

Evidence-informed framework to Re-focus qualitative health services research

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Background

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) are a common way of gathering qualitative data in Aboriginal health services research. However there has been little investigation of their appropriateness as research tools in such contexts, nor are there guidelines available to ensure that FGDs are delivered to collect data in ways that are consistent with Aboriginal approaches to consultation, ownership and ways of knowing.

Objectives

This paper presents findings from the Re-focus study: an in-depth, qualitative study of FGDs funded by the ARC. It aims to describe how health services researchers employ FGDs in Aboriginal contexts, identify how evidence based on FGDs is valued by health policy makers and explore Aboriginal experiences of FGDs. Findings from the study are presented to illustrate the development of a comprehensive evidence-informed framework for appraising, designing and undertaking FGD research in such contexts.

Method

Interviews were conducted with researchers, government policy makers and Aboriginal participants of FGDs. These provided insight into the methodological and theoretical underpinnings of FGD research and procedures, the role of Aboriginal participants and the value of FGD and qualitative evidence for health policy decision making.

Results

A model for FGD research has been developed in collaboration with interview participants. This stage is a validation of the framework and prioritises Aboriginal narratives, experiences and knowledge along with perspectives from practitioners and users of FGDs. Guidelines will be widely disseminated and promoted to support greater research benefit for participants and provide a resource for conducting FGDs in ways that are culturally appropriate, ethically sound and rigorous.