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NGUNUNGULA: THE STORY OF A CANCER CARE TEAM FOR ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Janelle Trees^{1*}, Trish Levett¹, Kyla Wynn¹, Rowena Ivers²

1* Corresponding author: Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia
janelle.trees@gmail.com

2 Graduate School of Medicine, University of Wollongong, Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia

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In Dharawal Country in regional New South Wales, a small and powerful team provides cancer prevention, screening, support and care for Australian Aboriginal people, their families and communities.

In keeping with Aboriginal practices and values, their uniquely holistic approach encompasses everything from food security and finding childcare, to support at diagnosis, surgical, radiation or chemo treatment, through to holding funerals, facilitating yarning groups, and Ceremony for survivors of cancer and their carers.

The team created a manual for Aboriginal Health Workers, and other staff of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, together with training webinars, and modules. The program is also designed for Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Palliative Care Workers who work in hospitals.

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The book and the training modules are called Ngununggula. The name, from the Gundungurra language, means working and walking together.

“We’ll make ourselves available to anyone that wants to tread this path because we know all the pitfalls. We’ve learned them. We’ve tripped and had to climb out of them again. Anyone that wants the shortcuts—more learning, less pain—here they are. We want to share and help. I want the message to get out all over the place. I want to share the resources, to support anyone else who wants to run programs or build a team like we do.” Kyla Wynn, Counsellor/Co-ordinator Cancer Care Team, Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service

Partners include: Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, Illawarra Aboriginal Medical Service, University of Sydney, University of Wollongong, Menzies School of Health Research. ■