

Overview of the IRONBARK STUDY

What is the study about?

The Ironbark Study is comparing two different programs aimed at improving health and wellbeing of older Aboriginal people. Both involve an ongoing program delivered weekly by a local person, in a community setting. The **Ironbark: Standing Strong** program is a weekly exercise and discussion program, and the **Ironbark: Healthy Community** program is a weekly program that involves discussions and social activities.

Who is conducting the research?

The study is being conducted by researchers from The George Institute for Global Health, The University of NSW, The University of Sydney, Flinders University, Wollongong University and Curtin University.

What does the study involve?

Services participating in the study are randomly assigned to either receiving the **Ironbark: Standing Strong** program or the **Ironbark: Healthy Community** program. Both programs aim to improve the health and wellbeing of older Aboriginal people.

At the end of the trial, sites that delivered the Ironbark: Healthy Community program will have the opportunity to deliver the Ironbark: Standing Strong program for a further 6 months, including all resources and equipment needed.

Being a site in the study involves recruiting 10 - 15 eligible Aboriginal people aged 45 years or older to participate in a weekly facilitated meetings at a culturally appropriate and accessible venue.

Participants

Participants must be: of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent; aged 45 years or older; living independently; prepared to attend the program weekly.

People cannot participate if: they have not gone outside without physical assistance from another person in the past month; they have been diagnosed with dementia; they have a medical condition precluding exercise (e.g., unstable cardiac disease).

People who do not fit the criteria, including non-Aboriginal family and community, will be able to attend classes but data collected will not be included in the trial.

What data will be collected?

A health assessment will be conducted with all participants by the study research assistants. This includes an interview where they will be asked about health and wellbeing, including questions about medication, sleep, physical activity and diet. Participants will also be asked to do some simple tests to measure their health, including strength and balance, and waist circumference. The interview and tests will take around one hour to complete.

Participants will be asked a few questions each week about their health, sleep, falls and physical activity. These will take only 1-2 minutes to complete.

Every three months they will be asked some questions about their health, lifestyle and enjoyment of the program, and asked to complete some simple tests to measure strength and balance. These tests and questions will take about 30 minutes to complete.

At the end of the program participants will repeat the health assessment. This will include an interview where they will also be asked about quality of life and physical activity.

Ironbark: Standing Strong program

Sites allocated the Standing Strong program will be supported to deliver a weekly class that runs for around 1.5 hours - about 30 – 45 minutes is exercises, and 30 – 45 minutes will be a yarning circle facilitated by a trained worker. The program will run for the whole year, with additional weekly home exercise recommended.

Participants will be required to provide a form from their doctor indicating they are physically fit enough to do the class.

Ironbark: Healthy Community program

Sites allocated the Healthy Community program will be supported to deliver weekly yarning circles. The yarning circles will include discussions and activities that are important to community wellbeing and possibly social activities. Guest speakers may attend the program on request of the group.

How will the study benefit Aboriginal communities?

Being involved in the study will benefit participants directly by creating additional opportunities for them to meet with family and community, discuss topics important to older Aboriginal people, and have their experiences included in the findings.

The study will also contribute to employment opportunities for local Aboriginal people to participate as site managers and/or program facilitators.

It is also expected that the findings of the study will build on the evidence base around appropriate wellbeing programs for older Aboriginal people, and inform national policy development in this area.

What is needed from participating services?

We plan to recruit 60 Aboriginal community or health services in NSW, Western Australia and South Australia into the Ironbark Trial. Services need to;

- Be well established within their local Aboriginal community, and have existing relationships
- Be able to offer programs or services specifically for older Aboriginal people, and can recruit 10 – 15 eligible participants. Groups should not already be doing a regular exercise program.

- Have existing Aboriginal staff working at the service who are willing to oversee program delivery on a weekly basis over the duration of the trial
- Utilise a culturally appropriate venue that is accessible to participants
- Be willing to actively participate in both the program delivery and research components of this trial.

How will our service be supported to participate in the study?

The Study team will provide sites:

- Funding to employ locally based staff on a casual basis
- Weekly stipend to cover cost of morning/afternoon tea for group meetings
- **Ironbark: Standing Strong** program sites will receive training and ongoing support on delivering the program, the Ironbark: Standing Strong and Tall Manual and handouts, all equipment needed to deliver the exercise program
- **Ironbark: Healthy Community** program sites will receive training and ongoing support to deliver the program, resources to facilitate discussions and organise activities.
- At the end of the trial, sites that delivered the Ironbark: Healthy Community program will have the opportunity to deliver the Ironbark: Standing Strong program, including all resources and equipment needed
- All sites will receive site specific data from the study, as well as information about the results of the research

What will happen to the results?

All participating sites will receive copies of the findings of the study, in a format that is accessible to staff and community. Sites will also receive site specific information about the findings.

To inform program and policy development, we will also be disseminating the findings through peer review publications, reports to the funding body, presentations and reports to policy makers and to key stakeholders such as peak Aboriginal health and other organisations.

The findings will be presented in a non-identifying way, to maintain confidentiality of sites and individuals involved. Only the site managers will have access to non identifying information on participants, for emergency purposes and for accurate data collection.

Consent

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary – sites and services can stop at any time. All participants (sites and individuals), will be required to sign a consent form, prior to participation.