

Key Turning Points and Facilitating Factors of Health Trajectories As Told by Indigenous People in the Northern Territory: A Qualitative Research Nested in the Aboriginal Birth Cohort Study

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Background: Health inequities experienced by Indigenous Australians are well documented; however, most evidence remains predominantly quantitative and descriptive. Limited research has explored Aboriginal peoples' lived experiences or the ways in which social, historical, and cultural determinants shape health trajectories across the life course. Embedded within the Aboriginal Birth Cohort (ABC) Study, this qualitative study examined the life course experiences of Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, with particular emphasis on key influencing factors and turning points in health trajectories.

Methods: Research topic yarning was employed to facilitate culturally appropriate, in-depth data collection within a trusting and reciprocal environment. Fourteen ABC Study participants were recruited through established relationships with remote communities, with ten interviews included in this analysis. Data were analysed using a decolonising, strengths-based approach informed by a life course framework. Inductive thematic analysis identified key turning points and influencing factors, while chronological reconstruction of participant narratives informed the development of a novel trajectory typology.

Results: A novel three-trajectory typology was developed, comprising *resolute*, *turbulent*, and *stoic* trajectories. These trajectories reflected distinct patterns of resilience, adversity, aspiration, and wellbeing across the life course. Participants conceptualised health not primarily as physical wellbeing but as the capacity to remain strong through intergenerational relationships, participation in the cultural economy, and connection to Country. Two-way living emerged as a key determinant of positive trajectories, enabling participants to maintain Aboriginal ways of knowing while successfully navigating contemporary Australian society.

Conclusions: Strengths-based qualitative life course research provides critical insights into Indigenous conceptualisations of health and wellbeing. Health policy and interventions should recognise cultural determinants and holistic understandings of health, ensuring Indigenous perspectives meaningfully inform policy, service design, and implementation.