

Putting BlakAbility in the spotlight: Creating systemic and policy change for First Nations people with a disability

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Aims/Objectives: What was the purpose what you did? Why is your topic important? What did you want to change? What difference did you want to make?

In 2024 Dr Sheelagh Daniels- Mayes secured an Australian Research Council grant for a 5-year project aiming to improve life outcomes of Indigenous people living with a disability working or studying in Australian Universities. The research team will introduce the project and let people know how they might get involved. This is the first national research project in Australia looking at the needs of Indigenous staff and students working and studying in universities.

Methods/Process: Who was involved? What did you do? (100 words)

The research methods for this project are based on participatory action research using yarning and serial interviewing. This approach involves collaboration as equal partners between researchers and community members. Researchers and participants will meet six times over three years to hear what is working and what is not working in universities. We will also analyse policies and speak with university leaders about their experiences with supporting Indigenous staff and students who live with a disability. We aim to pilot and evaluate new ways to inform the development of culturally safe, disability confident practices within and beyond universities.

Results: What did you find? What changed? What difference did you make? What did you learn?

This project shines a light on what is called intersectionality which means that people experience discrimination because of different factors of who they are (e.g. being Indigenous, living with disability).

The Indigenous perspective of disability, and the barriers that exist for engagement in employment and study are considerations that need to inform policy and practice in all places of employment and study. We want to invite Indigenous people living with a disability who either work or are employed by a university to join us in this project. We want all disabilities represented.

Conclusion: How could other people use what you found out? What would you recommend other people do based on what you did and what you found out?

Indigenous people who have a disability are often poorly treated. We also know that there are Indigenous people with disability doing wonderful things that aren't recognised. So far, ways of addressing this in workplaces or universities have not been studied.

Universities in Australia, employ over 130,000 people, (excluding contractors for catering, gardening, cleaning, security etc). There are also over 1.6 million students. So, if we can show how to better support Indigenous people living with a disability in universities, we are confident that large employers such as the Australian Public Service, Woolworths and Coles, will learn from this project.

Alignment with the Conference Theme: How does your proposal address the conference theme of 'New Frontiers'? How does your proposal showcase something new we can do to make the world a better place for people with disability? (50 words)

This research is focused on securing the input and participation of Indigenous students and staff living with a disability. It is Indigenous designed and led and provides a way forward for other projects that are aiming to bring about systemic change to privilege Indigenous voice.