A MATTER OF URGENCY! REMOTE ABORIGINAL WOMEN’S HEALTH:

Examining the transfer, adaptation and implementation of an established holistic Aboriginal Well Women’s Health program from one remote community to another with similar needs and characteristics.

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Candidate’s Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without any acknowledgement, any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signed  Jillian Mary Graham Mitchell
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Glossary of Terms

Aboriginal - A person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent; - this is often the preferred title by Aboriginal people for themselves.

Capacity building - 'an approach to the development of sustainable skills, organisable structures, resources and commitment to health improvement in health and other sectors'. Better Choices Better Health p 199

Cross Cultural - A term used to express an awareness of more than one culture also used as awareness that people of other cultures have different needs, values and experiences and lifestyles (Shine SA Cultural Training Package, 2000.

Community - is seen as a geographical concept a group of people living in a particular local area, or it can be known as having a psychological sense of membership, as aligned with social networks or associations.

Cultural respect - Refers to the recognition, protection and continued advancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is achieved when cultural differences are respected. (AHMAC 2003)

Equity - 'Fairness, people's needs meet the distribution of opportunities for well being' (Better Choices Better Health p 199)

General Practitioner - 'a medical practitioner who provides primary comprehensive and continuing care (where possible) to patients and their families within the community'.(Royal Australian College of General Practitioners cited in Better Choices Better Health p199)

Health Promotion - '…A process of enabling people to increase control of the determinants of health and thereby improve their health ' (Better Choices Better Health p 199).

Health Status - 'a description and/or measurement of the health of an individual or population at a particular point in time against identifiable standards ' Better Choices Better Health p200

Indicator - 'A specific measure for assessing progress against goals,…that reflects, directly or indirectly, the performance of an intervention … in maintaining or increasing the wellbeing of its target population ' (Better Choices Better Health p 200)

Indigenous - A popular term used in Australia to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people actually translated it means ‘born to the land’. This could also
be applied to other non-Indigenous people and therefore many Aboriginal people are concerned about the correctness of this term.

**Medicare** - 'Australia's universal health insurance scheme introduced in 1984. Australia's public hospital system is funded jointly by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and is administered by state or territory health departments. The Health Insurance Commission administers the Medicare program which includes enrolments and benefits' (*Better Choices Better Health* p 200).

**Outcome** - 'A measurable change in the health of an individual, a group of people or a population, which is attributable to an intervention or a series of interventions.' *Better Choices Better Health* p 200

**Oppression** - The systemic use of power or authority to treat others unjustly.

**Quality of life** - 'An individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value system where they live and in relation to their goals and expectations, standards and concerns.' *Better Choices Better Health* p 201

**Social determinants of health** - specific features of and pathways by which societal conditions affect health and that potentially can be altered by informed action. *Better Choices Better Health* p 201

**Standardised mortality rate** - 'the number of deaths in the population within a year expressed as a percentage of deaths that would be expected if the population concerned had experienced the same sex and age related specific mortality rates as those recorded for a population as a whole'. *Better Choices Better Health* p 201

**Whitefellas** - A term used by some Aboriginal people to describe non Aboriginal people

*Reference.*

Abbreviations and Acronyms

ABS - Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCHS – Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service
AHAC - Aboriginal Health Advisory Committee
AHCSA - Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia
AHS – Aboriginal Health Strategy
AHW - Aboriginal Health worker
AMA - Australian Medical Association
AHMAC - Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council
ATSIC - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
AWWH Aboriginal Well Women’s Health
CRCATH – Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health
DHS - Department of Human Services
HIV - Human Immunodeficiency Virus
MBS - Medicare Benefits Scheme
MSHR – Menzies School of Health Research
NAHS - National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NATSIHC – National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council
NHMRC – National Health and Medical Research Council
NPHP – National Public Health Partnership
NPY WC - Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women’s Council
SHINE SA - Sexual Health Information Networking and Education South Australia
SMR - Standardised Mortality Ratio
STIs – Sexually transmitted Infections
WHO - World Health Organisation
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PREFACE

Introducing my interest in remote Aboriginal health

My allure to Indigenous health began many years ago when I first completed my nursing registration and moved to Darwin for my husband’s work commitments. The Northern Territory provided me with an opportunity to work with the Commonwealth Home Nursing Service. This community-established health service included school children, Fanny Bay gaol prisoners, people requiring home visits in Darwin as well as those further “down the track”. There were a high proportion of Aboriginal clients and some of these lived ‘out bush’ at least 18 km from any amenity. It was often difficult to locate these clients as they moved to where food and water were available. During my stay I learnt much about the multiple health problems of this community. When I returned to Adelaide to undertake midwifery training, an essential requirement to complement my general nursing skills, my goal was to return to the Northern Territory as soon as possible. However, I was unable to return as intended.

Some years later, I filled a temporary remote nursing role, relieving the solitary Registered Nurse in Fregon, a remote community in the Pitjantjatjara Lands of Far North West South Australia (SA). This Aboriginal community had a population that varied from 180 to 400 people, depending on the time of year and ceremonies taking place. Over the Christmas period, my family, together with two office workers and two mechanics, were the only non-Aboriginal persons (“whitefellas”) in the community, as all teaching and administration staff had headed south for holidays and family reunions. It was a welcoming community and my work involved a daily
routine of providing clinics, occasional midwifery services and using my trauma and suturing skills. I remember one man who sat patiently through the seventeen sutures I applied to his wound, which had occurred when his tomahawk tool used for carving wood, held by his feet, missed its target and sliced cleanly through his calf.

My worst experience was trying to suture my own son's arm in a stifling hot clinic, with what appeared to be dozens of large dark eyes peering through the window. All were interested in the noise forthcoming from my seven-year-old who had slipped climbing the iron fence surrounding the house. Nevertheless, I enjoyed the work and living in the community, but all too soon it was time to leave.

Idealistically, I made myself a promise that at some time in the future, I would again use my nursing skills to assist Aboriginal health and although it is now many years later, I believe this study has offered this opportunity.

To convey and clarify to the reader about my role in this research and its findings, I will use the first person from time to time. To maintain confidentiality, the name of the recipient remote community in South Australia has not been identified and it has been referred to as ‘the recipient remote community’.