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Applying a context-informed approach to evaluation of a licensing support program with Aboriginal communities: a study protocol

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Key Findings

- Culturally responsive programs are critical to address Aboriginal licensing rates
- Urgent need for robust evaluation of community licensing support programs
- Evaluation of community licensing support programs must consider program context
- A context-informed approach can underpin all stages of evaluation

Abstract

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia are more likely to experience transport disadvantage, which contributes to observed health disparities. Transport disadvantage has been attributed to low rates of licensed drivers in Aboriginal communities; to address this the *Driving Change* program was developed to support Aboriginal communities in New South Wales (NSW) to facilitate equitable access to licensing. This article presents the protocol for the *Driving Change* process evaluation and outlines the application of a context-informed approach. The process evaluation triangulates program data, stakeholder interviews and discussion groups. Descriptive and regression analyses of quantitative data (demographics, interaction with the program, service delivery and outcomes) will review reach, fidelity and dosage. Framework analysis of qualitative data will seek to uncover a richer understanding of context including barriers and facilitators to implementation. Community engagement and acceptability will be explored to determine the program's responsiveness to community and cultural needs. Understanding community and cultural context is crucial to evaluation in complex multi-site interventions. Using a context-informed approach, the *Driving Change* process evaluation will provide valuable insight into implementation and evaluation of multi-site programs in Aboriginal communities. We encourage evaluators to consider context at all stages of evaluation, particularly for complex and multi-site community interventions.

Keywords

Evaluation, Community, Driver licensing, Aboriginal, Indigenous, Transport disadvantage

Introduction

Ongoing difficulties accessing transport ('*transport disadvantage*') can include lack of access to safe and reliable public transport, inability to maintain private transport and difficulties meeting the costs associated with transport (Rosier & McDonald, 2011). Access to safe, reliable and legal transport is central to social inclusion and economic participation. Further, the health and well-being of individuals and families are impacted by the ability to access transport to maintain employment, attend school, access essential health services, socialise and meet cultural obligations.

Compared to other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to experience transport disadvantage, and this has been implicated in reduced health outcomes for Aboriginal people in Australia (Currie & Senbergs, 2007). In part this relates to the higher proportion of Aboriginal people living in regional/remote and urban fringe areas, as travel in these areas can be problematic for people without access to a private car. Moreover, the impact of transport disadvantage has also been recognised by the New South Wales (NSW) government as a contributor to transport-related injury and fatality (Transport for NSW, 2014). Aboriginal people are two to three times as likely to have a transport-related fatal injury (25% of all Aboriginal injury deaths) and 30% more likely to have a transport-related serious injury (8% of all Aboriginal injury hospitalisations) compared to non-Aboriginal Australians (Harrison & Berry, 2008; Henley & Harrison, 2013; Styles & Edmonston, 2006). The relationship between higher rates of transport-related injury and transport disadvantage centres on the premise that people with limited transport options are more likely to make unsafe choices or engage in illegal driving practices (Transport for NSW, 2014). This association is reinforced by known risk factors for transport-related injury in Aboriginal communities; remoteness, non-use of seatbelts, alcohol use, vehicle overcrowding and unlicensed driving (Clapham, Senserrick, Ivers, Lyford, &

Stevenson, 2008; Helps et al., 2008; Henley & Harrison, 2013).

Unlicensed driving in Aboriginal communities is associated with transport-related injury, infringements and incarceration (Clapham et al., 2008; Styles & Edmonston, 2006). Indeed 19% of Aboriginal transport fatalities involved an unlicensed driver or rider (Transport for NSW, 2014). It is widely reported that unlicensed driving is likely related to low rates of licence participation, with Aboriginal people estimated to be significantly under-represented among licence holders (Helps et al., 2008; Transport for NSW, 2014). Low rates of licence participation reflect significant barriers to attaining and maintaining a licence for Aboriginal people. These include lack of formal identification documents (e.g. birth certificate, different names on documentation), high cost of driving lessons, lack of suitable supervisory drivers for learners and feelings of intimidation (Elliot and Shanahan Research, 2008). These issues can be compounded in regional and remote areas by limited access to licensing services in these locations. Consequently, many Aboriginal communities have few licensed drivers, which impedes access to employment and healthcare services and places undue burden on licensed drivers to provide transportation for other community members (Elliot and Shanahan Research, 2008).

In NSW, 120 hours of supervised driving practice be completed by people under 25 years of age to be eligible for the on road practical driving test to attain a provisional P1 licence and drive independently without supervision. The provisional P1 licence must be held for 12 months before progressing to a provisional P2 licence, which requires completion of a computerised hazard perception test. The P2 licence must then be held for 24 months before automatically progressing to a full unrestricted car licence. The NSW government has committed to supporting evidence-based initiatives to address Aboriginal transport

injury and increasing legal and safe driving in Aboriginal communities (Transport for NSW, 2014). Integral to assisting Aboriginal people to access the NSW licensing system is robust evaluation of licensing programs to ensure that they are effective and acceptable to Aboriginal communities.

Intervention

The *Driving Change* program was developed to facilitate access to licensing in Aboriginal communities in NSW (Cullen, Clapham, Byrne, Hunter, Rogers, et al., 2016). The program aims to strengthen licensing services in participating communities to provide a more coordinated and culturally responsive approach that will better address community identified shortcomings.

Since February 2013 the program has partnered with 12 Aboriginal communities across NSW that have identified licensing as an issue to implement the program. *Driving Change* supports clients to obtain their learner, provisional and unrestricted licences including reinstated licences after resolving licensing and debt related sanctions. The program aims to build community capacity and strengthen connections between existing service providers, and the program is hosted in each location by a community organisation that is accessible to community members and key stakeholders.

The program is overseen by a central support team and is delivered at each site by an Aboriginal youth worker from the local community. The program is targeted at young people aged 16-24 years and is delivered via case management and mentoring for young people through the licensing system. Additionally, *Driving Change* addresses the issue of licensing sanctions and unpaid fines by supporting participants to liaise with appropriate government agencies to manage fines and have licensing sanctions lifted. The central project team conducted community consultations with the participating sites prior to implementation of the program. This involved engaging with a broad cross-section of government and community stakeholders to determine need and capacity to engage with the *Driving Change* program.

The process evaluation will review program implementation to explore whether *Driving Change* is being implemented as intended and is addressing the needs of the communities. The process evaluation will answer critical questions about the acceptability of the program and explore the contextual factors that may impact delivery.

Context-Informed Evaluation

Process evaluations are increasingly used alongside large scale interventions to explore the barriers and facilitators to implementation, receipt and acceptability of the intervention and potentially to gain insight into factors that may have impacted upon outcomes (Aarestrup, Jørgensen, Due, & Krølner, 2014; Jan et al., 2011; Salam et al., 2013; Saunders, Evans, & Joshi, 2005). Saunders et al (2005) outline steps for developing a process evaluation plan, which includes

considering the impact of the context in which the program operates. In considering context, evaluators should seek to understand aspects of the social, political or organisational environment that may impact program implementation (Saunders et al., 2005).

Understanding the program context is fundamental for programs that are based within Aboriginal communities. In 2013-2014 a formative evaluation of the *Driving Change* program was conducted to construct a logic model that articulates the program theory of change (Cullen, Clapham, Byrne, Hunter, Senserrick, et al., 2016). Logic models are frequently used in program evaluation to identify program resources and activities and links these with anticipated program outcomes, which assists in developing a framework for the evaluation (Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Gugiu & Rodríguez-Campos, 2007; McLaughlin & Jordan, 1999; Stetler et al., 2006). To construct the logic model, qualitative methods were used to explore contextual factors and better understand the problem definition. This process led to a richer understanding of how the program would work with multiple communities. It was evident that the program would need to address common systemic barriers to licensing, however due to inherent differences between communities the program needed to be adaptable to changing needs and variable community capacity.

While there is considerable diversity within and between Aboriginal communities, the evaluation of contextual factors provides valuable insight into community need, adversities and strengths. The formative evaluation of *Driving Change* at the three pilot sites provided significant insight into the program context, which subsequently informed the evaluation framework and development of the methodology for the *Driving Change* process evaluation. Accordingly, the process evaluation will consider community diversity and seek to further explore the impact of contextual factors on program implementation.

Theoretical approach: Social ecology

The process evaluation of *Driving Change* is informed by a model of social ecology, which has been employed in health promotion interventions targeting the social and environmental inequalities that underlie health disparities (Edberg et al., 2016; Kok, Gottlieb, Commers, & Smerecnik, 2008; Richard, Potvin, Kishchuk, Prlic, & Green, 1996). The model depicts health as a function of the interrelationship between individual, interpersonal, community, socio-political and environmental influences (Richard et al., 1996). This model is suited to evaluating multi-component community interventions like *Driving Change* as it supports the connectivity between activities at each level. The influence of the social ecological approach can be seen in the *Driving Change* program logic model, which outlines the sequential relationship between the program resources, activities and outcomes (Cullen, Clapham, Byrne, Hunter, Senserrick, et al., 2016). The logic model provides a framework for the evaluation and graphically depicts the program theory of change. Using a context-informed approach to logic model construction and evaluation is suited to multi-site community interventions that must be

responsive to community specifications. Overall, the logic model construction revealed that change should be targeted at four levels: 1) Clients and their families; 2) Organisation; 3) Communities; 4) Policy. Thereby, the *Driving Change* process evaluation will seek to have input from stakeholders at each of these levels of change.

There is a fraught history of research and programs being imposed upon Aboriginal communities with insufficient consultation, resultant poor uptake and lack of community support (Thomas, Bainbridge, & Tsey, 2014). Conversely, programs that are culturally responsive seek to work with Aboriginal communities by prioritising sustainable partnerships through capacity building and respectful communication (Clapham et al., 2008; Cullen, Clapham, Byrne, Hunter, Senserrick, et al., 2016; Ivers, Clapham, Senserrick, Lyford, & Stevenson, 2008; Martiniuk, Ivers, Senserrick, Boufous, & Clapham, 2010). This requires in-depth understanding of the context in which the program operates, with input from stakeholders into the evaluation. Drawing from participatory approaches can be a valuable way of involving stakeholders who are impacted by the program at all levels of change (Guijt, 2014; Makhoul, Nakkash, Harpham, & Qutteina, 2014). Further, community trust and respect is critical to ensure that evaluators have an in-depth understanding of community capacity, interest and willingness to participate.

Community partnerships are prioritised in the implementation and evaluation of *Driving Change*. Client feedback and community input is continually sought from local community youth workers and host organisations to ensure that communities have ownership over the solutions developed to address the issues identified by each community. Similarly, input and participation from policy makers and service providers has been sought through a project steering committee that was established to guide implementation and evaluation. This project steering

committee convenes quarterly and includes representatives from the communities, and key stakeholders, including Aboriginal policy officers from a range of Government agencies including Transport for NSW, Roads and Maritime Services, the Attorney General’s Department, and the Office of State Revenue, as well as representatives from program sites. Additionally, each community has connected with an existing local working party to facilitate input of community members and local stakeholders into the development of the program at each site. Representatives from each local community were invited to join the project steering committee. The research team conducting the evaluation reports to this steering committee, thus the local community representatives have input into the evaluation and dissemination of results. The members of the project steering committee are depicted in Figure 1.

Methods

Design

The process evaluation will use a mixed methods approach, with triangulation of program data, semi-structured interviews and program participant discussion groups. The process evaluation plan is outlined in Table 1.

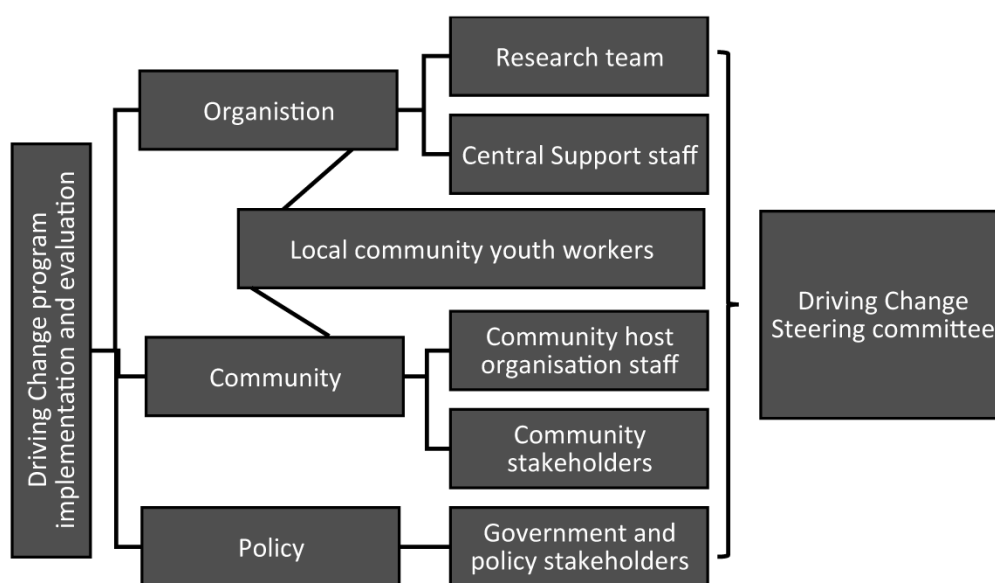


Figure 1. Driving Change Steering Committee membership comprising program staff, research team, community and policy stakeholders

Table 1. Process Evaluation Plan

Process evaluation measure	Process evaluation questions	Data source	Data collection	Data analysis
Reach	1. Were the intended participants with a high level of need being reached?	Program participant data: demographics and intake form	Completed by youth workers at initial participant registration	Descriptive analysis
Fidelity*	2. To what extent was the program implemented as intended?	Semi-structured interviews	In person and telephone interviews with youth workers and central program staff and stakeholders	Thematic analysis
	3. Are the program sites delivering all aspects of the program as intended?	Program participant data: service delivery	Completed by youth workers throughout program delivery	Descriptive analysis
Dosage	4. Is the program delivering sufficient contact and services to meet the needs of Aboriginal people seeking a licence at the program sites?	Program participant data: service delivery, participant contact, licensing outcomes Program participant discussion groups	Completed by youth workers throughout program delivery 2-3 conducted in at least 2 program sites	Regression analysis of service delivery, participant contact and licensing outcomes Thematic analysis
Engagement and acceptability	5. Has the program been effective in engaging communities?	Program stakeholder data	Completed by youth workers and central program staff throughout program delivery	Descriptive analysis of stakeholder data and content review of stakeholder records
	6. Does the program offer licensing support in an acceptable way to communities?	Semi-structured interviews Program participant discussion groups	In person and telephone interviews with youth workers, central program staff and community stakeholders 2-3 conducted in at least 2 program sites	Thematic analysis Thematic analysis
Context	7. What factors facilitated/ inhibited successful implementation of the program?	Semi-structured interviews Program participant discussion groups	In person and telephone interviews with youth workers, central program staff and community stakeholders 2-3 conducted in at least 2 program sites	Thematic analysis Thematic analysis

*Fidelity will be measured as high, medium or low based upon how many of the following program elements are implemented: Birth Certificates assistance; Fines assistance; Literacy assistance; Learner driver mentor program (clients receive supervised driving practice with a community mentor); Financial assistance; Professional driving lessons

Quantitative Data

The *Driving Change* program data (demographic information, program participant interaction, service delivery and licensing outcomes) are collected and managed using REDCap electronic data capture tools hosted at The George Institute for Global Health (Harris et al., 2009). The data collection instruments were developed jointly with the research team, central program staff and program field staff. Continual feedback is sought and provided by staff and consequently the instruments have been refined over time.

Stakeholder data

At the community level of the social ecology model engagement and stakeholder interaction with the program will be measured by reviewing site records that detail the number of stakeholders, the reach of stakeholders to secondary contacts, and the number and type of interactions with community organisations (meetings, committee memberships, collaborations). Similarly, at the policy level of the social ecology, engagement with policy and government stakeholders will be reviewed to determine the reach and nature of these interactions. This data is collected by all program staff (youth workers and central support) at each interaction with stakeholders and community organisations throughout program delivery.

Program participant data

At the individual level of the social ecology, program participant information is collected at baseline and at each interaction with the program. This data is collected by program staff at each site and is accessible to the research team in de-identified format. Participant follow-up data is obtained by central program staff over the telephone using a standardised questionnaire. Attempts will be made to contact all participants by phone for follow-up to review assistance received from the program, licensing, employment and educational outcomes; the follow-up data is collected 6 months after participants' enrolment in the program.

Qualitative Data

Interviews with program staff

At the organisational level of the social ecology model, semi-structured interviews will be conducted with field workers and central program staff during program development and implementation. Staff interviews will focus on the staff experience of developing the program model, engaging with communities, acquiring resources for the program, implementation barriers and facilitators, overcoming challenges to implementation, important outcomes and program sustainability.

Interviews with stakeholders

At both the community and policy level of the social ecology model, stakeholder participants will be sought throughout program implementation from government agencies, community organisations and the *Driving Change*

Steering Committee; purposive sampling will be used to identify key informants to participate in semi-structured interviews (Patton, 1990). Additionally, snowball sampling will be employed with all interviewees asked to recommend other potential interviewees with useful insights or unique perspectives (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Potential stakeholder participants from government and community organisations will be invited to participate by telephone and email; these interviews will be conducted throughout the implementation of the program. Stakeholder interviews will focus on the program context, the need for the program, experiences and expectations of the program, community and stakeholder engagement, implementation barriers and facilitators, important outcomes and program sustainability. Stakeholder interviews will be conducted until data saturation is reached.

Program participant discussion groups

The process evaluation will seek to capture program participant experiences by conducting discussion groups at two or more program sites. Each discussion group will consist of three to five participants and will be conducted in community host organisations throughout program implementation. Discussion groups with program participants will explore experiences with *Driving Change* and obtaining a license, the acceptability of the program model, access to current services as well as service gaps and the impact of existing licensing policy. Further, discussion groups will allow for exploration of both participant and community factors that may facilitate or impair delivery of the program, which will also explore the interaction between the individual, organisational and community levels of the social ecology model. There will be a semi-structured format but there will be flexibility to explore emergent themes and participants will be encouraged put forward issues that they consider important. The question guide for the discussion groups has been developed jointly by a member of the research team and project field staff.

This format has been selected as it facilitates access to a wide cross-section of program participants, and by keeping the groups relatively small a high level of engagement and contribution is expected. Discussion group participants will be recruited via program staff who will inform potential participants about the evaluation; program staff will then facilitate contact with the research team. Additionally, notices requesting participants to take part in the evaluation will also be displayed in community meeting places. The number of discussion groups will be determined by data saturation.

Data Analysis

The quantitative and qualitative data will be simultaneously collected, analysed and then drawn together to provide an integrated understanding of implementation barriers and facilitators. Data collected from program records will allow the research team to determine program specific outcomes (e.g. community engagement, services delivered, completion rates, licensing outcomes). Descriptive analysis (counts and

percentages) will be conducted for this data. Regression analyses will examine the relationship between licensing outcomes, site specific factors and participant factors (including demographics and contact with the program).

Interviews and discussion groups will be voice recorded and transcribed; analysis of the transcribed interview data will be assisted by using Nvivo 10 software (QSR International Pty Ltd, 2012). The data analysis will occur simultaneously with data collection to facilitate an iterative process.

Accordingly, there will be some analysis and emergence of preliminary concepts during early data collection and transcription, which can then be explored and developed in subsequent interviews. A framework method of analysis will be used to generate categories and codes and will incorporate both deductive (pre-determined) and inductive (emergent) thematic analysis. This approach allows for the exploration of specific themes (e.g. barriers and facilitators of implementation) while not restricting the emergence of unanticipated themes (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013). Further, this type of analysis will involve within and cross-case analysis to explore themes and interpret meaning across each level of the social ecology model. The research team will consult regularly with co-authors and seek feedback from program staff and the program steering committee.

Ethics

This project has been approved by the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH & MRC) of NSW. The program data will be collected by the program staff and provided to the research team in de-identified form only. Only the research team will have access to the de-identified program data. No other identifying information about study participants will be made available in any reports, presentations or other formats. Data at the community level will be presented but will be aggregated to ensure that no individual data is made available.

An information sheet will be provided to qualitative study participants who will be asked for written consent to participate. It will be emphasised to participants that the data collected will be confidential and de-identified. Further, they will be advised that participation is voluntary and they can opt out at any point during the interview or discussion group.

Discussion

Driver licensing inequality has been recognised as a contributor to transport disadvantage and reduced health outcomes in Aboriginal communities. While the need for culturally responsive licensing support programs has been identified, there is minimal information about the effectiveness or acceptability of such programs for Aboriginal people as few programs have been formally evaluated. This context-informed process evaluation, underpinned by a social ecological framework, seeks to evaluate the implementation of a community-based driver licensing support program. Reach, fidelity and dosage will be examined to ensure a robust program implementation that

is targeting high level of need with sufficient level of service delivery. Evaluation of multi-site and complex community interventions must take into account context in which the program operates (Funnell & Rogers, 2011; Makhoul et al., 2014). Accordingly this process evaluation will draw on multiple data sources to produce a cohesive understanding of contextual factors that facilitate and impede implementation.

Understanding the impact of context, and in particular cultural context is crucial to programs that are based within Aboriginal communities. Programs that neglect to seek feedback from communities and consider the impact of cultural values can experience poor uptake and lack of community engagement. The formative evaluation of *Driving Change* revealed that change should be targeted at multiple levels of change beyond the individual client and must consider the impact of the organisation, communities and authorising environment. Further, the exploration of contextual factors identified that level of need and community response to the program was variable. Thereby, this process evaluation seeks to understand the program's responsiveness to cultural and community needs, and will hence explore the acceptability of the program and engagement with communities. This is essential to ensure that the program is working with communities, benefiting from the input of cultural values and sharing ownership of local solutions rather than imposing a rigid model of delivery upon Aboriginal communities.

While it is not uncommon for process evaluations to take context into account this is generally at the final stages of evaluation rather than in the development of the evaluation framework. The process of exploring context early in the implementation and evaluation of the program was crucial to understanding the variable impact on communities and establishing an appropriate evaluation framework (Cullen, Clapham, Byrne, Hunter, Senserrick, et al., 2016). It is critical that evaluators, particularly those working with complex community interventions consider the impact of context at all stages of the evaluation.

Conclusions

This process evaluation will be important to informing sustainable delivery models and success of the *Driving Change* program but it also contributes to better understanding of the needs of Aboriginal communities around licensing support. This context-informed evaluation will contribute to establishing best practice guidelines for implementing community licensing programs and for delivering equitable access to the licensing system for Aboriginal communities in Australia. Further, it is anticipated that this context-informed approach will provide impetus for evaluators to explore context at the early stages of implementation and evaluation so that it may direct the evaluation framework. This pragmatic approach can be used by evaluators of complex and multi-site community interventions to incorporate contextual variables into the evaluation framework to comprehensively address all areas of need.

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