



## NEWSLETTER • Edition 3 • May 2026



This is the third newsletter from the WAACHS Linked Data Study, a study that has been funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Synergy Grant 2023-2028 (GNT2018970). After a lengthy development period and team establishment, we are now immersed in the research work program and wanting to share our progress.

### WAACHS Linked Data Study areas of research (sub-studies)

- Infectious disease (including skin, ears, respiratory infections)
- Mental health, trauma and suicidality
- Hazardous substance use and substance use disorders
- Chronic diseases (including diabetes and cardiovascular disease)
- Growth, development and neurodisability
- Involvement in the child protection system
- Involvement in Justice system
- Education engagement

### UPDATE ON SUB-STUDY RESEARCH

Good progress is being made by the Investigator teams working across the sub-studies, with one paper on the developmental characteristics of the WAACHS children recently submitted

for publication and several papers are being written up.

The **infectious disease sub-study team** have found what proportions of Aboriginal (and non-Aboriginal) children have otitis media, respiratory and skin infection related hospital admissions up to age 16, and for the Aboriginal children, how that relates to parent report of repeated infections in the WAACHS. They have also examined links between otitis media and schooling outcomes. Related to that is another important paper focused on potentially preventable hospitalisations in childhood, initially in all children, with the next step looking just at children with intellectual disability.

Investigators in the **child protection sub-study team** have used the WAACHS and child protection system data to examine the link between historical forced removal from families (parents and grandparents) and involvement of the WAACHS children in the child protection system. This paper is under development.

The **justice sub-study team** have drafted a paper on early life determinants (protective and risk factors in the first 10 years) of youth justice involvement among Aboriginal children. We look across 'domains' including child development,

kinship and culture, social and economic wellbeing, stress and trauma, and community and school factors.

Both the **mental health and substance use sub-study teams** are studying early warning signs for substance use and mental health related problems. For mental health, the focus is on 4-11-year-olds, and where services may have made a difference to outcomes into young adulthood. For substance use, associations

between self-report of substance use by WAACHS youth (12-17year olds) and substance use disorders identified in linked service data are being examined.

As findings come to light, and these papers are starting to be written up, we are seeking input via different ways to gain community feedback, including from those with lived experience or with expertise on the topics.



## **WE ARE CURRENTLY SEEKING EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST FOR CHILD PROTECTION AND JUSTICE SUB-TOPIC REFERENCE GROUPS**

**(Contact us to register your interest for any of the topic areas.)**

- Do you have lived experience and/or expertise as a health or other professional on any of our topic areas?
- Do you work in relevant services and organisations (government and community sector)?
- Were you a parent or child that was a part of the survey and would like to be involved?

### **WHY BE INVOLVED?**

An opportunity to advocate for culturally safe, accurate and respectful interpretation and reporting of research findings, reflecting community strengths and challenges.

### **COMMITMENTS**

- Looking for a maximum of 12 per group, representing a breadth of experience and knowledge, and representatives from metropolitan and regional areas.
- It is anticipated that there will be two formal meetings of a Topic Reference Group per year with opportunities to join in person or online for no more than 2 hours at a time.
- If you can't commit to formal meetings of the Topic Reference Group, there may be other opportunities to be part of a pool of interested people who could be called upon for other feedback meetings or processes.
- For 2026, we are prioritising the formation of the Justice and Child Protection Groups.

## Meet the team

### Steering Committee Profile – Heather D’Antoine

#### Where are you from?

I was born in Broome and grew up in Derby, and I have lived in Darwin since 2010.

#### Who’s your mob?

I am a Bardi woman from the West Kimberley

#### Where are you working and what is your role?

I am currently employed at The University of Queensland as a Hub Coordinator, NEXGEN Hub, OCHRe. Our collaborations in Health Research aims to establish a culturally secure and inclusive network of Indigenous researchers across Australia and sovereign Indigenous Nations, that builds unique skills at the interface of culture, science, and health research and translates to improvements in the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

#### What inspired you to join the steering committee for the WAACHS Linked Data Study?

I became involved with WAACHS about 25 years ago when I took up the position of Manager of Kulunga at the then Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, now The Kids Research Institute Australia. Hence, I already had the privilege of working with Francis Mitrou and Steve Zubrick when they were analysing the data from the WAACHS survey, and later with Glenn Pearson when the reports were being written up. I was honoured to be asked to be involved with WAACHS again as a member of the Steering Committee. I am keen to see the outcomes produced by the Synergy Grant that benefit First Nations people in Western Australia.



### Analyst Profile – Tahera Ahmed

#### Where are you from?

I am originally from Bangladesh: a country located in South Asia.

#### What is your role?

In the WAACHS project, I am working as a Postdoctoral Researcher, primary focusing on data analysis

#### How long have you been with the WAACHS team?

I have been with the WAACHS team for one year, having started my position in February 2025

#### What do you do in your role?

I am currently working on two sub-studies: Child Protection and Chronic Disease, both of which address areas of critical importance for Aboriginal children in Western Australia. Through this work, I contribute to the WAACHS project by transforming complex and large-scale linked data into clear, meaningful insights that directly support research objectives and informed team decision making.

In the Child Protection sub-study, I am investigating how intergenerational forced separation affects Aboriginal children’s involvement with the child protection system and identifying which factors contribute to WAACHS children being apart of the child protection system.

In the Chronic Disease sub-study, my focus is on Type 2 diabetes. I am looking into whether children who develop Type 2 diabetes are more likely to be hospitalised, experience different disease patterns, or spend more time in hospital for any reason compared with children without Type 2 diabetes, as well as the lifestyle and family factors associated with developing Type 2 diabetes.

## Community Engagement

Some of the study team attended training delivered by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation – Decolonising Data Evaluation and Research. Wungening teams presented on their decolonizing data research journey, approach and the learnings they gathered.

**Jannine Taylor**, Community Engagement Coordinator attended a 3- day training course at Nulungu Research Institute, The University of Notre Dame, Broome campus on Introduction to Aboriginal Research Methods for Aboriginal people.

The training covered a range of topics from:

- Aboriginal research methods
- Ethics, values, consent
- Data genocide
- Cultural governance
- Learning from, and with country and people
- Listening, spirit, country – an earth centric approach to holistic health

## Staff Update

**Phoebe Harrington** has moved on from her role as Project Coordinator. She is now working with Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa (KJ) organisation in the East Pilbara. We wish her all the best in her new role.

We welcome **Joanne Readman** to the WAACHS team as our new Project Coordinator. Jo began her career as a Registered nurse, transitioning to education and health promotion working across schools and government departments. She is strongly committed to child and family wellbeing. Jo brings years of experience in planning and organisation, reporting, budgeting and stakeholder engagement. She is looking forward to supporting the research team to deliver critical work aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families.



**Jannine Taylor**

**Community Engagement Coordinator**

E • [Jannine.Taylor@thekids.org.au](mailto:Jannine.Taylor@thekids.org.au)



**Jo Readman**

**Project Coordinator**

E • [Joanne.Readman@thekids.org.au](mailto:Joanne.Readman@thekids.org.au)

## Latest Publications



[Cohort profile: Understanding the influence of early life environments and health and social service system contacts over time and across generations through the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey \(WAACHS\) Linked Data Study | BMJ Open](#)