Improving Indigenous Health

Helen Kennedy – Health Programs Manager (VACCHO)
What I will cover

• Overview of Aboriginal health
• Role of VACCHO – what we do and why
• Information on our Koorie maternity strategy and models of care
• Improvements and achievements
• Resources available
• Some tips on engaging with Aboriginal people
Indigenous Health 2007

In Victoria Aboriginal people:

- Live 20 years less than other Australians
- Infant mortality at 2 times the rate
- Have higher rates of hospital admissions for all conditions
- Higher rates of Diabetes, heart disease, respiratory illness

- Why is the gap so big?
- Poor supervision of women’s & children’s health during pregnancy
- Incorrect data collection at health services and hospitals
- Cultural Awareness Training - Who is responsible?
• Many reports and studies have recognized that the deplorable state of Aboriginal health is a result of long standing and contemporary cultural dislocation, deprivation and social disadvantage. The decline continues across many health indicators and many health and community service systems have failed to respond adequately and appropriately.

• Improving Aboriginal health is every body's responsibility.
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation VACCHO

- The Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation was established in 1996.
- The primary focus for VACCHO was to support the Aboriginal Health Services and provide training for the Aboriginal Health Workers.
- VACCHO have 25 member organisations across the state.
- VACCHO is not a service delivery organisation, but promotes capacity building of our members, undertakes advocacy and research and aims to promote partnerships with mainstream services.
Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

• In the early 1990’s a gap was evident that Victorian Aboriginal mothers were not receiving adequate Maternity care.
• VACCHO Membership agreed that the funding and resources for maternity care were not relevant to Aboriginal mothers
• VACCHO consulted with the Victorian Aboriginal Community to find the gaps and why mainstream services were not an option for Indigenous mothers
• The results from their finding resulted in the establishment of the....
The VACCHO Koori Maternity Strategy started in 1999. The KMS program has 2 workers. The role of the Koori Maternity Strategy is to support & advocate for all the 11 Koori Maternity Services in Victoria (we recognise a major need for expansion of our role – especially in terms of promoting partnership development and cultural awareness provision and the need to match our resources with increasing Government expectations etc).

Every year...

- We hold forum for the Koori Maternity workers
- We celebrate Koori Maternity Week in April
- We complete annual Reviews on the KMS Sites
Koori Maternity Strategy Funding

• Funded by Department Of Human Services

• Part of mainstream Maternity Services Enhancement Program.

• Total annual recurrent funding for the Koori Maternity Program is 1.7 million

• Currently have 11 Koori Maternity Service’s in the state of Victoria
Establishment of the Koori Maternity Services

- Perceived negative attitudes of mainstream health professionals
- Shortage of Aboriginal staff in hospitals
- Failure to address Aboriginal needs
- Health policies of the past / institutional removal of children
- Cultural gap between Aboriginal patients and health care providers
- Aboriginal patients lacking a voice once in the hospital systems
MODELS OF CARE

Clinical-Linkage-Advocacy-Health promotion

- Complimentary team
- Combining of skills
- Antenatal/Postnatal Primary Care Provider
- Empowering of Aboriginal Health Workers role

Linkage-Advocacy-Health Promotion

- Smaller Communities
- Lower Birth Rates
- Health Service Employs a Doctor
- Good working relationships with mainstream
IMPROVEMENTS

• More women accessing antenatal care
• Accessing antenatal care earlier in pregnancy
• Good working relationships with mainstream orgs have been established
• Services have been flexible to meet the needs of Koori women
• Continuity of care has improved
• Changes to the birth notification form re: Question about the infants Aboriginality
• Women are more familiar with the hospital before they birth
ACHIEVEMENTS

- Have increased the number of Koori Maternity Services from 1999 to 2007 from 3 to 11
- Building stronger relationships between Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and Mainstream services
- Rumbalara KMS Program were successful in opening an Aboriginal Birthing Suite located at the Goulburn Valley Base Hospital in Shepparton
- VACCHO were successful in obtaining funds to purchase cots and mattresses for 13 VACCHO member organisations to aid in the promotion of safe sleeping
- VACCHO has produced various cultural appropriate resources for Aboriginal Women and their families
Resources
Engaging with Aboriginal People

- Have an understanding of the local Aboriginal Community and organisation(s) – create or build on existing links/key contacts

- Be willing to learn about the local Aboriginal Culture and history – find out what events are occurring in the community – recognise that attending community events can have major benefits to your work and ‘credibility factor’ – and this is important outreach work with long standing benefits

- Create a culturally friendly environment (Aboriginal art work/posters/resources). Recognise the impact of past government policies (i.e. fear of welfare, mistrust of mainstream services etc)

- Deliver services to Aboriginal clients and families that are culturally sensitive (i.e. recognise that it takes time to develop relationships, confront any negative stereotypes you may have, be flexible)

- Understand that there exists much diversity within and between Aboriginal communities (i.e. Distinct cultural and individual differences)

- Appreciate that some Aboriginal people may prefer to use your services even when there may be Aboriginal maternity services in the local community – no one service model fits all

- Recognise that care extends to the health of families and communities as well as that of an individual

- Find out if there are any local cultural awareness workshops you could link into/participate in (check out DHS web site for resources on engaging with Aboriginal people)
Contact VACCHO

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

5-7 Smith Street Fitzroy Victoria 3065
P.O. Box 1328 Collingwood Victoria 3066
Phone: (03) 9419 3350
Fax: (03) 9417 3871
Email: helenk@vaccho.com.au
       kelliel@vaccho.com.au
       simonea@vaccho.com.au

Website: www.vaccho.org.au

This document is managed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Victoria (as of 27 August 2007)