Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper

Data Linkage

February 2024

By Dr Rebecca Reeve, A/Prof Ruth McCausland, Peta MacGillivray & Virginia Robinson

DHARRIWAA ELDERS GROUP
COMMUNITY-LED DEVELOPMENT
UNSW SYDNEY

Contents

Contents **2**

Executive Summary **3**

Context **5**

The Role of Data in the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership 5

Children and young people 6

Indigenous Data Governance 7

The Data Linkage Project **8**

Holistic research and evaluation require holistic evidence 8

What is data linkage? 9

Why link data relating to young people in Walgett? 9

Steps involved in developing the data linkage study 10

Phase 1 ..... *11*

Phase 2 ..... *13*

Phase 3 ..... *14*

Phase 4 ..... *16*

Next Steps **16**

Linking the data 16

Maintaining data security and confidentiality 17

Data transfer and storage *17*

Data use and outputs *17*

Building Indigenous research capacity 18

Further community briefings and publications 18

Lessons **19**

Resources **19**

References **20**

Executive Summary

Yuwaya Ngarra-li ('vision' in the Yuwaalaraay and Yuwaalayaay languages) is a community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and UNSW that aims to improve the wellbeing, environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett. After collaboration on a research study from 2011–2015, the DEG invited UNSW to work with them longer-term around their vision for systemic change.

The DEG identified children and young people in their community ending up in the criminal justice system as an early priority for Yuwaya Ngarra-li, and in the 2018 Walgett Action Plan for Children and Young People set out the their vision that "*Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett can learn, work, be safe, supported and thrive within a robust sense of belonging to their families, community, culture and Country*".

Yuwaya Ngarra-li undertook community data gathering with Aboriginal children and young people and other community members in Walgett in 2018 and 2019 to inform planning and evaluation. With an experienced quantitative data researcher joining the team in 2020, Yuwaya Ngarra-li also began gathering and analysing administrative data relating to Walgett available from government agencies including aggregated census, police, court, fines and education data, and interpreting the findings in conversations with the DEG. However, it became clear that publicly available data from individual government agencies wasn't able to provide the detail around system interactions and outcomes for children and young people that was needed.

Access to linked administrative data was identified as an important part of building a holistic understanding and evidence base to identify and respond to issues faced by children and young people; to evaluate the outcomes and impact of various strategies and programs; to inform more effective policy and services; and to advocate for systemic change in Walgett and elsewhere.

Despite data sharing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities being an agreed Closing the Gap priority, obtaining and analysing relevant data is a major challenge. This is due to the imbalance in power between agencies who control the data, researchers with the resources and technical skills to analyse data, and the communities to whom the data belong.

This briefing paper details the process of how Yuwaya Ngarra-li, led by the DEG, is developing a linked data study for holistic community-led research and evaluation that serves community priorities and operationalises Indigenous Data Governance (IDG) through facilitating access to government-held data for community purposes.

The paper outlines the four phases of work involved in developing Yuwaya Ngara-li's data linkage project:

- Phase 1: internal work of Yuwaya Ngarra-li teams at the DEG and UNSW to determine the scope of the project and establish protocols to guide the work at all stages.
- Phase 2: initial scoping consultations with data custodians and the Centre for Health Record Linkage (CheReL), and ethics applications to the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) and UNSW Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs).
- Phase 3: more detailed consultation and application phase with each data custodian and the CHeReL (where the process is currently up to at January 2024).
- Phase 4: final CHeReL and Population Health Services Research Ethics Committee (PHSREC) application stage.

The paper also details how the actual linkage process works, including the safeguards employed to ensure data security and confidentiality. This includes how data are transferred, stored, accessed and reported.

Through sharing our experience, the Yuwaya Ngarra-li teams at UNSW and the DEG hope that we can help other communities who wish to undertake a similar data journey.

Context

The Role of Data in the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Partnership

Yuwaya Ngarra-li ('vision' in Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay) is a community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group (DEG) and UNSW that aims to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett. After collaboration on a research study from 2011–2015, the DEG invited UNSW to work with them longer-term with the aim of bringing research and evidence-based solutions to priority areas led by the vision of the Elders.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li's approach to research, learning and evaluation is reflected in Figure 1.

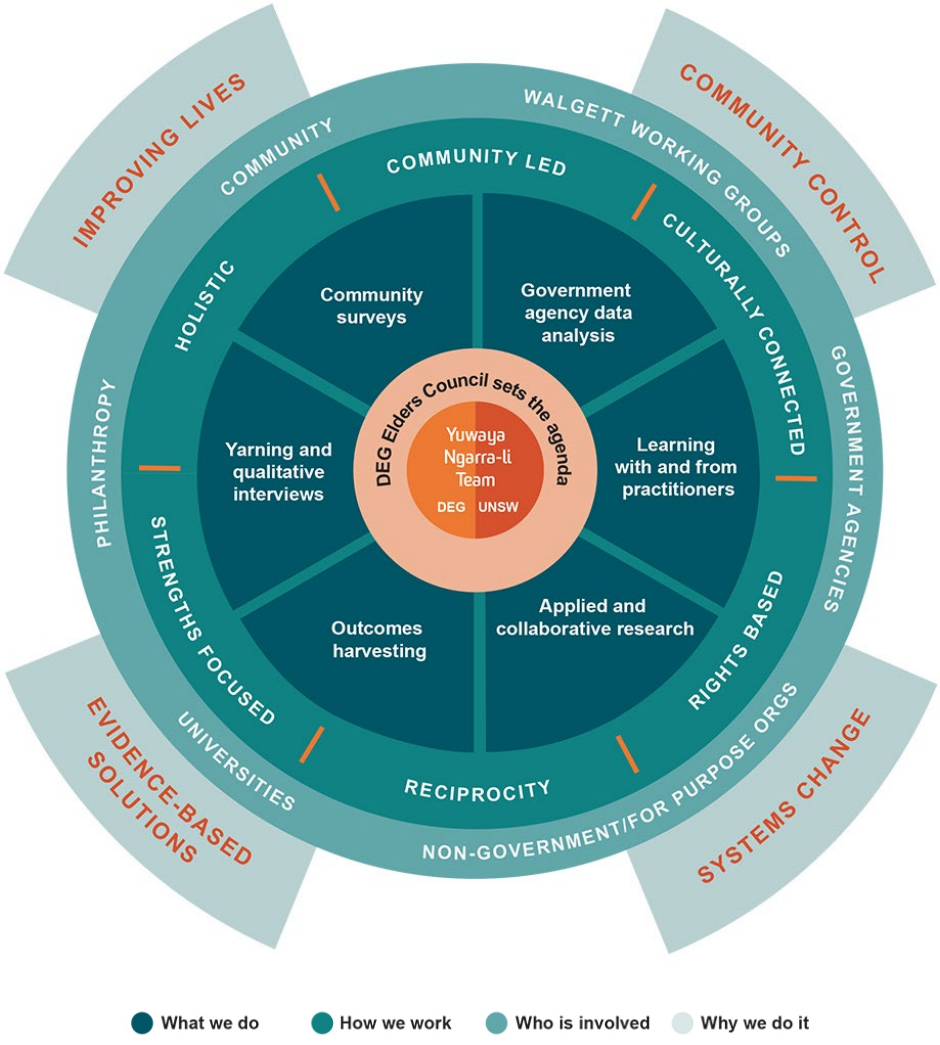

Figure 1: Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research, Learning and Evaluation

A particular focus of Yuwaya Ngarra-li is on increasing the understanding and strategic use of quantitative data, including government administrative data, to inform our planning, evaluation and progress towards Yuwaya Ngarra-li's long-term aims. This is achieved through an iterative process of collaboration and capacity building between the DEG, UNSW and other stakeholders.

The Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research and Evaluation team at UNSW works together with the DEG and then, with their direction, other stakeholders to identify and collect relevant data to inform planning, evaluate the impact of the work of the partnership, hold relevant agencies to account for their responsibilities, and build an evidence base for ongoing advocacy for systemic change. The Research and Evaluation team work closely with Elders, DEG staff and other Yuwaya Ngarra-li colleagues to ensure that data collection and research addresses community priorities and adheres to the core principles of Yuwaya Ngarra-li. The DEG brings their leadership and rich local knowledge to the forefront, providing researchers with a deeper understanding of the context and circumstances of the issues being investigated as well as the collaboration providing a way of building data literacy amongst the DEG Elders Council and staff.

Children and young people

The DEG's vision is that Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett can learn, work, be safe and supported and thrive within a robust sense of belonging to their families, community, culture and Country. The Elders have long held grave concerns about the risk of young people in the community ending up in the justice system rather than in education and employment, and identified this as an urgent priority for Yuwaya Ngarra-li. In 2018, the DEG hosted a Youth Justice Forum at Walgett Community College High School and from that came the Walgett Action Plan for Children and Young People.

Since 2018, Yuwaya Ngarra-li has developed its community-led Youth Diversion Demonstration Model, known as Baulaarr Bagay Warruwi Burranba-li-gu (Gamilaraay), which translates to 'Two River Pathway to Change'. The model has three interconnected strategies:

1. Influence the practices and services and improve the accountability of responsible agencies to support better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people
2. Support engagement and leadership by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), parents and carers to support better outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people
3. Work intensively with Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett to increase their rates of belonging, safety and wellbeing and reduce or prevent ongoing contact with the criminal justice system.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li staff at UNSW and the DEG are working together to better understand and document the complex issues facing children and young people in Walgett and to use this to

advocate for change and to monitor progress and impact of its work. The Two River Pathway to Change model is informed by the concept of the social determinants of justice, which views effective diversion as addressing the issues that underpin children and young people's contact with the justice system holistically, including health, education, housing and environmental factors. Reflecting this, Yuwaya Ngarra-li's evaluation methodology includes developing a linked administrative dataset on children and young people that involves data from all relevant government agencies.

Indigenous Data Governance

Administrative data have historically been collected and used according to the ideologies and agendas of government agencies and non-Indigenous researchers. This has led to research that is predominantly deficit-focused and fails to address the needs and priorities of Indigenous peoples themselves. In response, Indigenous researchers, collectives, and networks have been scrutinising the data logics and methods applied to Indigenous data (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). This work includes developing concepts of Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) and Indigenous Data Governance (IDG) by a global network of Indigenous scholars (including Global Indigenous Data Alliance, e Mana Raraunga Māori Data Sovereignty Network, United States Indigenous Data Sovereignty Network and Maiam nayri Wingara Indigenous Data Sovereignty Collective).

Indigenous Data Sovereignty (IDS) asserts the rights of Indigenous peoples to control their own data, from what data are collected through to access, data management, analysis, interpretation and dissemination of findings and the reuse of data (Walter & Carrol, 2020; Walter et al, 2018). Indigenous Data Governance (IDG) details how IDS is put into practice, to ensure that data collection, access and usage reflect the priorities, values, culture, life-worlds and diversity of Indigenous peoples (Walter et al, 2018). This briefing paper explains the process of how Yuwaya Ngarra-li is developing a linked data study for holistic community-led research and evaluation that serves community priorities, as well as steps towards achieving IDG in Walgett, through facilitating access to government-held data for community purposes.

The Data Linkage Project

Holistic research and evaluation require holistic evidence

In 2018 and 2019, Yuwaya Ngarra-li conducted annual community data gathering sessions in Walgett, including surveying children and young people about the areas that are the focus of the Walgett Action Plan for Children and Young People. The findings informed Yuwaya Ngarra-li's planning and activities and provided a baseline for its evaluation of the impact of the Two River Pathway to Change model. Since 2019, to continue developing a shared understanding of the issues affecting children and young people in Walgett and to enable collaboration on the solutions, the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research and Evaluation team has analysed administrative data from various individual government agencies. The findings from these data have been interpreted and refined with the DEG and disseminated in the form of presentations, briefing papers and research reports, some of which are published.

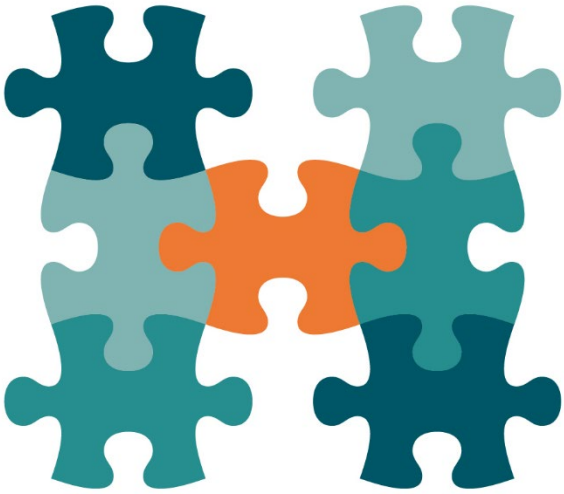

Figure 2: Data need to be linked to achieve holistic understanding

Most of Yuwaya Ngarra-li's early analysis of administrative data used publicly available data, including aggregated census, police, court, fines and education data. To enable more detailed analyses of youth justice system interactions, in 2022, Yuwaya Ngarra-li analysed de-identified unit record data provided by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) to measure changes over time in diversions, criminal court and youth detention before and after the Two River Pathway to Change model commenced. The findings were interpreted in conversations between the DEG and the Research and Evaluation team and published as a research report. However, it was clear that justice system data are only one part of this puzzle, and that health, child protection, housing and education data are also important for a holistic understanding. It was also apparent that separately analysing publicly available data from different government agencies is not able to provide that understanding because it does not enable analysis of the interdependence of different areas and outcomes.

Limits to the flexibility of and gaps in publicly available data, and the limitation of analysing individual datasets in isolation, demonstrated the need for linked (de-identified) unit record data from multiple agencies to build on this work.

What is data linkage?

Data linkage is when multiple sets of data for multiple individuals are put together and 'de-identified' for research. Linked data from multiple agencies and multiple individuals can improve understanding of how people interact with different services over their lifetime and the impact of this.

Personal identifying information (such as names and addresses) is only used by data linkage experts, such as the Centre for Health Record Linkage (CHeReL), to link the data from different sources and is kept separate from other information (such as details of service use). Each person who appears in different datasets is assigned a random "project person number" which is the same across the different datasets. The data from different data sources (for example, government agencies and surveys) are then provided to authorised researchers without identifying information but with the project person numbers. The researchers can then look at the patterns and pathways for people across the different datasets.

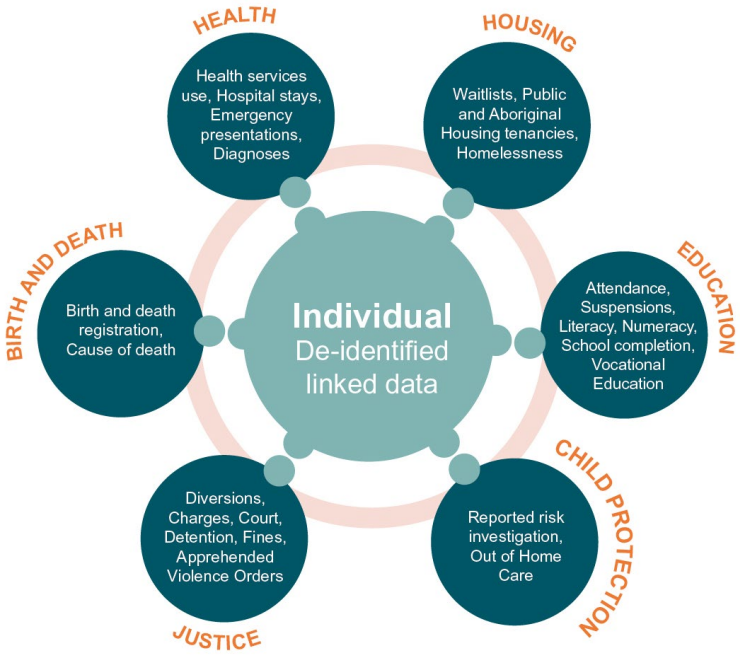

Figure 3: De-identified linked data

Why link data relating to young people in Walgett?

There are complex interactions between young people's experience with the justice system, education, health and wellbeing, housing, and family and community factors. Linking data for young people in Walgett and their immediate family members can help stakeholders to better understand and respond to issues faced by young people in Walgett and reflects Yuwaya Ngarra-li's holistic approach to planning, implementation and evaluation. Analysis of how, when and in what circumstances young people interact with different services can help with planning and

advocacy to ensure people get access to the services and support they need. Linked data can also help us to evaluate how changes in services, such as police use of diversions, are associated with changes in other outcomes, such as education or health.

Figure 4: Linking data relating to young people in Walgett

Steps involved in developing the data linkage study

The process of developing Yuwaya Ngarra-li's data linkage study can be broken down into four phases of work, illustrated in Figure 5.

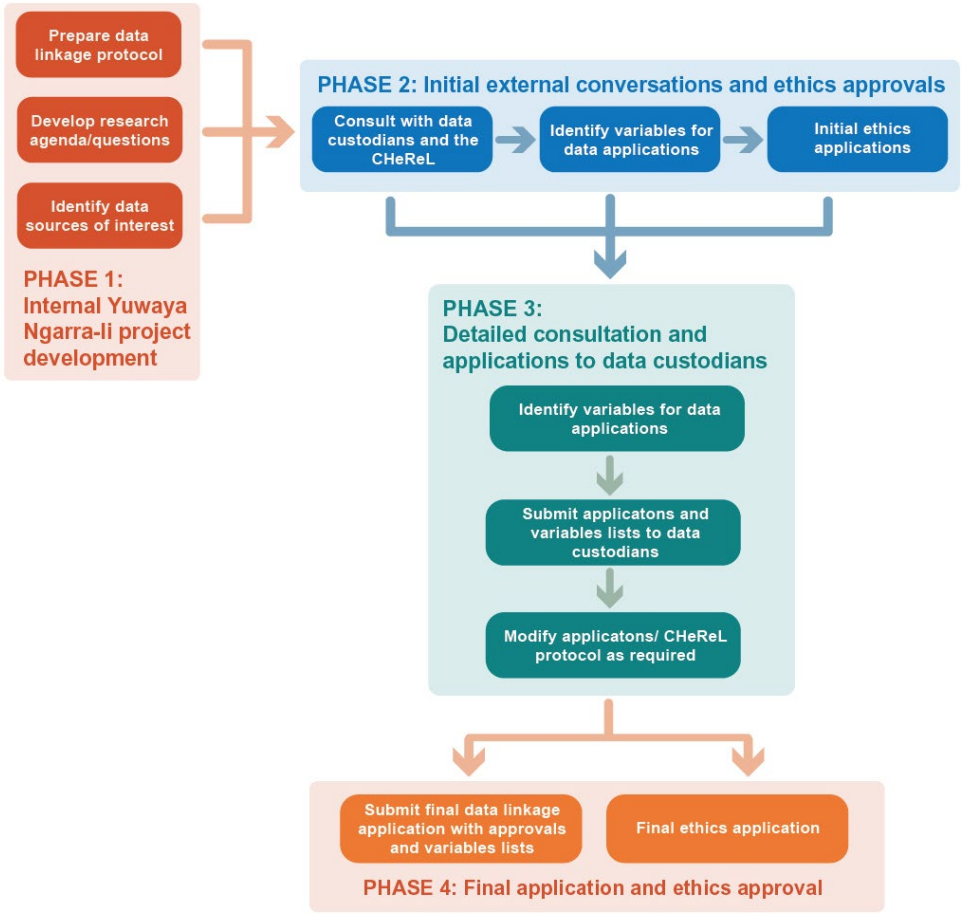

Figure 5: Developing the data linkage study

Phase 1 is the initial internal work of Yuwaya Ngarra-li teams at the DEG and UNSW to determine the scope of the project and establish protocols to guide the work at all stages, from conception to completion. Phase 2 is the initial scoping consultations with data custodians and the CHeReL, and ethics applications to the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) and UNSW Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs). Phase 3 is the more detailed consultation and application phase with each data custodian. Phase 4 is the final CHeReL and Population Health Services Research Ethics Committee (PHSREC) application stage. These phases of work are explained in greater detail below.

Phase 1

Protocols

In 2021, Yuwaya Ngarra-li's Research and Evaluation Team including Peta MacGillivray (a Kalkadoon and South Sea Islander woman, lawyer and Yuwaya Ngarra-li's Senior Research Fellow focused on legal and justice issues) reviewed Yuwaya Ngarra-li's five Core Principles and Research Protocol to identify how these apply to our research and evaluation generally and specifically to the planned data linkage study. This was then discussed and further refined with Virginia Robinson, Secretary of the DEG, who led the team in the development of protocols for the data linkage, which were then built into a protocol document to guide the data linkage work at all stages of the project. The Data Linkage Protocol document was reviewed and refined with Virginia and finalised in December 2021. A small revision was made in October 2022 based on feedback from the AH&MRC HREC.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li's five core principles and their application to the data linkage study, as described in the Data Linkage Protocol, are as follows:

1. **Community-led**

- Developing data linkage protocol with DEG Secretary Virginia Robinson to guide the research agenda.
- Consultation with and reporting back to the DEG at all phases of the research to ensure the research is informed by and contributes to community priorities, and protocols are being followed.
- Peta MacGillivray helping to lead the project at UNSW. Building Indigenous quantitative research capacity wherever possible.

2. **Culturally connected**

- Regular meetings with the DEG to inform all phases of the research to ensure that it is conducted in a way that is culturally connected and responsive to the needs and expectations of Aboriginal people in Walgett.
- Consultation with Aboriginal young people via the DEG to ensure the research reflects their experience, needs and expectations.

- Ensuring that the research findings are presented in a way that is useful, respectful and accessible.

3. **Strengths-focused**

- Identifying the enablers of positive pathways and outcomes for Aboriginal young people in Walgett, including education, through consultation via the DEG, and gathering appropriate data to capture these, as well as systemic barriers, such as over-policing, that prevent young people reaching their potential.
- Assisting the DEG to use the research findings in communications with key institutions to advocate for positive change and required resources.

4. **Holistic**

- Recognising that the solutions do not lie solely in one area and linking data from multiple sources to better understand and demonstrate this, and then plan and respond appropriately led by the DEG and other ACCOs.

5. **Rights-based**

- Working in partnership with the DEG to undertake research that will provide evidence to help respond to the systemic issues facing Aboriginal young people in Walgett so that they can more fully enjoy their human rights.
- Build on and contribute to broader research on data sovereignty, including that which references the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Formulate data questions

Building on the work of Yuwaya Ngarra-li since 2018 around the issues facing children and young people in Walgett, the Research and Evaluation Team and the DEG developed three overarching research questions for the data linkage study:

1. What are the changes in Aboriginal children and young people's police and court outcomes since Yuwaya Ngarra-li began its focused work on youth diversion in 2018?
2. Are changes in justice system contacts associated with changes in education and health outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett?
3. What can we learn about young people's pathways from their interactions with different agencies (health, housing, child protection, education and justice)?

Answering these questions, contextualised and interpreted through the deep local knowledge and experience of the Elders and other community members, will give Aboriginal Community stakeholders a deeper understanding of how young people interact with different services over time and the impact of this. This information can inform community-led planning and advocacy to ensure young people get access to appropriate supports and services.

Identify relevant data sources

As shown in Figure 6, the key outcome areas of interest (as reflected in the first and second over-arching research questions above) are Justice, Education and Health. However, as reflected in the

third question, there are many other underlying associated factors, some of which are evident in data (such as housing and child protection). Other underlying factors will come from local knowledge (including from the DEG, young people and other community members/organisations) and changes to policy and practice (local and systemic) and this information will help to contextualise and interpret the findings. For the outcomes and underlying factors which are reflected in administrative data, we identified the datasets held by relevant government agencies that we would like to access for our study. These were refined as we consulted with the agencies, and the final datasets we are applying for data from are detailed in Phase 3 .

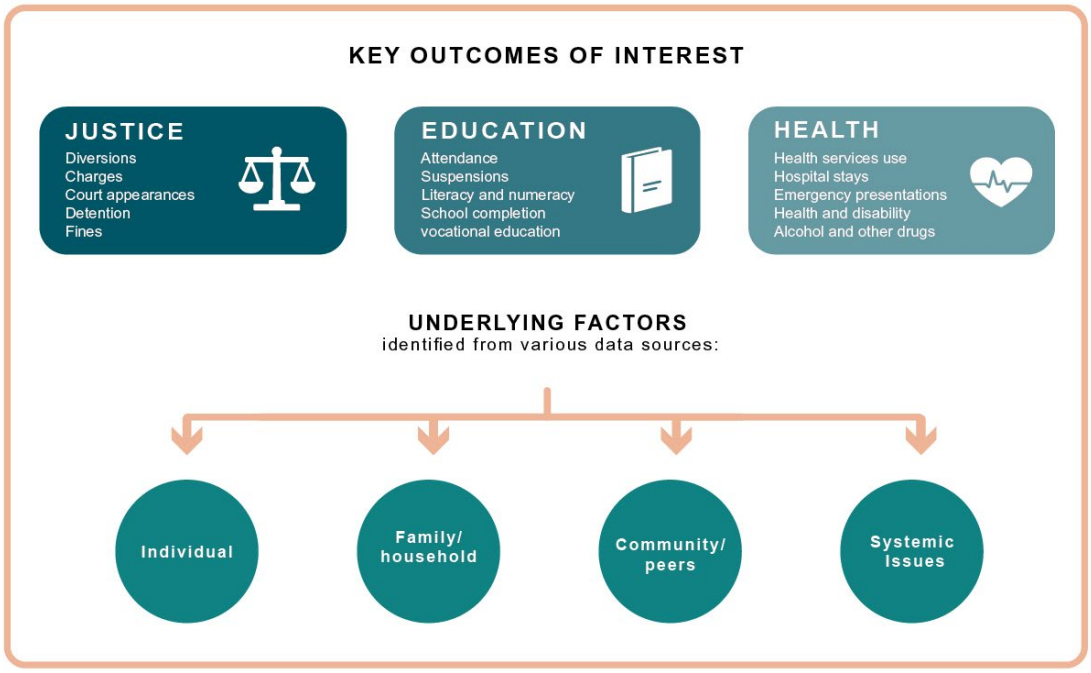

Figure 6: Data linkage framework

Phase 2

Initial consultations and ethics applications

In 2022 we commenced consultations with key government agencies, including Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR - within the Department of Communities and Justice) and the CHeReL (within the NSW Ministry of Health) to identify the most feasible approach to access/link data for our study. FACSIAR hosts an existing dataset, the Human Services Dataset (HSDS) that contains most of the administrative data relevant to our research questions (and more). However, Yuwaya Ngarra-li was advised that access to the HSDS would typically be provided at the "Statistical Area Level 2" (SA2)[1] level covering Walgett-Lighting

[1] SA2s are medium-sized statistical areas with an average population size of around 10,000 persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021).

Ridge. The Walgett-Lightning Ridge SA2 includes other population centres which are not representative of the Walgett community, meaning that data at this level would not be appropriate for this study. Further, the statistical software used by Yuwaya Ngarra-li for data analysis is not contained in the platform that must be used to access the HSDS. The additional investment required to master new software would be extremely resource intensive and demonstrates a technological barrier to accessing data. FACSIAR is instead working with us to facilitate access to the relevant datasets they manage (Public Housing, Homelessness Services, Child Protection and Out of Home Care) for linkage with other datasets via the CHeReL.

We discussed our planned linked data project relating to Walgett children and young people with the CEO of Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) who was supportive of the project, subject to ethical approval by the AH&MRC. The project will bring data and capacity that will hopefully be very beneficial for WAMS as well as broader evaluation and evidence building around the work of Walgett ACCOs. We then advised the CHeReL of our planned study and drafted a CHeReL protocol and data application and AH&MRC ethics application. These were submitted to the AH&MRC HREC with other supporting documents for their review, including a letter of support from the DEG. After some minor edits, the project was approved by the AH&MRC HREC, ratified by the UNSW HREC and a letter of support for the approved study provided by WAMS.

Phase 3

Detailed data custodian consultation and applications

Throughout 2023, Yuwaya Ngarra-li has been working with the CHeReL and each agency contributing data to the study to identify relevant variables and obtain data custodian approvals. This is an extensive and complex process, with each agency having their own governance structures and application requirements, as well as varying degrees of transparency about available data. Key staff at the CHeReL (Samantha Lesic), DCJ (Caroline Anderson, Sajeev Kunaharan and Stephanie Ramsey), Department of Premier and Cabinet (Celia Walker) and the Department of Customer Service (Michael Mara and Rebecca Agland) have been enormously helpful in supporting our efforts to access data and connect with data custodians.

Following extensive discussions, we are applying for de-identified linked data, for individuals aged 10–25 in any year from 2016 to date who ever lived in Walgett (postcode 2832) during that time and their family members (children, siblings, mother, other parent, of any age and location) from the following agencies and data collections:

NSW Ministry of Health

- Emergency Department Data Collection
- Admitted Patient Data Collection
- Mental Health Ambulatory Data Collection

- Non-admitted Patient Data Collection
- Notifiable Conditions Information Management System
- NSW NCIMS – Covid Cases
- Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages - birth registrations
- Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages - death registrations
- Cause of Death Unit Record File

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)

- Reoffending Database (ROD) which includes:
    - Local, District and Supreme Criminal Court data (Source: BOCSAR)
    - Children's Criminal Court data (Source: Juvenile Justice NSW to 2005, then BOCSAR)
    - Youth Justice Conferencing (YJC) data (Source: Juvenile Justice NSW)
    - Adult Custody data (Source: Corrective Services NSW)
    - Juvenile Custody data (Source: Juvenile Justice NSW)
    - Drug Court data (Source: Judicial Commission of NSW)
    - *Young Offenders Act* cautions and warnings back to 2010 (Source: NSW Police)
    - Death records (Source: NSW Registry of Births Deaths and Marriages)
- COPS cubes
    - POI
    - Victim
    - AVO
- First court bail cube

NSW Dept. Education, Centre for Educational Statistics and Evaluation (CESE):

- Attendance
- Suspensions/expulsion
- Disability targeted support
- Vocational education and training (non RoSA/HSC)

NSW Education Standards Authority (NESA)

- NAPLAN participation and performance
- RoSA/HSC participation and performance (includes VET delivered to secondary students)

Revenue NSW

- Fines and penalty notices
- Overdue fines
- Work and development orders
- Enforcement of fines

Family and Community Services Insights Analysis and Research (FACSIAR)

- Public Housing and waitlist (including Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO))
- Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS)
- Out of Home Care
- Child Protection

Phase 4

Submission to the CHeReL and the PHSREC

Throughout Phase 3 discussions there have been various revisions to the variables lists and CHeReL protocol and data application as we have consulted with each agency from whom we are applying for data. When approvals (or in principal approvals) are received from each external data custodian, the final documents will be submitted to the CHeReL to confirm the technical feasibility of the project and seek approval from the custodians of NSW Health data collections. Following this, all data custodian approvals, technical feasibility letter and application documents will be submitted to the PHSREC for their approval. Once approved by the PHSREC a modification will be submitted to the AH&MRC and UNSW HRECs with the final documents for their approval and the CHeReL can undertake the process of linking the data from each agency.

Next Steps

Linking the data

- All data for this study will be linked by the CHeReL Data Linkage Unit who will perform the linkage using the personal identifiers in their Master Linkage Key (for NSW Health data collections) and those supplied by external data custodians.
- Custodians can choose to send identifiers only or identifiers and content data.
- Custodians who approve their collection being used for cohort generation will be asked to provide identifiers from the start of their collection (or earliest available). This will enable family linkage to occur (secondary cohort generation of parents, siblings and children of the primary cohort).[2]
- Once linkage is complete, CHeReL will prepare a unique person project number (PPN) for each individual (all other identifiers will be removed).
- Data custodians who did not provide content data to CHeReL will be sent PPNs and their own unique record ID (referred to as project keys).

[2] The primary cohort is children and young people aged 10–25 at any time from 2016 onwards who ever lived in Walgett (postcode 2832) during this time.

- Content variables and the PPN will be securely transferred to UNSW by the data custodian or the CHeReL Data Integration Unit on the custodian's behalf.

Maintaining data security and confidentiality

Data transfer and storage

- During the data linkage process, encrypted electronic files containing data extracts will be transferred between the CHeReL, the data custodians and UNSW utilising secure file transfer protocols.
- The de-identified linked administrative data provided to UNSW will be securely stored in UNSW's E-Research Institutional Cloud Architecture (ERICA). ERICA is a secure password-protected (with mandatory multifactor authentication) cloud computing infrastructure for individuals working with sensitive, often large-scale data. It provides a highly secure, yet highly functional, computing environment that enables cutting-edge data analytics and reporting.
- The encrypted data will be imported into ERICA by the chief investigator (CI) and then unencrypted within the ERICA environment.
- The unencrypted data inside the ERICA platform will only be accessible by authorised members of the Yuwaya Ngarra-li research team. No copy of the unit record data will be kept outside of ERICA.

Data use and outputs

Although the data are de-identified, there is a small risk that individuals represented in the data could be inadvertently re-identified, either by the researchers or in publications. The following precautions are being undertaken to minimise this risk:

- Limiting access to the unit record data minimises the likelihood of inadvertent identification of individuals by Yuwaya Ngarra-li researchers.
- Only the CI is currently approved to access the unit record data, through UNSW's ERICA, for data preparation and statistical analysis.
- Data for composite de-identified case studies will be combined by the CI (groups of at least 5 individuals with similar trajectories), to ensure that no specific individual is identifiable, before being provided to other investigators for analysis.
- All research outputs will be aggregated to avoid potential risk of re-identification.
- Where there are small numbers of observations in tables or graphs they will be replaced with <5.
- Any case studies developed from the linked data will be composite and not pertaining to a specific individual.

Building Indigenous research capacity

The CI, who is non-Indigenous, is currently the only person on the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team with the technical skills and experience to undertake quantitative analysis of linked unit record data, and is the only investigator who will have access to the de-identified unit record data. However, she collaborates extensively with the DEG and other Yuwaya Ngarra-li researchers at UNSW to ensure that the methodology is appropriate to answer the research questions and that the findings are interpreted appropriately. The CI also consults more widely with other colleagues (for example, biostatisticians and econometricians) at UNSW and experts in agencies who supply the data to ensure that methods are appropriate and rigorous.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li is hoping to secure funds to employ Indigenous quantitative researchers to work with the Yuwaya Ngarra-li Research and Evaluation Team at UNSW and to build Indigenous research capability in this space. It is our expectation that these researchers will join the data linkage project and work with the CI in the future to help analyse the unit record data. At that time, we will submit a modification to the project. This will both align with our commitment to build capacity in Indigenous quantitative research and ensure that the project is not reliant on one individual for the technical requirements of the analysis.

Further community briefings and publications

The research team will continue to report back to the DEG throughout the research to ensure that it is informed by and contributes to community priorities, and protocols are being followed. This will take place through meetings, presentations and briefing papers. We will also continue to disseminate the work as it progresses through webinars, published reports and journal articles. For example, our recent webinar on Community-Led Research, Government Data, and Indigenous Data Governance. A forthcoming article on the role of government administrative data in community led research and evaluation, coauthored by UNSW and DEG investigators, has been accepted for publication by the *International Journal of Law and Justice*.

Lessons

Under Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australian governments agreed to “share available, disaggregated regional data and information with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities on Closing the Gap, subject to meeting privacy requirements” (Closing the Gap, 2020, clause 72.a). However, obtaining and analysing relevant data is a major challenge for ACCOs. There is an imbalance in power, resources and technical knowledge between agencies who control the data, researchers with the resources and technical skills to analyse data, and the community to whom the data belong. Over time, government administrative data are becoming more available to researchers but the process of obtaining access to the data is resource intensive, as we have described in this briefing paper. It is difficult for ACCOs to access data without research partners such as universities who have experience and resources to navigate the process and help to analyse the data. Led by the DEG, Yuwaya Ngarra-li’s data linkage study operationalises IDG through facilitating access to government-held data for community purposes. It is our hope that through sharing our experience we can assist other communities who wish to undertake a similar data journey.

Resources

Below are links to various resources that we have used throughout the process of developing our data linkage project, which may be useful for others planning their own NSW-based data linkage studies.

AH&MRC Ethics Application Information and Resources

CHeReL Application Process and Forms

NSW Human Services Data Set (HSDS) Metadata

FACSIAR Research Support Request Form

BOCSAR Guidelines and Form to Access Unit Record Reoffending Data

Corrective Services Ethics Committee Information and Application Forms

Education Data Services Information and Contact Details

Fines Dashboards and Contact Details

References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), *Statistical Area Level 2*, available at https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/standards/australian-statistical-geography-standard-asgs-edition-3/jul2021-jun2026/main-structure-and-greater-capital-city-statistical-areas/statistical-area-level-2 [accessed 19 January 2024].

Closing the Gap (2020) *National Agreement on Closing The Gap*, July 2020, Priority Reform Four, available at https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/6-priority-reform-areas/four

Kukutai, T. & J. Taylor (Eds) (2016) *Indigenous data sovereignty: Toward an agenda*, Canberra: ANU Press.

Walter, M. & S.R. Carrol (2020) 'Indigenous Data Sovereignty, governance and the link to Indigenous policy', in M. Walter et al (Eds) *Indigenous data sovereignty and policy*, Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge.

Walter, M., R. Lovett, G. Bodkin Andrews & V. Lee (2018) *Indigenous Data Sovereignty Briefing Paper 1*, Miaim nayri Wingara Data Sovereignty Group and the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5b3043afb40b9d20411f3512/t/5b70e7742b6a28f3a0e14683/1534125946810/Indigenous+Data+Sovereignty+Summit+June+2018+Briefing+Paper.pdf