
The Sistas Shawl Project

Initiative Type

Service Improvement

Status

Deliver

Added

29 May 2024

Last updated

14 March 2025

URL

<https://clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/improvement-exchange/sistas-shawl-project>

Summary

The Sistas Shawl Project responded to the cultural barriers of feeling embarrassed or shame during breast screening, by providing women with an incentive gift of a beautiful cultural shawl to provide modesty and wear during screening. Working collaboratively with the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team the Sistas Shawl Project utilised multiple strategies to meet our aims. It addresses the barriers of providing a welcoming and culturally safe BreastScreen Service

with the use of cultural artwork as murals in the breast screening rooms and on staff polo shirts. Combined with regular in-service cultural capability training for all staff the project aimed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women accessing our service receive culturally appropriate and racism-free care. The project built upon the learnings of the successful Cultural Shawl Project implemented at BreastScreen Queensland's (BSQ) Townsville Service. It was localised to the Brisbane Northside area with a collaboration between the BreastScreen Queensland Brisbane Northside Service and the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team and was launched on 10 October 2022. The Project was funded by the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team as a health equity initiative. The project demonstrated its effectiveness and outcomes through the measurable achievements of an increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women having their breast screen (particularly first-time screeners) at BSQ Brisbane Northside and the high levels of acceptability indicated by qualitative evaluations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients. It now continues as a collaborative strategy at the Brisbane Northside Service.

Key dates

Apr 2022

Dec 2023

Implementation sites

Metro North Hospital and Health Service

Partnerships

BreastScreen Queensland Brisbane Northside Service and the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team

Key Contacts

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Aim

The overall aim of the Sistas Shawl Project was to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women screening in the BreastScreen Queensland Brisbane Northside catchment. It also aimed to address cultural barriers to breast screening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Benefits

Working collaboratively with the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team, the Sistas Shawl Project utilised multiple unique strategies to meet our aims. The project responded to the cultural barriers of feeling embarrassed or shame during screening, by providing women with an incentive gift of a beautiful cultural shawl to provide modesty and wear during the breast screen. It also aimed to address the barriers of providing a welcoming and culturally safe BreastScreen Service with the use of cultural artwork as murals in the breast screening rooms and on staff polo shirts. Combined with regular in-service cultural capability training for all staff the project aimed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women accessing our service receive culturally appropriate and racism-free care.

Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have lower breast screening participation than the general population and face additional barriers. Inequities in screening participation contribute to the inequities in cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and must be addressed. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's participation in the BreastScreen Queensland Program in the Brisbane Northside Service is lower (48.2%) than that of the general

population (50.0%) (2021-22 participation rates).

Solutions Implemented

Working collaboratively with the Metro North Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Team the Sistas Shawl Project utilised multiple strategies to meet our aims. The project responded to the cultural barriers of feeling embarrassed or shame during screening, by providing women with an incentive gift of a beautiful cultural shawl to provide modesty and wear during the breast screen. It also aimed to address the barriers of providing a welcoming and culturally safe BreastScreen Service with the use of cultural artwork as murals in the breast screening rooms and on staff polo shirts. Combined with regular in-service cultural capability training for all staff the project aimed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women accessing our service receive culturally appropriate and racism-free care.

Evaluation and Results

Evaluation measures included comparisons of screening numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, at the BreastScreen Brisbane Northside Service, pre and post the project implementation. Evaluation surveys (paper-based) were also given to women with the Sistas Shawl to evaluate acceptability and collect qualitative feedback on the Project. Anecdotal feedback was collected from clients and key stakeholders. The feedback has indicated that these strategies have contributed to creating a welcoming and culturally appropriate breast cancer screening service.

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