

## Child restraint use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in 12 communities in NSW

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### Abstract

Despite the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in road related deaths and serious injury, little is known about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children travel in cars. We conducted interviews with 601 parents and carers and 367 observations of children in cars as they arrived at preschools, day care centres and Mums and Bubs groups across 10 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in New South Wales. While 93% of children were observed to be restrained in some way (323/349), 16% (54/329) were not in the right restraint for their age, highlighting the need for a community based child restraint program working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities targeting optimal restraint use.

### Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in fatalities and serious injury with road related injury being a leading cause of death for this group.(Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2012) Despite the known safety benefits of child restraints and recent changes to the road rules regarding child restraint use, previous research has shown only 31% of children are optimally restrained (child correctly restrained in an age-and size-appropriate restraint).(Keay et al., 2012) Despite this, little is known about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are travelling and whether or not they are being correctly restrained in age appropriate child restraints.

### Method

Working with community and following extensive consultation and engagement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in New South Wales, Australia, we recruited and trained 42 local Aboriginal and Torres Strait people to conduct surveys with parents and carers and to observe how children were restrained as they arrived at early childhood services in 10 communities. Communities were classified according to the Australian Standard Geographical Classification - Remoteness Area (ASGC-RA) two were 'outer regional', three 'inner regional' and five were 'major city'.(Australian Government - Department of Health) Data presented here form the baseline data for the evaluation of a pragmatic trial (*Buckle-Up Safely*) targeting optimal restraint use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

### Results

#### *Participants*

In 2015-2016, we conducted interviews with 601 parents and carers and completed 349 observations of child restraint use. Parents or carers provided responses to the structured survey for 601 children. The average age of the child was 3.3±1.6 years (range 0-7 years) and 338/560 (60%) were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander children. Of the children observed, 16% (54/329) were not in the right restraint for their age; significant errors ranged from belt buckle not being engaged (11%) to internal / shoulder harness being incorrectly or not used (31%).

## Conclusions

These findings are the first stage of the baseline data collection for a large scale pragmatic trial measuring the effectiveness of a culturally appropriate child restraint program among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Core messages of the *Buckle-Up Safely* program, delivered by local Aboriginal Community Workers, will focus on correct use of child restraints, targeting key errors in observed use and highlighting the safety benefits of correct and age-appropriate use. Program messaging will be tailored to address the needs of the local communities. The program is guided by a Steering Committee comprising both non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people representing community organisations, government and non-government agencies.

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