

# Missing Voices: Aboriginal stories of stroke and traumatic brain injury

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**Background:** The Missing Voices project (NH&MRC ID#1046228) is investigating the extent and impact of communication disorders following stroke and traumatic brain injury in Aboriginal people within Western Australia. To date, little is known of Aboriginal people's experiences in this regard, and there is limited engagement between current speech rehabilitation services and Aboriginal people. This paper reports on one part of the larger study and involves results from interviews with Aboriginal people with acquired communication disorders and their families across regional and rural areas in WA and metropolitan Perth.

**Methods:** Twenty participants were referred to the study by health professionals, community organisations and through personal contacts. The project was guided by an Aboriginal Reference Group, and Aboriginal research assistants conducted the semi-structured interviews (adapted for communication disorder where required), primarily in people's homes but also in Aboriginal Health Services. Participants were asked about their hospital experiences and follow up, living with acquired communication disorder, assistance required immediately after the event and since that time, and suggestions for improving access to assistance. The videotaped interviews were transcribed and analysed utilising NVivo9. Responses were classified according to emerging themes. Member checking occurred where possible.

**Results:** The paper will elaborate on initial themes related to dislocation from family and country affecting ongoing rehabilitation options for people from rural/remote areas, satisfaction with speech pathology services despite unmet need in some cases, systemic problems with communication in hospitals, need for more information on community services, complexity of health and social contexts, acceptance of disability, and individual stories of moving forward.

**Discussion:** Preliminary results suggest a range of experiences, many highlighting the complexity of lives in which the communication disorder is often embedded, rather than ACD being a primary focus. Implications for the development of more culturally accessible rehabilitation services will be discussed.