



# Impact story: Exploring and improving processes for collecting authentic patient experience information from speakers of Aboriginal languages

## What was this research about?

We wanted to find ways to improve the communication between health care staff and Aboriginal patients and their families, in order to deliver a better patient experience.

**Who**  
was involved?

19

First Nations language experts

4

Language groups\*

\*Djambarrpuyŋu, Yankunytjatjara, Arrernte, Warlpiri

**What**  
did we do?

First Nations language experts were engaged in a critical review of 2 survey tools; the adapted Australian Hospital Patient Experience Question Set (AHPEQS) and the Return to Country (RtC) Project survey tool.

## What did we find out?

In the review of the survey tools, extensive challenges were experienced in the collection of authentic patient information among speakers of the four First Nations languages (FNL). These challenges are outlined below:

Inconsistencies between the **intended** meaning and the FNL **interpretations**, despite efforts to find the equivalence in meaning.

Terms relating to **frequency**, such as 'always' 'sometimes', 'never', might not have an equivalent term in FNL.

Conceptual terms like **'too much'** consistently caused confusion with health concern questions potentially translated into positive behaviours.

A **limited range** of responses does not allow participants to share more detailed accounts of their experience, missing what is important to patients and details needed to inform change.

When survey methods are **inconsistent** with First Nations communication protocols and needs, the information collected has **no value**.

Surveys are very hard ... people will answer just to make you happy ... That's what you get from a survey - an untrue story.

Läwurrpa Maypilama, Yolŋu language expert

[it] makes the interpreter seem incompetent and damages their professional reputation ... when the problem is actually the survey.

Dikul Baker, Yolŋu language expert



Language experts shared ideas for better ways to capture authentic patient experience information as outlined below:

Engaging local cultural and language experts working with health staff and researchers through **all stages** of planning, development, implementation and evaluation is key.

It is important determine the participants' **preferred language** and engage an appropriate interpreter (if needed) **before** commencing the information and consent process.

A **conversational approach** in seeking information was **strongly advocated** to allow for more detailed and authentic information to be captured.

Participants responded well if the purpose was clearly explained and if sharing their experience would lead to some kind of **action** or outcome.

To maintain the integrity of the process, patient experience data collection must be accompanied by effective strategies to **act on** identified concerns.

Work together - find out the way together ... because if you want to know about a patient's experience and what's important to them then you need to know the population.

Yolŋu language experts

We don't want to be always asked questions just so that they can tick a box, yes or no. We need to be heard and have our reality understood. For people to listen deeply: **puruanyani**

yirri yirri - listening carefully to understand.

Warlpiri language expert

## Why is this important?

When the voices of First Nations Australians are prioritised, health care system improvements can be **activated** to address negative patient experiences that are otherwise unheard.

Quality, authentic patient experience data gained through culturally and linguistically relevant approaches reduces the risk of wasted resources and disengagement with the health care system.

## What next?

The findings from this study are currently informing a study that is piloting and evaluating a **conversational approach** for gathering patient experience information with First Nations language speakers. We look forward to learning the results of the new study and using the findings to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal people.