Reviewer's report

Title: Making progress: the role of Cancer Councils in Australia in Indigenous cancer control

Version: 1 Date: 26 September 2013

Reviewer: Anton Clifford

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Review of Manuscript: Making Progress; the role of cancer Councils in Australia in Indigenous cancer control.

Major Compulsory Revisions

Paragraph 1, In the last sentence it is unclear if the authors are referring to disparities in cancer outcomes, healthcare outcomes or both. The preceding sentence would suggest that it is healthcare outcomes, but the opening sentence of the second paragraph in which the authors use the term 'health disparities' suggests that it is both.

Paragraph 2, A statement on how social and economic factors contribute to health disparities, in particular those that have the greatest impact upon cancer, are required. Citations to support such a statement should also be provided. Consider rephrasing the next sentence to, …a broad range of factors related to the needs and preferences of the individual, cultural, policy context, health workforce and health service organisation.

Methods

I recommend structuring the information in this section under the following subheadings: Ethics, Settings and Participants, Study design, Measures, and Data analysis. An outline of the steps taken to implement the different methods (key informant consultations, interviews and a review of websites and links used in the study), under the heading procedures is also needed.

Overall, a major limitation of the methods section is the omission or limited reporting of important information. Information on the following is required:

- What method was used to analyse interview data, and why?
- How was the interview schedule determined?
- Where did the interviews take place? Were interviews transcribed?
- Where did the criteria used to appraise Cancer Council websites come from? What evidence is there that these criteria are sound indicators of cultural accessibility and appropriateness?
- In paragraph 1 of the methods section, key informant consultations, interviews and a review of websites and links are identified as the main methods. Paragraph
5, however, states that this ‘current paper’ is a summary of a report. However, this report is not cited and the process of summarising it for the purposes of this paper is not described. For example, were only salient findings from the larger report summarised for inclusion in this paper? Were only those findings approved by CEOs and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Subcommittee included in this paper? Can the authors provide some details on how this report was summarised information from the larger report to clarify the extent to which the information reported in this paper reflects that contained in the original report?

Results

Overall, the synthesis and presentation of results is inconsistent with the aims stated in the Background section, paragraph 4. That is, programs and practices being undertaken by CCs to improve cancer services and outcomes for Indigenous populations (which are the stated aims) are not clearly identifiable in the results but should be. This suggests that the method of data analysis was inappropriate or poorly applied. But as the method of data analysis was not reported in the methods section, there is no way of determining which of these weaknesses in study methodology is likely to apply.

Additional suggestions for improving the results section:
- Details relating to where interviews occurred would be better placed in the methods section
- The number of interviews conducted and their average duration should be reported.
- The number of participants interviewed face-to-face, in small groups and over the phone should be reported as the type of interview is likely to influence participant’ responses to questions.
- Paragraph 2 and Table 2, Where do these key criteria come from? They are not mentioned in the methods section. What is the relationship between these key criteria, the aims of the study and the results presented?
- The review of cancer council websites is presented as if it is a theme emerging from interviews when in the methods it is presented as a method of inquiry in itself. Additionally, if the findings of the website review are not to be presented in detail in this paper (as stated in the results section under the heading ‘Review of Cancer Council Websites’), then I recommend that they not be identified as a method used in this study
- Implications of findings should be presented in the discussion not the results section. e.g. most of the information in paragraph 3 and 4 under human resources.

Discussion

In its current form the discussion is primarily a summary of key findings. Lacking
is a discussion of these findings in relation to existing relevant literature (i.e. the contribution of key findings to what is already known about the topic and their potential implications). As a minimum, this is required for the following key findings raised in the discussion:

- Paragraph 2 and 3, challenges of recruiting and retaining a stable Indigenous workforce;
- Paragraph 7, importance and benefit of quality cancer data collection systems;
- Paragraph 9 and 10, strategies for improved advocacy of and collaboration with Indigenous communities;

The limitations of the study should be reported with respect to those inherent in the specific methods used (e.g. semi-structured interviews) and the manner in which they were applied (a mix of individual, group etc...)

Discretionary Revisions (which are recommendations for improvement but which the author can choose to ignore)

Nil

Minor Essential Revisions (such as missing labels on figures, or the wrong use of a term, which the author can be trusted to correct)

Background section
- Paragraph 3, references to support the statements made in the first half of this paragraph are required.
- Paragraph 5, The aims of this paper should be stated, not the aims of the scan.

Results
- there appears to be discrepancy between the number of interviewees reported in text (n=18), Results, paragraph 1 and in Table 2 (total =19).

Grammar, spelling and punctuation
Editing of the manuscript to reduce its word length and improve expression of key ideas is recommended.

Level of interest: An article of limited interest

Quality of written English: Needs some language corrections before being published

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.