

Aboriginal women's experiences of strengths and challenges of antenatal care in the Kimberley

Why was this study done?

High-quality antenatal care (pregnancy time check-ups) is important for all women and their babies. For Aboriginal women, antenatal care services need to be culturally safe. Asking women about what happened during their antenatal care and how they felt is one way of finding out about how good the care was. As part of the Nini Helthiwan project, Aboriginal women in the Kimberley were asked about their antenatal care, to better understand what services are like now and how they might be made better.

How was this study done?

Throughout the Kimberley, 124 Aboriginal women shared their stories. These women had antenatal care in 2015–2018. Most of the women talked to people from the project team during a health assessment (the mother and baby check-up time), and some women had a longer yarn with an Aboriginal researcher.

What did we find out?

Most of these women expressed that overall they had a good antenatal care experience. There were five main messages in what the women said:

- 1) Positive (good) relationships with antenatal care providers are very important.
- 2) The support that women get from their family (the whole family, including extended family members) during pregnancy helps a lot.
- 3) It is hard having to travel for care, and the Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS) doesn't cover everything that is needed, especially a support person for women having a baby.
- 4) Pregnancy, health and medical information needs to be given to women in a way that is right for the woman, to match the women's individual needs.
- 5) Care experiences are better if health services are easy to access, have enough staff, and have staff who know the women. A few women spoke about Aboriginal Health Workers being part of their antenatal care, and said it would be good if these staff had a bigger role in antenatal care and there were more.

What does this mean?

There were very good care experiences with some midwives and other antenatal care providers, who women trusted and could talk with. However, there were a lot of staff changes and there weren't many Aboriginal antenatal staff. The experiences shared by these Kimberley women add to evidence from other parts of Australia, showing a need to improve culturally safe antenatal care for all Aboriginal women. This includes having more local Aboriginal antenatal care providers. There also needs to be more support for the large number of women and their families who need to travel for care.

Thank you to the women and who participated in this research, and the many health services involved in the Nini Helthiwan project.

There are more stories in the full paper:

K Seear, E Spry, E Carlin, D Atkinson, JV Marley. Aboriginal women's experiences of strengths and challenges of antenatal care in the Kimberley: a qualitative study. *Women and Birth*. 2021; <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.wombi.2020.12.009>

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