

Indigenous Cultural Festivals – Impact on community health and wellbeing

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This paper will deliver findings from an ongoing research project that examines the impact of Indigenous community festivals on the health and wellbeing of the children, young people and the communities who participate in them. The research project is an Australian Research Council Linkage between The Globalism Institute, RMIT University and Telstra Foundation. The project explores the immediate and longer-term impacts of selected Indigenous festivals, across five sites, on community wellbeing (Telstra Foundation supported: Crocfeest – Aurukun, Qld, Derby, WA, and Shepparton, Vic; Garma, NT; and Dreaming, Woodford, Qld). The research is designed to make a difference to the policy framework and industry support for this increasingly significant sector, with potential to make a real difference to the lives of Indigenous people. The research is grounded in detailed, field-work based case studies of each festival. The research:

- analyses the role of festivals in improving the health and well-being of children, youth and community;
- examines the role festivals play in strengthening and promoting Indigenous cultural identity and belonging and how this contributes to health and well-being;
- details the initiatives that grow from festivals and analyses the extent to which they enrich social connection and community capacity.

Most of the studies to date on the contribution of community arts and festivals to improvements in health and wellbeing have relied heavily on the self-referential assessments made by project designers and managers. Not nearly enough research has been done on the experiences of project participants and very few researchers have either gathered pre-participation data or returned at a later time to examine claims for enduring benefits. This project uses a range of complementary research methods that covers both a breadth and depth of experience and uses innovative forms of analysis that can relate local experience to broader social processes and influences.

Charter Recommendations:

1. Recognition of the crucial role that Indigenous culture plays in enabling and maintaining Indigenous wellbeing;
2. Indigenous people have expressed concern about indicators of wellbeing. For example, selected indicators can't be just based on what government agencies consider success to look like – they have to focus on developing **Indigenous** measures of success.