



CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings contained in this mid- Project Evaluation Report the evaluators concluded the ACIMH Program is fulfilling its aims and meeting its program objectives. As at November 2013:

- The Program had increased Aboriginal employment in community mental health sector by successfully recruiting 46 Aboriginal trainees, with 37 retained and continuing with the Program
- Based on very positive stakeholder feedback, across all respondent groups- trainees, host organisation staff, mentors and external stakeholders- the Program was found to have built the capacity of the participating mental health organisations with evidence to suggest that each of the eight host organisations had :
 - improved their capacity to employ and support Aboriginal workers
 - updated, or were in the process of updating, their internal policies and practices to make them more culturally appropriate
 - in general were aware of the need to be more culturally appropriate in their internal operations, and to ensure non trainee staff were supporting the trainees as much as possible
- The Program was found to be adequately assisting the Aboriginal trainees to develop skills and knowledge to work in the community mental health sector. For example, the vast majority of stakeholders, including individual trainees and their supervisors, reported significant improvements in trainees' capacity as a result of the Program including in the core competency areas of:
 - knowledge of mental health
 - skills in working in the mental health sector
 - confidence and capacity in learning and studying
 - overall professional and personal development.
- The Program was also found to be on track to increase Aboriginal engagement in vocation education and training with significant numbers of trainees in survey responses, interviews and focus groups indicating their wish to continue with some form of education or training following the completion of this Program. (This issue will be more systematically investigated in 2014 when trainees are drawing to the end of their certificate training as part of the Program.)
- Early feedback also suggests the Program is starting to have impacts on better engaging and supporting Aboriginal consumers and communities, though at this stage the evidence is only anecdotal. This issue will also be further investigated in 2014.

As at November 2013, all stakeholder groups expressed satisfaction with the Program to date, with clear benefits consistent with the Program aims.

For trainees, the major benefits were defined as:

- having access to quality education and training while in paid employment
- opportunity to study and develop a career in a culturally appropriate context
- being able to learn new skills and knowledge with the opportunity to then utilise these skills in the workplace
- future job prospects, particularly within mental health
- opportunities to meet, network, and share ideas and experiences with other Aboriginal trainees.

When trainees were asked to rate how happy they were with the traineeship program overall, the vast majority reported being very happy with the Program.

For host organisations, the major benefits were defined as:

- having a structured means of recruiting, training and supporting new Aboriginal staff
- having the means to support Aboriginal staff in the workplace, including through peer-to-peer options, access to mentors and to expert Program staff
- having opportunities to improve the organisation's internal policies and practices as well as an expanded capacity to work with Aboriginal communities
- being part of a sector reform program focused on expanding the Aboriginal workforce.

All stakeholders highly rated the utility and value of the Program's block training sessions. They also rated the various Program resources very highly. The Program website and *Yarn Up* newsletter were reported as being particularly of particular value and use to Program participants.

Stakeholders were very positive about the overall Program management and operations. There was unanimous praise for the quality of support and advice provided by the MHCC Program staff.

Stakeholders reported high levels of satisfaction with the level of access and communications with key ACIMH staff. Many participants commented on the fact that when issues had been raised, they were generally responded to in a timely, professional and supportive manner. This included the management of a number of sensitive workplace issues, including matters that ended in trainees exiting the Program. This was also confirmed in trainee exit interviews with various references to the quality of support provided by Program staff.

In general, the major challenges identified in the evaluation were associated with maintaining the positive momentum established to date, including ensuring the trainees are able to continue to “juggle” their study and work commitment up unto graduation.

The evaluators concluded that the ACIMH Program was tracking extremely well, with overall very positive feedback from participants about their ongoing involvement in the Program.

It is anticipated that the final evaluation report, due in late 2014, will be able to expand on the positive results to date, notwithstanding the possibility of some further exits from the Program.