Reviewer’s report

Title: Challenges and strategies for cohort retention and data collection in an Indigenous population: Australian Aboriginal Birth Cohort

Version: 2 Date: 20 January 2014

Reviewer: Anthony Hanley

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The objectives of this paper were to report the follow-up rates of the Aboriginal Birth Cohort study and describe how they were achieved. This is an important topic given the serious burden of chronic disease among Indigenous people worldwide. Although there has been a seismic increase in the interest in early life determinants of chronic disease, currently there are very few Indigenous birth cohorts. Given the duration and tremendous successes of Aboriginal Birth Cohort study, this study represents a beacon project in this area. The outstanding follow-up rates for this cohort (vital status was determined for 87% of the cohort and ... 83% and 71% of living participants were directly examined at mean ages 11.4 years (Wave -2) and 18.2 years (Wave-3)) are especially notable as the usual difficulties of following up birth cohorts are exacerbated in Indigenous communities, given the many cultural differences as well as the geographical and socio-economic challenges faced by these communities.

The paper is clearly written and well organized. I have a few comments and suggestions.

1. I note that the manuscript has no abstract – is this not required?

2. On page 2 it is reported that the babies in the cohort were born at the Darwin hospital, but that the majority were from rural, remote and very remote Aboriginal communities. For clarity, it might be worth mentioning what the health care policies were regarding delivery at the time of cohort inception—i.e. did mothers relocate from their home communities to Darwin at a certain point in the 3rd trimester?

3. As the cohort was established in the 1980s, can the authors comment on how things have changed in the communities over this period as it relates to the mechanisms of follow up – e.g. the availability of the internet, cell phone service, social media, etc.

Level of interest: An article of outstanding merit and interest in its field

Quality of written English: Acceptable

Statistical review: No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.
Declaration of competing interests:

'I declare that I have no competing interests'