

Driving Lasting Change: Enablers of long-term impact in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diabetes and Cardiovascular Research

Sustainability in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research is essential to ensure that knowledge, relationships, and community benefit endure beyond individual projects or funding cycles. Sustainable research builds long-term capacity, supports community leadership, and enables evidence to translate into lasting improvements in health and wellbeing.

On 1 December 2025 MTPConnect, the Lowitja Institute and the Australian Centre for Health Services Innovation (AusHSI) jointly hosted a forum in Naarm (Melbourne) to explore sustainable models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research in diabetes and cardiovascular disease. The forum brought together groups funded through MTPConnect's Targeted Translation Research Accelerator program, community partners, government representatives, funders and sector leaders, to share strengths, reflect on community-led research, and pathways that support enduring health and wellbeing outcomes.

Participants highlighted how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-centred research approaches lead to better outcomes, and why strong, respectful community-driven partnerships are critical for agile, responsive, and sustainable impact.

The following Enablers of Long-Term Impact emerged clearly throughout the forum and should be considered and implemented by those funding or shaping policy in First Nations health research:

System accountability for uptake and outcomes

Sustainable impact is enabled when health systems, funders and policymakers are accountable to communities and can collectively demonstrate how research outcomes are implemented, monitored and sustained against community-defined priorities and success measures.

Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance

Sustainable impact is enabled when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples lead decision-making across the conception, design, implementation, scaling and evaluation of health research and its outcomes across policy, funding and service delivery.

Invest in long-term community-led partnerships, not short-term projects

Enduring impact requires partnerships led by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and communities, supported by funding and policy settings that prioritise continuity, trust, place-based solutions, and early involvement of all partners.

Funding models that support implementation and system change

Lasting health outcomes are enabled by funding models that resource not only research activity, but implementation, adaptation, workforce capability and impact evaluation, so findings can be embedded into services, systems and policy.

Uphold Indigenous data sovereignty and Indigenous data governance

Ethical, effective and sustainable implementation of research outcomes, and lasting community benefit, is enabled when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Data Sovereignty is embedded across policy and practice, ensuring community control over data, knowledge and its application.