



**NEWSLETTER** • Edition 1 • June 2025



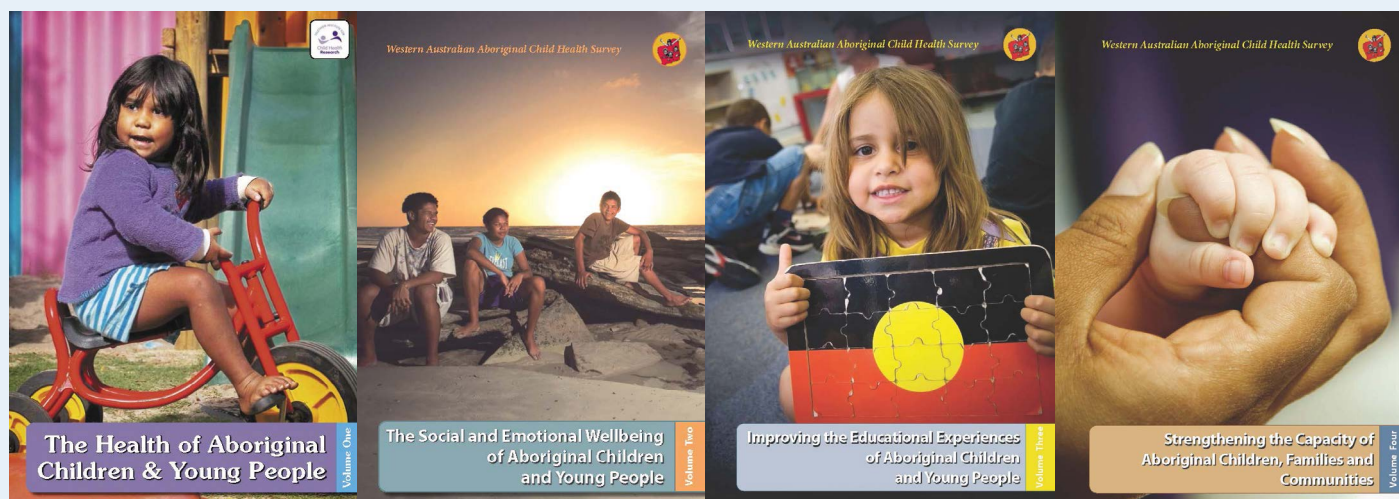
This is the first newsletter from the WAACHS Linked Data Study, a study that has been funded by a National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Synergy Grant 2023-2028 (GNT2018970).

After a lengthy development period and team establishment, we are now immersed in the research work program wanting to share our progress.

**What is the WA Aboriginal Child Health Survey (WAACHS Data Linkage Study)**

This study is a partnership between researchers, the Aboriginal community and government to provide evidence for policy and practice addressing high priority health conditions for Aboriginal children and families. It will use a longitudinal linked dataset based on a population representative sample of Aboriginal children and their families (the 2000/02 Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey) and government data across health, education, child protection, and justice domains. This data will be used to identify how early life environments and social and cultural factors contribute to Aboriginal health outcomes, and where and when intervention can be most effective. The WAACHS Data Linkage Study is governed by an Aboriginal Steering Committee.

The WAACHS was the largest and most comprehensive survey ever undertaken on, the health, wellbeing & development of WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. It produced four Volumes of findings:



## WAACHS Linked Data Study areas of research (sub-studies)

- mental health, trauma and suicidality
- chronic physical diseases (eg diabetes)
- growth, development and neurodisability
- hazardous substance use and substance use disorders
- education engagement
- justice system involvement
- child protection involvement

## What are the possible benefits to the Aboriginal community?

- new knowledge describing pathways to Aboriginal disparities in health, education and child protection and justice systems, and evidence to inform policy initiatives aimed at Closing the Gap.
- a resource for government and non-government agencies for developing effective and targeted policies and programs to support vulnerable children, families and communities.
- a source of local information to be communicated to Aboriginal families and communities.
- a powerful advocacy tool to be used by Aboriginal organisations to lobby for better policies and services to meet identified needs.
- a basis for the development of translational projects within The Kids Research Institute Australia in the form of a place-based, community-designed response to the needs identified.

## MEET THE TEAMS | In each newsletter we will feature members of the Investigator and Study teams, and the Aboriginal Steering Committee.

### Study Team

#### Sarah Johnson

Sarah has been at The Kids since 2005. Her research interests and expertise include parents, child and adolescent mental health, social determinants, survey & evaluation methodology, data analysis and reporting. She has been working on the development of this Study since 2017 and played a key role in obtaining the linked administrative data and writing the successful grant application. As Senior Research Fellow, Sarah works closely with the Investigators and analysts on the team in each of the sub-study areas and is committed to delivering meaningful outputs for the community.

#### Phoebe Harrington

Phoebe is a Noongar woman born and raised in Perth with family ties to Southern Western Australia. She is employed as the Project Coordinator. In her role she provides critical support across project management, financial and administrative functions, facilitating vital research aimed at improving outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. With a broad professional background in community engagement, volunteer coordination, early years education and special needs support, Phoebe brings a wealth of experience working alongside vulnerable children and their families, further enriching her contributions to impactful community-based research.

#### Jannine Taylor

Jannine is currently employed as the Aboriginal Community Engagement Coordinator and a Noongar/Yamitji woman born and raised in Perth. She has worked as an Aboriginal Health Worker/Health Practitioner, Family Support Worker, Family Case Worker, for over 25 years working in ACCHO's and mainstream organisations and health services in WA, NSW and Vic.



Sarah Johnson, Phoebe Harrington and Jannine Taylor

## Original 4 Researchers



### Professor Francis Mitrou - from the WAACHS 2000-02

Francis is currently Head of Human Development and Community Wellbeing. He has many years of experience in the design, conduct and management of large-scale population surveys of adults, children and their families, including Indigenous families. He has expertise in the use of linked administrative data for research, Indigenous health and wellbeing, and economic evaluation, with a focus on child and adolescent mental health, social disadvantage, and life course trajectories. His research goal is to make a positive difference in the lives of disadvantaged children and families through the application of a life course approach to human capability research, whereby targeted, evidence-based population intervention can help prevent entrenchment of costly disadvantage.



### Professor Helen Milroy

Helen is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of WA but was born and educated in Perth. She is Australia's first Indigenous doctor and child psychiatrist. She is the Stan Perron Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Perth Children's Hospital and University of WA and Honorary Research Fellow at The Kids Research Institute, where she is Co-Director of the Embrace research collaboration. Helen is also an artist and published author and illustrator of children's books. She has been shortlisted for several children's literature awards and received the 2021 Whitley Award for best early childhood reader for Backyard Birds.



### Associate Professor Glenn Pearson

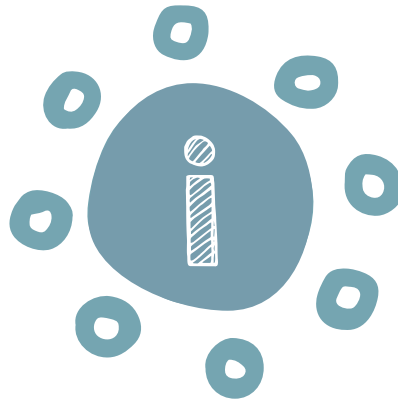
Glenn is of Noongar descent and the Director of First Nations Strategy and Leadership at The Kids Institute. A member of the Executive team his position leads the implementation of the Institute's Reconciliation Action Plan and brings to this role 15 years of experience in senior positions within Government in a range of areas including health, education and child protection. Glenn's primary role of research is in Strep A/ Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) where he is the Team Co Lead for the Strep A Translation Team as well as the Indigenous lead in Australian Strep A Vaccine Alliance (ASAVI). Glenn is an Associate Professor at UWA.



### Professor Steve Zubrick

Stephen holds a Professorial appointment in the Centre for Child Health Research at the UWA and is an Honorary Emeritus Research Fellow at The Kids Institute. Trained in the USA at the University of Michigan he holds qualifications in clinical and neuropsychology as well as speech pathology and audiology. He worked in WA hospitals and outpatient health and mental health settings for many years before commencing work in 1991 at The Kids Institute. Over the past 20 years he has been instrumental in designing and implementing the leading Australian studies of child and adolescent mental health.





## EXPRESSION OF INTEREST

Are you interested in being on a sub study advisory group for the WAACHS Linked Data Study, helping researchers address concerns for Aboriginal children, families and communities?

Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and have current or previous experience sitting on advisory groups or committees?

Do you have experience and/or expertise on any of our sub study topic areas? We would love to hear from you.

Where you a parent or child that was a part of the survey and would like to be involved?

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**For further information or to send an expression of interest by email contact:**



**Jannine Taylor**

**Community Engagement Coordinator**

E • [Jannine.Taylor@thekids.org.au](mailto:Jannine.Taylor@thekids.org.au)



**Phoebe Harrington**

**Project Coordinator**

E • [Phoebe.Harrington@thekids.org.au](mailto:Phoebe.Harrington@thekids.org.au)

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## Latest Publications



[Cohort profile: Understanding the influence of early life environments and health and social service system contacts over time and across generations through the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey \(WAACHS\) Linked Data Study | BMJ Open](#)