

EVALUATION OF THE NSW HEALTH EDUCATION CENTRE AGAINST VIOLENCE, ABORIGINAL QUALIFICATIONS

Summary report

March 2022



Education Centre
AGAINST VIOLENCE



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About this report

This report provides an overview of findings of the evaluation of the NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence Aboriginal Qualifications Pathway. A comprehensive description of evaluation methods, findings and implications can be found in the [main report](#). A shorter summary of the main report is provided in the [community report](#).

In this report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are referred to as Aboriginal people in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW.

Acknowledgements

The NSW Ministry of Health acknowledges the Education Centre Against Violence Aboriginal Qualifications Evaluation Advisory Group who provided input and guidance.

Thank you to the past course participants, course delivery staff, workplace managers, members of the Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group, Education Centre Against Violence staff, NSW Ministry of Health staff and external stakeholders who were interviewed for their time and valuable insights.

Thank you also to Inca Consulting for conducting the evaluation.

The NSW Ministry of Health acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of NSW and pays respect to elders past, present and future.

Synopsis

The NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

The NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence (ECAV) is a state-wide unit responsible for workforce development in the specialist areas of prevention and response to violence, abuse and neglect with a specific focus on Aboriginal, and Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Communities.

The Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

The ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway Model is a pathway for Aboriginal workers in the areas of family violence, sexual assault and child protection. It consists of three tiers: 1) *10619NAT Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Wellbeing & Violence Prevention Work*¹; 2) *10634NAT Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling*; and 3) *Graduate Certificate in Human & Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)*.

Evaluation of the ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

The ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway was evaluated in 2018-19. A mixed methods approach was used to evaluate how the Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate are delivered; their reach, outcomes and implementation costs; and whether they are meeting their intended objectives. The evaluation included a document review, analysis of routinely collected course data, analysis of financial data and qualitative interviews with course stakeholders. The Certificate IV had previously been evaluated and was not a focus of this evaluation.

Results

The Advanced Diploma aims to develop specialist counselling skills to respond to Aboriginal individuals, families and communities affected by a history of trauma. The Graduate Certificate combines policy, practice and research, and is intended as an accelerated pathway to university study for Aboriginal people working in the field of family violence. The courses are underpinned by Aboriginal concepts of healing such as *kanyini* (Aboriginal teachings about unconditional love), cultural humility, cultural safety, deep listening, and connectedness. The courses are overseen by the Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group (ACMAG) to ensure cultural relevance to Aboriginal individuals and communities.

Between 2011 and 2017, 69 Aboriginal people participated in the Advanced Diploma, 52 (76%) of whom completed and graduated from the course. Between 2013-2017, 29 Aboriginal people participated in the Graduate Diploma, 25 (86%) of whom completed and graduated from the course. The overall graduation rate across the three courses in the Pathway was 66%. The demographics of the participants reflect the broader characteristics of the Aboriginal workforce in the area of family violence: predominantly female, mid-career and over 40 years of age. The cost of delivering the Advanced Diploma was \$40,364 per enrolled student and \$53,338 per graduate, while the cost of delivering the Graduate Certificate was \$34,053 per enrolled student and \$42,066 per graduate.

The evaluation found that the two courses met their objectives to fill skill and qualification gaps and build the capacity of the Aboriginal Family Health workforce. Stakeholders identified several strengths of the two courses, including the close involvement of the Aboriginal community, culturally appropriate and trauma-informed content and teaching methods, and flexibility and support for participants. Stakeholders commented that the courses provided benefits to both workplaces and participants, with benefits extending to participants' personal lives (e.g. greater self-confidence).

Barriers to implementation for the two courses included systemic challenges (e.g. inconsistent support from workplace managers, instability of funding, administrative challenges) and personal challenges for some participants (e.g. past trauma, previous negative experiences in education). Stakeholders identified opportunities for improvement in the areas of course promotion and participation, monitoring of outcomes, study and administrative support for participants, and funding certainty.

¹ This course was previously referred to as *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health (Family Violence, Sexual Assault & Child Protection [91314NSW])*.

1. The NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence

Domestic and family violence is widespread and under-reported.² Domestic and family violence occurs at higher rates for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people.³ This violence ‘must be seen in the context of colonisation, disadvantage, oppression and marginalisation’.⁴ It has a devastating impact on the physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities and is compounded by a lack of access for survivors to culturally appropriate services and supports, entrenched distrust of the justice system, and experience of significant socioeconomic disadvantage and marginalisation as a result of their Aboriginal status.

Domestic and family violence within Aboriginal communities needs to be understood as both a cause and effect of social disadvantage and intergenerational trauma.⁵ The NSW Ministry of Health (MoH) recognises that any response must involve Aboriginal community members in defining the problem and in identifying pathways forward. The drive towards developing more effective and culturally appropriate responses to family and domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse underscores the continued strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people and communities.

ECAV has operated for more than 30 years as a state-wide unit responsible for workforce development in the specialist areas of prevention and response to violence, abuse and neglect with a specific focus on Aboriginal, and Cultural and Linguistically Diverse Communities. ECAV provides training, consultancy, clinical supervision and resource development for NSW Health and other government and non-government organisations. Its training programs range across three different portfolios: Aboriginal Programs, Child Protection and Sexual Assault (including Medical and Forensic responses), and Domestic Violence and Cultural Equity.

2. The Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

The ECAV Aboriginal Qualification pathway consists of three tiers. In 2001, ECAV introduced an accredited one-year *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health (Family Violence, Sexual Assault & Child Protection [91314NSW])*,⁶ the base level training for Aboriginal Family Health Workers (AFHWs) under the NSW Aboriginal Family Health Strategy. In 2011, the introduction of a one-year *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* was designed to follow on from the Certificate IV. In 2013, ECAV extended its offering for Aboriginal workers by introducing a *Graduate Certificate in Human & Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)*, developed and delivered in partnership with the University of Sydney. This addition completed what is known as the ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway. Formal recognition of ECAV’s Aboriginal Qualification Pathway was granted by the MoH in July 2015, enabling graduate status under the Senior Health Education Officer Award.

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

³ Ibid.

⁴ 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.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ This course is now the *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Wellbeing and Violence Prevention Work* (10619NAT).

3. Evaluation of the ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

What did the evaluation aim to achieve?

In March 2017, the MoH commissioned Inca Consulting to conduct an evaluation of the Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate (the Certificate IV had previously been evaluated in 2010). The evaluation's objectives were to:

- examine whether the *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* and the *Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)* are meeting their intended objectives
- describe how these qualifications are delivered and monitored, and identify related implementation barriers and enablers
- assess the reach of these qualifications and their impact on building the capacity of Aboriginal health staff to respond effectively and in a culturally competent way to family violence, abuse and neglect in Aboriginal communities
- identify ways to improve the training of Aboriginal health staff in NSW in responding to family violence effectively and in a culturally competent way
- describe the costs of implementing the *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* and the *Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)*.

How was the evaluation conducted?

A mixed methods approach was used to evaluate the courses. This included a review of documentation, analysis of routinely collected course and financial data, and interviews with past course participants and other stakeholders.

Review of documentation

The range of documents examined include:

- information about each course, e.g. course outlines, application forms, assessment information
- accreditation documentation and evidence
- NSW Health documents e.g. operational guidelines
- submissions and correspondence from/to ECAV
- student evaluations for the *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* (2015 and 2016)
- previous evaluation reports
- relevant policy documents.

Analysis of de-identified, routinely collected course data

Participation and graduation rates were analysed by gender, age, location (Greater Sydney/regional NSW/interstate), employer (NSW Health, ACCHS and other – NGOs, other Government agencies or self-employed), position (AFHW/other), year, and completion status.

Analysis of financial data

ECAV provided four years of financial information, including data on expenditures and income, relating to the Advanced Diploma and the Graduate Certificate. These data were analysed to determine costs per enrolled student and graduate, and to determine the contribution of MoH funding to course costs.

Qualitative interviews with course stakeholders

Qualitative interviews or group discussions were conducted either face-to-face or via telephone with 45 people who were currently or previously engaged with one or both courses. A semi-structured guide was developed for each stakeholder group to ensure key evaluation questions were addressed. The discussion questions explored themes such as course strengths, perceived outcomes, challenges for implementation and participation, and opportunities for improvement. A purposive sampling approach was used to select candidates for interview among the past course participants from 2013 to 2017.

Participants included:

- past course participants (n=17)
- workplace managers (n=4)
- educators, lecturers, clinical supervisors or ECAV staff (n=7)
- ACMAG members (n=9)
- other key informants (e.g. MoH, partner organisations) (n=8).

Ethics and governance

Ethics approval for the evaluation was sought and granted from the AH&MRC Ethics Committee (1309/17) and the Hunter New England Local Health District (LHD) Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC/17/HNE/344). Site-specific approvals were obtained for the research from Hunter New England LHD, Western NSW LHD and Western Sydney LHD. The evaluation was overseen by the ECAV Aboriginal Qualifications Advisory Group which had representation from MoH, Nepean Blue Mountains LHD, Sydney Children's Hospital Network, ECAV and ACMAG.

4. What were the key findings of the evaluation?

Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling

Course description

The six-module *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* aims to develop specialist counselling skills within an Aboriginal Healing Framework to respond to Aboriginal individuals, families and communities affected by a history of trauma such as adult and child sexual assault, family violence, and child abuse and neglect. It has been delivered by ECAV seven times in seven years at its main site in Parramatta, Sydney. Entry requirements include that participants must be Aboriginal, be over 18 years of age, have completed the Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health and have a minimum of 12 months relevant employment experience.

The six modules progress through different aspects of counselling children and adult survivors of sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect. Each module includes a mixture of theory, practice and reflection. Module 1 is a prerequisite for the other five modules and focuses on what an Aboriginal Healing Framework is, introducing key concepts such as *kanyini* (Aboriginal teachings about unconditional love), cultural humility, cultural safety, deep listening, and connectedness.

The course is delivered in block mode over 210 classroom-based hours broken up into six, five-day blocks over 12 months. A further 290 hours of home- and work-based self-directed learning and assessment activities, and 30 hours of clinical supervision, are expected (clinical supervision may include individual and group supervision).

Staffing

The course is organised and delivered by a staff of eight, including four Aboriginal trainers, one Indigenous (Maori) trainer and three non-Indigenous trainers. Two trainers deliver each of the six modules: the first Aboriginal Healing Framework Module is delivered by two Aboriginal trainers, the next five modules are delivered by one Aboriginal trainer and one non-Aboriginal trainer with specialist skill and experience in each of the areas of child sexual abuse, physical abuse and neglect, domestic violence and adult sexual assault.

Funding model

Funding for the Advanced Diploma has been provided to ECAV by the MoH on an annual basis since 2010-11. The funding allocation has varied from year to year. MoH funding covers just under half of total implementation costs. The remainder is contributed by ECAV using operational funds. AFHWs are not charged a course fee. Other students are charged for attendance and assessment on a sliding scale.

Course costs

The average cost per graduate for the Advanced Diploma was \$53,338 and \$40,364 per enrolled student (Table 1).

Table 1. Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling, per student costs

Cost definition	Cost
Average annual cost of the course ¹	\$373,369
Cost per enrolled student ²	\$40,364
Cost per graduate ³	\$53,338
Cost per graduate/Statement of Attainment ⁴	\$41,485

¹ Averaged over four years 2013-14, 2014-15, 2015-16, 2016-17

² Based on 37 enrolled students in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016

³ Based on 28 graduates in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016

⁴ Based on 36 graduates in 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016

Participation and completion

Between 2011 and 2017, 69 people enrolled in the Advanced Diploma. The size of the annual cohort has ranged between six and 14 participants, with the average cohort being just under 10 people.

Of those enrolled across the seven years, 52 completed the course and received the full qualification (76% full qualification rate). A Statement of Attainment (SOA) was awarded to 14 people (20% partial qualification rate) either because they did not attend all six modules or because they did not otherwise satisfy the requirements of the course. Only three participants commenced the course but received neither a qualification nor a SOA. These students were classified as 'Did not complete'.

The participant profile was largely female (84%), aged 40 years or older (74%) and employed in a health service (61%). Participants lived equally in either Sydney or regional areas. The graduation rate was higher for females compared to males, people employed by NSW Health or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) compared to other employers, and AFHWs compared to people in other positions.

A summary of the completion rates by participant characteristics is in Table 2.

Table 2. Completions for the Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling by selected characteristics, 2011-2017

	Count	Graduated		Statement of Attainment		Did not complete	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Female (n=58)	46	79	10	17	2	4
	Male (n=11)	6	55	4	36	1	9
Age	<40 years (n=18)	14	78	4	22	0	0
	≥40 years (n=51)	38	74	10	20	3	6
Employer	NSW Health (n=22)	18	82	4	18	0	0
	ACCHS (n=20)	16	80	3	15	1	5
	Other (n=27)	18	67	7	26	2	7
Position	AFHW (n=14)	12	86	2	14	0	0
	Other (n=55)	40	73	12	22	3	5
Region of employment	Greater Sydney (n=31)	24	78	6	19	1	3
	Regional or rural NSW (n=36)	26	72	8	22	2	6
	Interstate (n=2)	2	100	0	0	0	0
Total (n=69)		52	76	14	20	3	5

Stakeholder views

Course strengths

The stakeholders who were interviewed were positive about the course. Key identified strengths were:

- the design of the course to meet specific industry and sector needs

We value the qualifications even more so than mainstream qualifications because these are really focussed on our core business. They're really targeted to preparing people to actually do the work in trauma.

(Manager)

- its focus on cultural safety

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

(Graduate)

- its close links to the Aboriginal community through the involvement of the Aboriginal Communities Matter Advisory Group (ACMAG)
- its robust and evidence-based approach (which reportedly is recognised by key industry organisations such as the Australian Counselling Association)

The beauty of the Aboriginal Healing Framework module is that it's got a national competency and it's also got an ECAV specialised competency that's developed on the basis of the needs of the industry.

(ACMAG Member)

- the high level of support provided by ECAV staff, both inside and outside the classroom

There was excellent support from ECAV staff. They kept the group motivated all the time.

(Graduate)

- the mix of learning and assessment approaches

We all bring different concerns and issues in the ways we learn and for our course last year it was really well structured to meet the learning needs of all of us.

(Graduate)

- the relevance and rigour of assessments
- the structure of the course into six modules.

Perceived outcomes

Participants, managers, staff and other stakeholders interviewed identified a range of perceived outcomes from the Advanced Diploma course. Key findings were:

- participants, employers and industry stakeholders felt the course enabled participants to develop counselling skills and be trained as fully qualified counsellors

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 an enhanced capacity.

(Manager)

- some graduates felt the course had improved their employment opportunities such as promotion, recognition or change of job
- participants felt that the course had impacted their personal lives, for example through greater self-confidence and self-healing, and including a positive 'ripple' effect in relation to education and training within families

In my personal life, I've grown so much. When I was in Cert IV I was angry because of what I'd been through. I have much better understanding now. My kids are now looking to me and saying, 'I can do it if Mum's doing it'.

(Graduate)

- workplace managers felt the course benefited organisations, for example in their capacity to recruit and retain Aboriginal staff, enhanced cultural competence and increased engagement with Aboriginal families.

Challenges

Some stakeholders reported that some aspects of implementing the Advanced Diploma had been challenging. Key challenges identified included:

- retaining participants through the challenging, and at times confronting, course

As a manager it's important to support workers to get through the rough bits when they're going to be unsettled, but it is short term.

(Manager)

- a lack of support from some workplace managers which made it difficult for some students to meet course requirements

I had two bosses. The first boss was very supportive, gave me study leave, encouraged me. My second boss was not supportive at all. At one stage she said I couldn't go and study, so I threatened to leave. At the end I didn't want to come back. I think there needs to be more work done with managers.

(Graduate)

- the considerable task of managing Registered Training Organisation compliance
- individual participants needed to submit their ABSTUDY application to their local Centrelink office for assessment, which led to inconsistencies in assessment and approval

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.

(Graduate)

- uncertainty of funding from year to year made it difficult to plan and promote the course, and meant considerable administrative time was spent in funding negotiations.

Opportunities for improvement

While stakeholders identified few improvements to the course itself, some opportunities for improvement suggested included:

- some stakeholders felt there could be an increase in the number of people progressing from Certificate IV to the Advanced Diploma
- a workplace manager recommended the provision of more information to workplace managers about the course and the units of competency
- an educator commented on increasing the amount of the course that is delivered by Aboriginal facilitators
- some participants from regional areas felt it would have been better if the course could have been held closer to home

I can see how it would be difficult for some people to spend time away for study when they are working and the distance. Be good to have more Aboriginal people with these qualifications in the rural and remote communities but the distance is a definite barrier.

(Graduate)

- several stakeholders wanted issues with accessing ABSTUDY addressed.

Graduate Certificate in Human & Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)

Course description

The *Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma)* combines policy, practice and research in the human and community services industry. It is intended as an accelerated pathway to university study for Aboriginal people working in, or wishing to work in, the field of family violence, who often have extensive practice experience and skills but lack formal educational qualifications. The Graduate Certificate was developed to assist pathway participants to move from competency-based practice to understanding and applying theories and ideas. The program aims to graduate critically reflective and skilled practitioners for the health and community services sector and other fields of practice.

Aboriginal workers who completed the *Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* were encouraged to enrol in the Graduate Certificate. NSW Health sexual assault and child protection counselling services clinical staff who had extensive practice experience but did not have an undergraduate degree may also be eligible to enrol.

Completion of the course requires four units of study over the course of one year. Each module is assessed via three to four assessment tasks, including in-class writing tasks, individual and group presentations, essays, reports, reflections and simulations. Each unit is delivered face-to-face on campus at the University of Sydney Camperdown campus over five days. The course has been delivered four times jointly by ECAV and the School of Social Work, University of Sydney, at the University of Sydney Camperdown campus. The program was delivered in 2013, 2015, 2016 and 2017.

Staffing

The course was delivered jointly by the School of Social Work, University of Sydney and ECAV. Modules 1 and 3 were delivered by University of Sydney, typically by a Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Work. Modules 2 and 4 were delivered by ECAV and were co-facilitated by one Aboriginal and one non-Aboriginal educator. All four modules were delivered on-site at the University of Sydney Camperdown campus in four, one-week blocks over 12 months.

Funding model

Annual funding for the Graduate Certificate has been provided by the MoH, with the amount varying from year-to-year. MoH funding covers just under half the implementation costs, with the remaining drawn from ECAV operational funds. The University of Sydney is compensated via scholarships costed at approximately \$14,000 per student. Participants may be eligible to apply for ABSTUDY Away from Base support for their travel and accommodation expenses, and this can be arranged through the University of Sydney.

Course costs

The average costs for the Graduate Certificate was \$34,053 per enrolled student and \$42,066 per graduate (Table 3).

Table 3. Graduate Certificate in Human & Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma) – Actual cost per student¹

Cost definition	Cost
Total cost (delivery years only)	\$715,118
Average annual cost of the course ¹	\$238,373
Average cost per enrolled student ²	\$34,053
Average cost per graduate ³	\$42,066

¹ Average over three years 2013/14, 2015/16 and 2016/17

² Based on 21 enrolled students

³ Based on 17 graduates

Participation and completion

Over four years, 29 people commenced the course. Participant cohorts ranged from six to 10 participants each year, with an average enrolment per year of 7.25 people. Twenty-five participants (86%) graduated with the full qualification and four (14%) did not complete.

The participant profile was largely female (83%), aged 40 years or over (83%), employed in a health service (72%) and resided in a regional or rural area (62%). A summary of completion rates by characteristic of participant is in Table 4.

Table 4. Completions for the Graduate Certificate in Human & Community Services (Interpersonal Trauma) by selected characteristics, 2013-2017

	Count	Graduated		Statement of Attainment		Did not complete	
		Count	%	Count	%	Count	%
Gender	Female (n=24)	23	96	0	0	1	4
	Male (n=5)	2	40	0	0	3	60
Age	<40 years (n=5)	5	100	0	0	0	0
	≥40 years (n=24)	20	83	0	0	4	17
Employer	NSW Health (n=11)	10	91	0	0	1	9
	ACCHS (n=10)	9	90	0	0	1	10
	Other (n=8)	6	75	0	0	2	25
Position	AFHW (n=7)	7	100	0	0	0	0
	Other (n=22)	18	82	0	0	4	18
Region of employment	Greater Sydney (n=10)	9	90	0	0	1	10
	Regional or rural NSW (n=18)	15	83	0	0	3	17
	Interstate (n=1)	1	100	0	0	0	0
Total (n=29)		25	86	0	0	4	14

Stakeholder views

Course strengths

Stakeholders highly regarded the Graduate Certificate course. Key strengths identified included:

- stakeholders felt a high degree of cultural safety was provided to participants

I've never seen cultural safety like that anywhere.

(Graduate)

- one educator felt the course was relevant to Aboriginal individuals and communities
- stakeholders felt the course built on both the skills-focused Certificate IV and Advanced Diploma and overlays the theory behind the practice
- stakeholders believed the introduction to the University was positive, safe and supported

I never thought I would go to university. With this pathway, it just took me there.

(Graduate)

- many participants commented on the high quality of teaching

Having Aboriginal teachers doing it makes it feel like you belong.

(Graduate)

- participants enjoyed the structure of the course, which was separated into four manageable blocks of study
- most participants from outside Sydney felt they benefited from travelling to Sydney for block study, as it encouraged networking and gave participants permission to focus on themselves.

The travelling helped, it meant we got to yarn while we were there. It was good having that time to just concentrate on the course.

(Graduate)

Perceived outcomes

Perceived outcomes as reported by stakeholders included:

- the development of sophisticated ways of thinking and understanding family violence

I see them on their first day of uni and I see them again in the third module, and I think the difference is quite astounding. I'm talking about academic confidence. I see a difference in their ability to write, to engage in debate and ability to understand the theoretical concepts.

(Educator)

- graduates being placed on an equal footing with those with a bachelor's degree
- provision of a gateway to postgraduate study

The skills and knowledge are portable so they can extend past trauma work and work in other fields as well.

(Educator)

- the development of skilled and educated workers with a greater capacity and drive to address family violence in their communities
- the 'ripple' effect with families who were inspired to progress 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)

Challenges

Key challenges identified by stakeholders included:

- University and ECAV staff said they often have to work hard to retain students in the early stages who experience difficulties or crisis of confidence. Barriers included fear of failure, personal resource limitations, and challenges with research and study skills.

Preventing dropout before the course starts and during. Having an ECAV Aboriginal staff member actively chasing people up and encouraging them, talking through their concerns and supporting them makes a big difference. Also having an Aboriginal staff member who is actively engaged in the program at the University helps.

(Educator)

- stakeholders experienced some administrative hurdles at the University as they were required to provide proof of Aboriginality, which is difficult for some Aboriginal people without the necessary documentation
- stakeholders identified uncertain funding as a significant challenge as it made it difficult to plan and promote the course and to ensure continuity from year to year.

Opportunities for improvement

Opportunities for improvement suggested by stakeholders included:

- stakeholders saw the need to improve the orientation experience by bringing students in for O-Week (Orientation Week) to familiarise them with the campus and facilities and to undertake some introductory classes in academic writing and research and study skills
- participants saw the need to introduce themselves to the Koori Centre at the University of Sydney on campus earlier.

The ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

Participation and completion

Since the *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Health (Family Violence, Sexual Assault and Child Protection [91314NSW])*⁷ was introduced in 2001, there have been 439 Aboriginal participants in one or more of the Pathway courses. The overall graduation rate across the three courses was 66%.

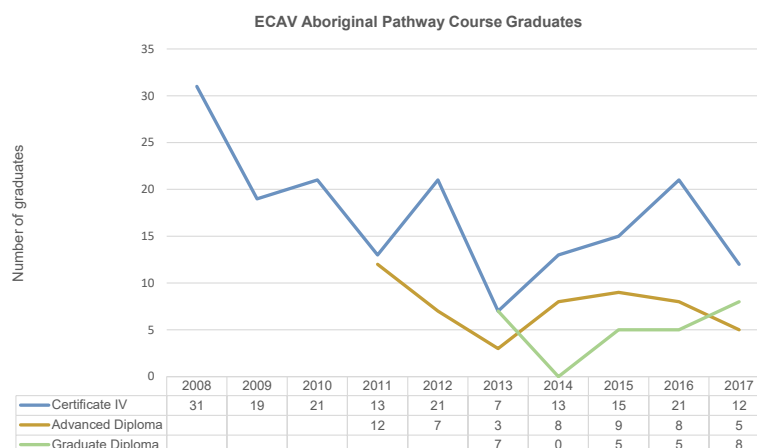
Statistical significance tests were performed for the differences in graduation rates between subgroups of attendees. The results of these tests are summarised in Table 5. A p-value of less than 0.05 indicates a statistically significant difference in the graduation rate between subgroups. The only demographic factor that was statistically significantly associated with course completion across the Pathway as a whole was gender. Female candidates (69%) were more likely than male candidates (50%) to be awarded a full qualification following an attempt at one of the three courses (p=0.0084).

Table 5. Results of statistical significance tests for course graduations by participant characteristics for the Aboriginal Qualification Pathway, 2001-2017

		Participants (n=439)	Graduated (n=291)		p-value
		Count	Count	%	%
Gender	Female	379	261	69	0.0084
	Male	60	30	50	
Age	<40 years	167	108	65	0.6101
	≥40 years	234	160	68	
Employer	NSW Health	174	121	70	0.2382
	Other	265	170	64	
Position	AFHW	97	67	69	0.4651
	Other	342	224	65	
Region of employment	Greater Sydney	150	106	71	0.0864
	Regional or rural NSW	258	163	63	

There was a moderate transition up the tiers of the Pathway. Around half (56%) of those who graduated from the Certificate IV from 2010 onwards (the first 'feeder' year for the Advanced Diploma) went on to participate in the Advanced Diploma, and the same proportion transitioned from the Advanced Diploma to the Graduate Certificate. Figure 1 plots graduate numbers over 10 years across the three Pathway courses and shows that when graduate numbers dip for the Certificate IV, this tended to result in a ripple effect on graduate numbers in the Advanced Diploma and Graduate Certificate.

Figure 1. Number of graduates in Aboriginal Qualifications Pathway courses, 2008-2017



⁷ This course is now the *Certificate IV in Aboriginal Family Wellbeing and Violence Prevention Work (10619NAT)*.

Accreditation and recognition

The Advanced Diploma has been accredited twice by the Australian Skills Quality Authority (in 2010 and 2017), by the NSW Vocational Education and Training Accreditation Board and the Australian Counselling Association.

In 2015, the MoH recognised the three-year pathway culminating in awarding the *Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Health (Interpersonal Trauma)* as having the equivalence of a bachelor's degree. It also recognised the Graduate Certificate as a graduate qualification under the Aboriginal Health Education Officers' Determination. This determination meant that from 2015 onwards, participants who completed the full pathway could access the salary grade of the Aboriginal Health Education Officer – Graduate Classification when employed by NSW Health.

Stakeholder views

Course strengths

Stakeholders identified a number of strengths of the Pathway:

- it differs from other mainstream education and training programs in that it allows participants to learn and develop skills within a culturally safe space

It is a fantastic pathway and is just so supported and so well structured and well delivered. I didn't find anything difficult just the small challenges and there were always ways to get you through. It was such a supported learning process and I know myself at times I am not as confident as I probably could be but I know having connection to the trainers and the supervisors has strengthened my result because I could get through it and complete it and to do it well not just pass through it.

(Graduate)

- the courses involve Aboriginal people in the design, development and delivery of the training
- the courses are closely connected to Aboriginal communities
- the model of delivery is flexible, supports different learning requirements and capacities, and accounts for experiences of Aboriginal people with regards to responsibilities to family and community
- the courses are trauma-informed
- stakeholders commented on the high retention rates of courses
- stakeholders identified that there is a high level of employment amongst graduates
- the courses are designed to meet industry needs

Better writing skills, communication skills, analysis skills; greater engagement of the community; better understanding of family violence; working through own personal issues that makes them stronger and more effective to clients and the community; comprehension and knowledge; pride.

(Manager)

- the Pathway facilitates a conduit to tertiary education for Aboriginal students who have a very low university participation rate.

Stakeholders expressed the view that ECAV has a strong reputation in the field for delivery of high quality, needs-focused and culturally safe education and training in this space, in addition to the strong links it has developed with Aboriginal communities.

A number of stakeholders also expressed the view that the Pathway has had a transformational impact on many of the lives of participants, an impact that has also extended to participants' families.

5. Limitations

There are three potential limitations of this evaluation. Firstly, participation and graduation rates, and course costs, were evaluated using routinely collected data. These data were collected for administrative purposes rather than evaluation, and as such it is possible that there may have been some inaccuracies in the data. Additionally, in some cases, data were missing, particularly for the Certificate IV course.

Secondly, transition rates across the tiers of the Pathway are estimates only. It is not possible with de-identified data to track the transition rate precisely.

Thirdly, findings from the qualitative interviews should be interpreted with caution. The evaluators attempted to interview a diverse mix of stakeholders; however, it is possible that the range of experiences of, and views about, the ECAV Aboriginal Qualification Pathway were not fully explored.

6. Considerations for enhancing the Aboriginal Qualification Pathway

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.

Monitoring

- Consider monitoring the employment and education outcomes of participants.

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.

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.



7. Conclusion

Overall, both courses (*Advanced Diploma of Aboriginal Specialist Trauma Counselling* and *Graduate Certificate in Human and Community Services*) were found to be well regarded and delivering on their objectives. The courses were meeting their objectives to fill skill and qualification gaps and to build the capacity of the Aboriginal Family Health workforce. The stakeholders interviewed in this evaluation felt the courses were highly worthwhile, contributed much to the sector and should continue to be supported.

The Aboriginal Qualification Pathway as a whole was viewed as unique in terms of training an Aboriginal family violence, sexual assault and child protection workforce, and also providing a model for Aboriginal education and training more broadly.

However, improvements to the promotion of the courses, participant support, further skills development and funding may enhance the reach and implementation of the courses. Increasing the participation rates for both courses would reduce the costs per participant and further strengthen the Aboriginal family violence, sexual assault and child protection workforce.

Access the full NSW Health Education Centre Against Violence Aboriginal Qualifications evaluation report at www.health.nsw.gov.au/research/Documents/ecav-evaluation-report.pdf

