

'Across the Timor Sea': Bringing together health workers from Timor Leste and the Northern Territory to learn about nutrition and food security

Nutrition and food security: approaches to improving the health of women and children is a practical, flexible short course designed to enable participants to identify, implement and advocate for effective, comprehensive and integrated approaches to improve nutrition and food security (NFS). The development of the course is co-funded by Menzies School of Health Research, representing Compass: Women's and Children's Knowledge Hub for Health and funded by AusAID; and The Fred Hollows Foundation.



The course participants and facilitators

The pilot of the core module was delivered in May-June 2011 to seven Indigenous health workers from the Northern Territory (NT), including five from NT Aboriginal Medical Services, and five nutritionists and health workers from Timor Leste. This made for an enjoyable cross cultural learning experience, with the groups sharing differences and similarities between communities in remote Indigenous Australian and Timor Leste. Participants agreed that bringing the two country groups together was beneficial, reporting that they had “learned from each other”.



Participants recapping learnings from the previous day in a game

The group was introduced to the principles of community nutrition, focusing on the determinants of health; the importance of community engagement and community development; health promotion and the health promotion planning cycle; the short and long term benefits of good nutrition; and frameworks of relevance to NFS. Field trips to community NFS projects in Katherine and Darwin provided an opportunity to observe the learnings of the course in practice, and to further share similarities and differences

between their contexts. The development of individual action plans allowed participants to identify appropriate approaches to improving NFS in their local context; and to consolidate their ability to plan, implement, monitor and evaluate these effectively.



Activities and role plays were used throughout the course to reinforce learnings

The module was delivered in a participatory, activity-based manner and learnings were reinforced through roleplays, games and stories. These activities were popular with participants and facilitators alike, and participants observed that as well as being enjoyable, they were “good for learning”.

Participants demonstrated an enthusiasm that surpassed all expectations; and their willingness to learn and share was remarkable. Everyone enjoyed the course greatly, and participants agreed that they had gained “more confidence” to undertake their roles; a sentiment that was reflected in the monitoring and evaluation results.

We are all looking forward to the delivery of the first of the elective modules in October!

For more information about the course and future courses please contact Heather Grieve:
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Participants discussing the immediate and underlying determinants of health relevant to Timor Leste and remote NT communities