Author's response to reviews

Title: A Systematic Review of Suicide Prevention Interventions targeting Indigenous peoples in Australia, United States, Canada and New Zealand.

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Author's response to reviews: see over
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The Editorial Team
BMC Public Health

Dear Editorial Team,

Thank-you for the opportunity to revise and resubmit the manuscript entitled ‘A systematic review of suicide prevention interventions targeting Indigenous peoples in Australia, United States, Canada and New Zealand,’ and respond to reviewer’s comments. Reviewers One and Three were satisfied with the first round of revisions and recommended the manuscript for publication. As such, all responses below address the comments of Reviewer 2.

Yours sincerely,

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Major Compulsory Revisions

p.15 This first paragraph in the discussion section solely focuses on the interests and capabilities of the researcher. What about the interests and capabilities of indigenous communities and funding agencies? As is, this article situates the researcher at the center of the research endeavor, which precludes meaningful collaboration with indigenous communities. A lot of the language in the paper should be shifted to avoid this attentional bias.

Response: The relevant section, Page 16, paragraph 2, has been revised in line with the reviewer’s comments.

As stated in the aims (Page 6, paragraph 1), the focus of the paper is on the methodological quality and characteristics of published suicide prevention interventions targeting Indigenous peoples. As such, how researchers undertake these evaluations is an important and central component of this paper. In addition, throughout the paper, the importance of how researchers (and how they should) collaborate with Indigenous people, when undertaking evaluations of Indigenous suicide prevention interventions is highlighted. Specifically: i) the extent to which interventions identified by this review were tailored to the needs of Indigenous communities, informed by Indigenous community input and integrated Indigenous culture into their content, is considered in the assessment of their methodological quality (Page 13, paragraph 1); and ii) the types of collaborations required between Indigenous peoples and researchers to improve the quality of future evaluations of Indigenous suicide prevention interventions, are identified in three of the recommendations posited (Page 18).

p.18 The authors jump to the conclusion that tailoring evidence-based interventions is the solution to a lack of evidence as to what works in indigenous communities without explaining this leap. This rout toward tailoring could certainly be fruitful, but it's not the only rout forward (e.g. perhaps evaluate local healing practices). Given the mixed evidence around the effectiveness of cultural tailoring as an approach to meeting the mental health needs of cultural minority communities, at a minimum please qualify this suggestion as "cultural tailoring of evidence-based interventions may be one productive rout forward in attempting to address problems of suicide in these indigenous communities." Also, please cite evidence in support of this approach.

Response: This section has been revised in line with the above comments and a reference provided to support the statement that tailoring evidence-based suicide prevention strategies to the needs and preferences of Indigenous communities is one potential promising strategy for building an Indigenous-specific evidence-base in the area of suicide prevention. Please see page 18.

p.18 “to confidently allow prescriptive determination of suicide prevention... for these populations”? I'm not sure there's sufficient evidence in any populations to proscribe what suicide prevention program a community should engage in, and I'm not sure this is a practical goal. Community work involves mutual input between interventionists and community collaborators, and this language of proscribing suicide prevention programming for indigenous communities is problematic. Simply rewording this bit would be sufficient.

Response: The relevant section is reworded. Please see page 18, sentence 1.
Although you have mentioned that "it's possible the review did not locate all relevant studies," this is an understatement. Something along the lines of "it is highly possible/likely that relevant studies were not included in this review due to less than optimal search terms." Given my point in the original review that it's likely this review caught less than half of the relevant literature, I think specifying the inadequacy of the search strategy is essential to avoid misleading readers less familiar with this area of study.

Response: To write in the manuscript that it is highly possible/likely the review did not locate all relevant studies would be misleading given the comprehensiveness of the search strategy undertaken. In support of our initial response to the reviewer’s concerns that the search strategy ‘caught less than half of the relevant extant literature,’ we make the following key points:

(i) Database specific search strings (including keywords, MESH terms and explode terms) were used in our search strategy. For example, the attached spread sheet titled ‘Search strategy worksheet’ shows that both the terms ‘alaska natives’ and ‘american indian’ were selected when the subject heading ‘Indigenous peoples’ was exploded in PsycINFO. The term ‘First nation’ was not indexed as an explode term in PsycINFO and therefore was not used in the search string for this database. Our targeted search strategy captures all relevant terms, for a given database, which are likely to vary across databases.

(ii) Our search strategy, using search strings specific to each database, is more precise than using general keywords across a number of databases and is, therefore, more likely to yield studies that are relevant.

(iii) The search strategy used in this paper has been used in other systematic reviews published in the peer review literature, indicating that it is sufficiently rigorous, and acceptable [1, 2, 3].

(iv) The two other reviewers were satisfied with the search strategy employed.


Minor essential revisions

P.15 Change “too difficult” to something like “a formidable challenge” to avoid implying that systematic evals in indigenous intervention work is impossible.

Response: The relevant section is reworded. See page 15, paragraph 2.