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Addressing multiple health risk behaviours in disadvantaged populations: research being led by the national health and medical research council centre of research excellence in mental health and substance use

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Abstract

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ADDRESSING MULTIPLE HEALTH RISK BEHAVIOURS IN DISADVANTAGED POPULATIONS: RESEARCH BEING LED BY THE NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL CENTRE OF RESEARCH EXCELLENCE IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

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Issues: Cardiovascular disease, cancer and diabetes are leading causes of disease burden and mortality across western societies. All three diseases share common behavioural risk factors that include alcohol abuse, smoking, poor diet and physical inactivity. While there is strong support for the use of preventative approaches for these diseases, traditional treatment has tended to focus only on single risk behaviours.

Approach: Our group have conducted a series of pilot studies that have examined the feasibility of delivering multiple health behaviour change interventions for people from disadvantaged populations. These interventions target smoking, diet, physical inactivity and problematic substance use in an integrated fashion. This has included conducting separate pilot studies examining telephone, group and Internet delivered approaches.

Key Findings: People with a history of substance abuse and/or mental health problems demonstrate higher rates of smoking and other risk behaviours than the general population. Our team has demonstrated that it is feasible to deliver multiple health behaviour change interventions within therapeutic communities and Indigenous focused residential substance abuse treatment settings. We have also successfully demonstrated that it is feasible to use these approaches with people living with a mental illness.

Implications: The presentation will provide an overview of these studies and highlight opportunities for clinicians to address multiple risk behaviours as part of their routine practice.

Conclusion: It is important that we consider the physical health needs of people with substance abuse problems and/or mental illness. More rigorous controlled trials are needed to examine the most effective ways to deliver preventive health care to disadvantaged populations.