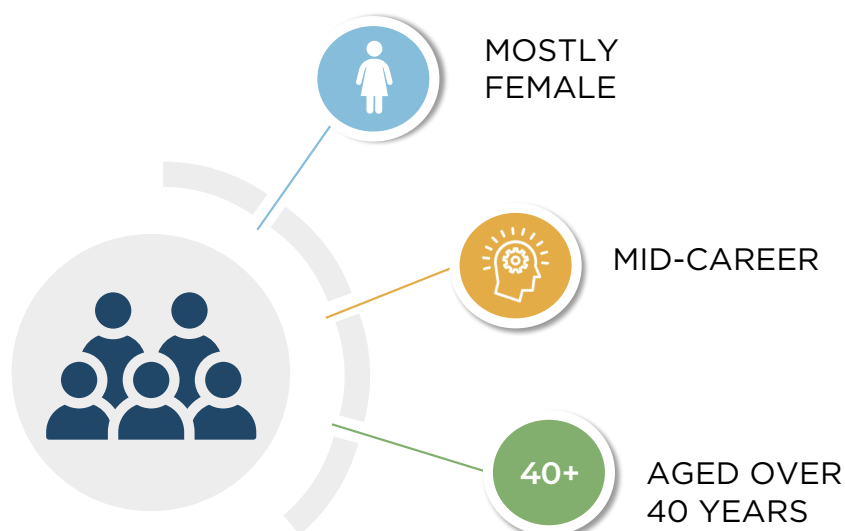
**Table 1: Participation and Graduation Rates for the Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate**

	Graduated	Statement of Attainment	Did not complete	Total enrolments
Advanced Diploma (Count (%))*	52 (76)	14 (20)	3 (4)	69 (100)
Graduate Certificate (Count (%))**	25 (86)	0 (0)	4 (14)	29 (100)

\* Over seven years from 2011 to 2017.

\*\* Over four years from 2013 to 2017 (excluding 2014 when the course was being reviewed).

The **characteristics of the participants** in both courses reflect the characteristics of the Aboriginal Family Health workforce:



<sup>4</sup> Behrendt L, Larkin S, Griew R and Kelly P. (2012) Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Final Report. Panel of the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. Australian Government, Canberra, pp 7-8.





## Course content and structure

Course participants said that the strengths of the courses included:

- they provided a culturally safe learning environment that recognised people's past trauma, vulnerability and negative experiences in education
- flexible delivery
- high level of support provided by ECAV.

Stakeholders praised the evidence-based and trauma-informed approach of the courses and that they incorporate Aboriginal world views and ways of learning. They also felt that the strengths included:

- a strong connection to Aboriginal communities
- that Aboriginal people were involved in designing and delivering the training
- that the courses provide students with a pathway to university education.

*"I never thought I'd go to University. With this pathway, it just took me there."*  
(Graduate Certificate Graduate)

*"The whole course was delivered in a culturally appropriate way. All or most of the participants would have had a lived experience of domestic violence or child protection and they made us feel really safe."*

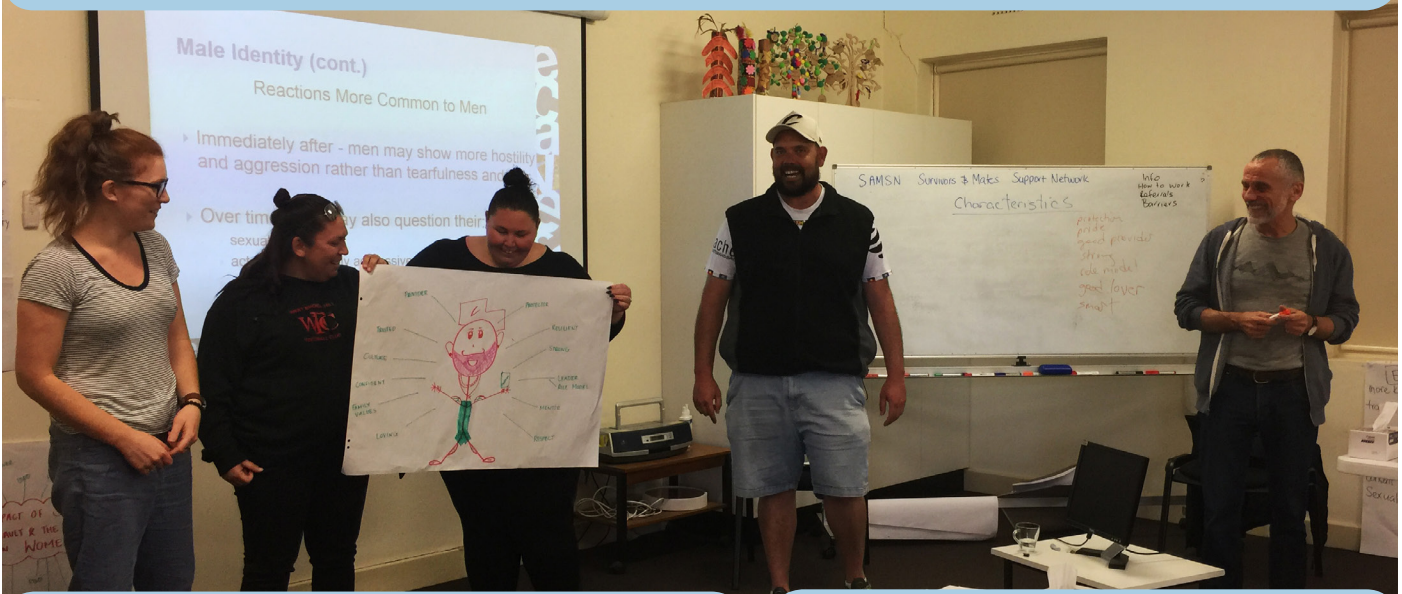
(Advanced Diploma Graduate)

*"They deliver the structured modules to the different levels of the students in the class. I found that was really good and no-one was left behind."*

(Advanced Diploma Graduate)

*"The Aboriginal Healing Framework and ECAV's use of narrative therapy in the course is particularly relevant for preparing students for work in their field ... If more people did this qualification we'd be in a much better place."*

(Australian Counselling Association representative)



## Benefits to workplaces

Managers commented that the courses helped organisations to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff, and that graduates brought valuable skills back to the workplace.

*"The Advanced Diploma equips them with practical counselling skills. It's really apparent when they come back from the blocks that they come back with enhanced capacity."*

(Manager)



## Personal benefits for participants

Some course participants felt that completing the courses improved their employment opportunities. They also said the courses helped improve their self-confidence in their personal lives and inspired family members to pursue their own training and education.

*"I think it inspires our kids to go on and get a better education so they can help people."*

(Graduate Certificate Graduate)

## CHALLENGES



### Personal challenges for participants

Key challenges identified by some stakeholders included the need to provide a high level of support to keep participants in the courses as the topics discussed can be confronting on a personal level. Some course participants also reported finding study challenging because of previous negative experiences in mainstream education.

*"A heap of work has to be done around learning how those workers need to be supported. There will be some instability with the worker at the start of the process because they're processing their own trauma at the same time, but that settles down and they come through it stronger."*

(Manager)



### Workplace support

Course participants reported different experiences of support from their workplace managers, with some course participants reporting highly supportive workplace managers and others reporting that they felt unsupported by their managers. ECAV stakeholders explained that one way they sought to address the problem of some participants feeling unsupported by their manager was to communicate with the manager to help them better understand the course and how they could support their staff member to participate.

*"It depends on whether workplaces release them or not. Some students have to use their own leave to do the courses and some did do this in our group."*

(Advanced Diploma Graduate)



### Administrative challenges

The evaluation found several administrative challenges for the courses. These included balancing the requirements of Registered Training Organisation (RTO) compliance with the desire to tailor the courses to Aboriginal culture. There were also problems for some Advanced Diploma participants in obtaining ABSTUDY financial support and, for Graduate Certificate participants, in enrolment at the university.

*"Some of the people in the course found it hard with financing it when they have to pay their own way or try to get ABSTUDY. One lady missed a week because she couldn't get it sorted out in time."*

(Advanced Diploma Graduate)

Funding for the courses has been allocated annually and ECAV staff said that this uncertainty from year to year made it difficult to plan and promote the courses.



## WHAT CAN BE IMPROVED

The evaluators at Inca Consulting identified the following **implications for the delivery** of the Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate:



### Reach and promotion

- Consider how to increase the number of students entering and progressing to higher levels of the Pathway.
- Consider whether the Advanced Diploma could also be delivered in regional locations.
- Explore ways to increase the number of men enrolling in and completing the courses.

*"I can see how it would be difficult for some people to spend time away for study when they are working and the distance ... the distance is a definite barrier."*  
(Advanced Diploma Graduate)



### Participant support

- Encourage workplace managers to undertake cultural competency training.
- Consider strengthening ECAV and clinical supervisors' engagement with workplace managers to better support staff members' course participation.
- Address administrative barriers to participants accessing ABSTUDY for the Advanced Diploma and enrolling at the university for the Graduate Certificate.



### Monitoring

- Consider monitoring the employment and education outcomes of participants.



### Funding

- Improve certainty of funding to support long term planning for the courses.



### Further research

- Conduct further research to understand whether the Pathway has made it easier for Aboriginal people to access family violence services.



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The full NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence Aboriginal Qualifications evaluation report is available on the NSW Health website.

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SHPN (CEE) 200806

ISBN 978-1-76081-652-0

Produced by:

Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence and

Centre for Aboriginal Health

Population and Public Health Division

Suggested citation:

Centre for Epidemiology and Evidence and Centre for Aboriginal Health. Evaluation of the NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence, Aboriginal Qualifications: Summary of findings. Sydney: NSW Ministry of Health, 2022

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March 2022

