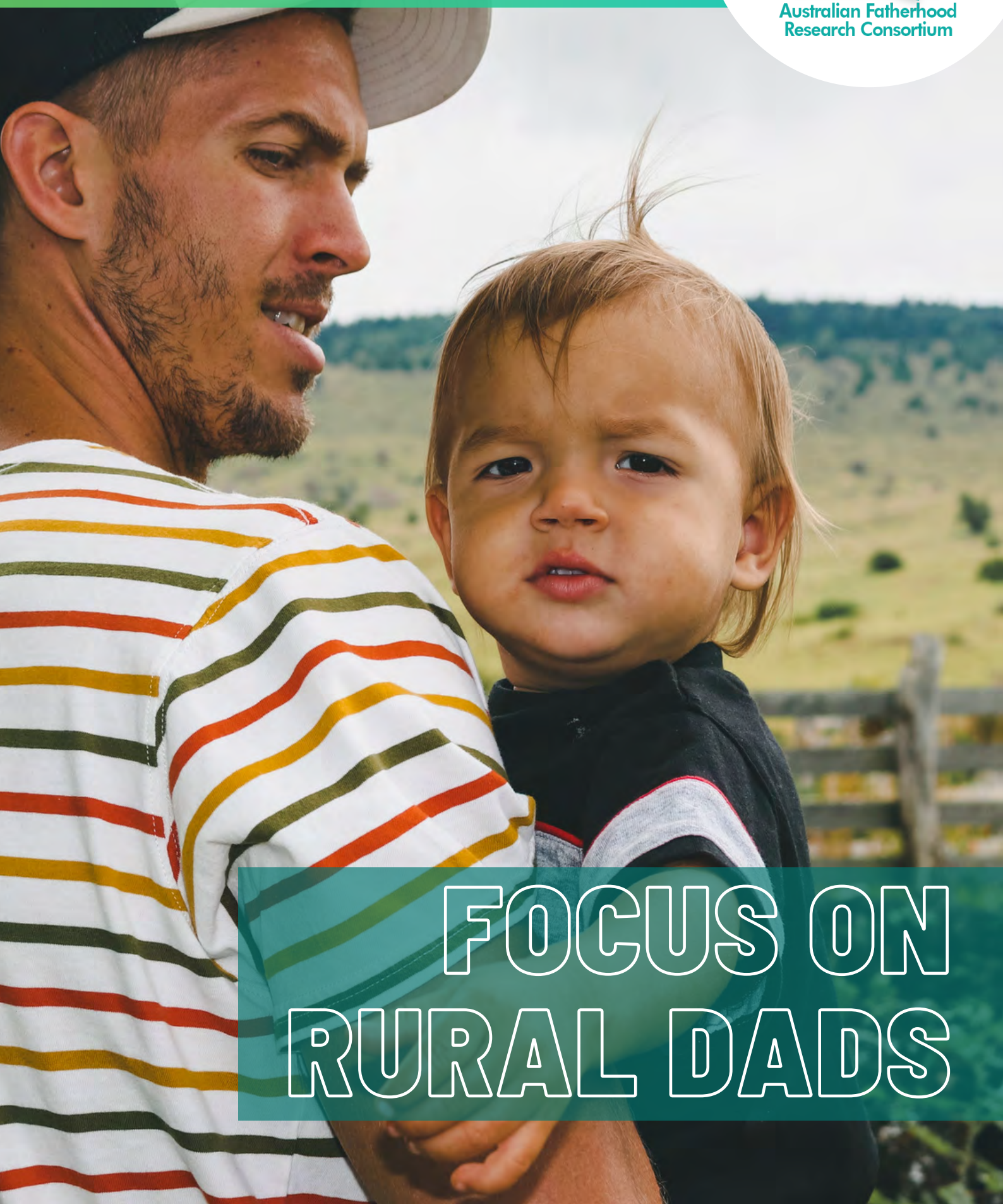


# FATHERHOOD BULLETIN

AUTUMN 2022  
ISSUE 52



Australian Fatherhood  
Research Consortium



## FOCUS ON RURAL DADS



Australian Fatherhood  
Research Consortium



AFRC Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium

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Cover photo by [Derek Owens on Unsplash](#)



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*The Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium is a collaboration of researchers, practitioners and policy makers. We exist to advance the science of fatherhood, inform practice and policy that supports men and their families, and promote healthy inclusion of fathers in family life.*

***If you wish to join the Fatherhood Bulletin mailing list, please email [chris.may@newcastle.edu.au](mailto:chris.may@newcastle.edu.au)***

# Guest Editorial

EVIE FISHER – DEAKIN UNIVERSITY



**With fresh air, connection to land, and easy access to nature, regional Australia can be a fantastic place to raise a family.**

However, the rural expanses that many fathers enjoy also present an array of challenges to fathers and to the services that support them.

Rural isolation can weigh heavily on dads while medical, educational and support services are often few and far between. The challenges associated with lower population density, vast distances, limited infrastructure, and difficulty recruiting practitioners can make it hard to provide the same quality and breadth of services as those experienced by dads in urban areas.

Beyond this, service quality can be impaired by a severe lack of research on rural dads' wants and needs, and a tendency to apply top-down urban-designed programs without consultation or collaboration with local communities.

**However this tide may be turning as services employ innovative means for engaging rural fathers despite the structural barriers.**

In recent years we have seen fathers' groups being established in rural pubs and sporting clubs, increasing father-inclusive training for frontline healthcare workers, the proliferation of online services, and movement towards participatory design where rural programs are developed in consultation with the fathers they serve.

While more is being done to acknowledge and support rural fathers, we are still very much at the start of this process. More thought, more research, more consultation, and more conversations need to be had to allow us to provide the best possible support, services, and care to dads - wherever they live.

# A LONG WAY FROM THE RIGHT SERVICE

BY OWEN COOPER

My daughter was born on the 1st of December 2020, the first day of summer. She was not a calm and happy baby; for the first few months she cried more often than not, and didn't sleep well.

Many babies find travelling in cars relaxing, and many people recommend calming an inconsolable baby by taking it for a drive. My daughter didn't tolerate trips in the car until she was almost a year old. We live in a small town about half an hour outside Wodonga, Victoria - what was meant to be a relaxing thirty-minute drive through scenic country into Wodonga turned out to be a stressful ordeal we did our best to avoid.

Our town's single general store was closed and had been for some time, compounding the issue - even a loaf of bread was at least 25 minutes away and, with a screaming baby, that is an eternity. Grocery shopping became a one-person job, and family trips into town had to last most of the day, to give our daughter time to calm down after getting out of the car, and to ensure we spent more time out and enjoying ourselves than in it and not.

Of course, these trips were also only possible when COVID-19 restrictions allowed. For my partner, at home with our daughter, this meant a long term and devastating isolation.

Between our daughter's dislike for the car and recurring restrictions, she was unable to do the things that make her happy; seeing friends,



exploring the countryside, going shopping, or simply going for a drive. I had the opportunity to go to work; my partner didn't. Visits from friends and family couldn't be relied upon, thanks to the (very necessary) restrictions and frequent lockdowns of 2021.

Anyone who loves children as we do will be happy to tell you they're not great conversationalists and not very considerate of your needs. 2022 has been an improvement so far. A few months ago, our daughter started enjoying being in the car, and has even gotten used to daily walks by the lake... I wonder if she'd consider sleeping through the night?

TO FIND OUT ABOUT TELEHEALTH IN RURAL AREAS, CHECK OUT THE NEW RESEARCH ON PAGE 13.

# SERVICES FOR FATHERS IN REGIONAL & RURAL AREAS

IF YOU, OR ANY FATHER THAT YOU KNOW, IS IN NEED OF SUPPORT PLEASE CONTACT THE FOLLOWING SERVICES:

## **Lifeline**

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>

13 11 14

Mental health crisis support

## **Men's Line**

<https://mensline.org.au/>

1300 78 99 78

Men's support, counselling, referral and information

## **SMS4Dads**

<https://www.sms4dads.com.au/>

SMS-based support and information for new and expectant fathers

## **Support for Fathers: Relationships Australia**

<https://supportforfathers.com.au/>

1300 364 277

Free information/workshops for fathers and professionals working with fathers.

## **Stayin' On Track**

<https://www.stayinontrack.com/>

Support and information for Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander dads



Photo by Yousef Naddam on Unsplash



Photos provided by author

# KIDS AND THE COUNTRY

## A STORY OF RURAL FATHERHOOD

At 38, I became a father for the first time, shortly after I transferred my job with NSW Fire Brigades from Bondi to Wagga, where I had grown up on a family farm. For the first year or so, I got to work there with my Dad. Just before my second daughter and 3rd child arrived, we purchased our own home on 130 acres to “give farming a go.”

This was the first year of an 11-year dry spell. However, we were able to purchase more land, my wife and I both working in paid jobs, along with a ‘drought proof’ block in the foothills of the Snowy Mountains.

Initially the purchase was a great idea, allowing us to go away as a family to spend time in a different climate, and meet new people and old friends. It was family time where the kids could run around our place and meet new neighbours. Dad (81) gave in to the harsh conditions and sold his farm but he’d do day trips to work with my sheep. It was a truly special time which we continued to share until he was 88.

My children took a varied interest in farming, but I was often too busy to wait for their participation – holding down a full time job and working across the properties.

I deliberately got involved in Australian football, netball, cricket and in summer spent regular time with them in sport or at the local town swimming pool. I coached my eldest son in under 11’s, 13’s and 15’s and took up umpiring. I have umpired matches of both of my sons and one daughter. My other daughter (21) is looking to start Aussie Rules as well.

I have been able to share wonderful times with my children as they helped and shared the work of handling sheep and cattle and from time to time breeding and training sheep dogs - something I’m not very good at, but something that the kids just love. Unfortunately their passion has not always been my passion and I often felt the guilt of imposing my choices on them when asking for help.



My youngest son, in particular, is consumed by online shoot 'em up games. On occasion, I can draw him away to spend time working with me. When I get him there he usually becomes engaged and involved. Seeing this change in him will usually quell the guilt I feel for the things I have had to do in getting him out there.

Last weekend I travelled with him to Brisbane to commence his next stage in life at university, just as his elder brother has done. During this five hour ride he shared his dreams and anxieties. It is always easier to talk on a car trip for some reason.

We can only hope that the decisions we have made and how we live, as a rural family, have enhanced theirs and my life. This is what we have done, it's what we understand. We have nothing else to compare it to.

BY JOHN



Photos provided by Matthew MacDonald

# CALLING ALL FATHERHOOD PROFESSIONALS & RESEARCHERS TO ATTEND



## AUSTRALIAN FATHERHOOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM 2022

5TH & 6TH MAY | MELBOURNE & ONLINE

[Quick, click here to register](#)

The official annual event of the  
Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium



@ausfatherhood | #AFRS2022







# Why attend the AUSTRALIAN FATHERHOOD RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM ?

**5 & 6 MAY, 2022**

IN SUPPORT OF FATHER FIGURES

**Moving toward father-inclusive practice:  
Bringing research, policy and practice  
together to drive real and sustainable  
change.**

Research has yielded consistent evidence about barriers to father-inclusive practice, and there are some excellent programs being implemented in Australia and elsewhere. So why are we still 'stuck' when it comes to addressing those barriers, generating high quality evidence about father-inclusive practice, and scaling up evidence-based policies and programs?

What do we need to overcome the barriers and co-operate across sectors to transform our vision into sustainable change?

The Australian Fatherhood Research Symposium 2022 presents Australian and international keynote speakers who offer insight into these and other issues, alongside presentations on current fatherhood research and discussion panels to drive change.

## QUOTES FROM AFRS 2021

"Really appreciated this opportunity to consider further the father's perspective and needs. It has given me much food for thought and ideas to take back to my workplace."

"Always wonderful topics and speakers that get me thinking about areas of fatherhood advocacy and intervention that I have not yet delved into!"

# FATHERHOOD NEWS

The latest need-to-know news on dads in one place

## DAD SAVES DAUGHTER IN 36 HOUR QLD FLOOD ORDEAL

[7News](#)

Caught in a snap flood as they drove between Childers and Nanango, in Queensland, father Craig Mortensen tied rope to his daughter Kira and managed to keep her safe in the fork of a tree, whilst he stood in the floodwater for 36 hours. Kira said tht her dad is "amazing".



## FATHER & SONS TURN LIFE STORIES INTO THEATRE

[ABC News](#)

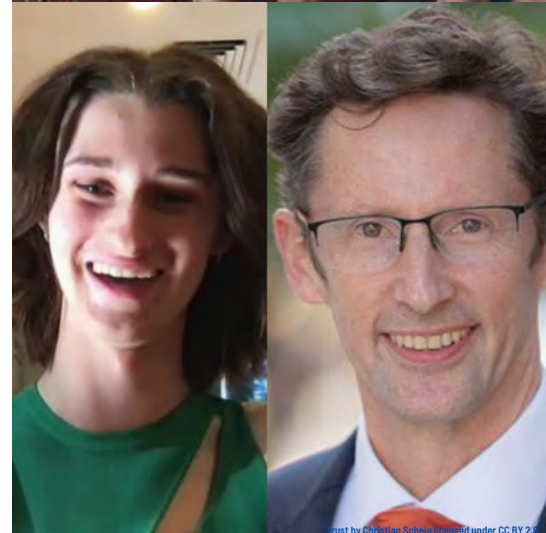
When he was sentenced to two years in prison, Kim Crotty missed reading to his young sons the most. So, he began writing stories for them from his cell - 47 in total. These stories, and the story behind the stories, have been supported to become an interactive theatre show at the Perth Festival 2022.



## HERO MP DAD STANDS FOR SON

[ABC News](#)

Labor MP, Stephen Jones, delivered an impassioned speech about his son and his late nephew during the debate for the federal government's divisive religious discrimination bill. Calling for the members of the Hill to reconsider the bill that critics feared would legalise discrimination against the LGBTIQ+ community, Jones spoke proudly of his son, Paddy, who "swims against the tide" and advocated for all children who did not follow gendered norms.



# SMS4DADS GOES REGIONAL ACROSS AUSTRALIA

SMS4dads received Australian Government funding in late 2021 to roll SMS4dads out to families in rural and remote locations across Australia through to the end of 2024. This funding has enabled an expanded team at SMS4dads to make some important changes to the program while providing this free service to new dads from 12 weeks pregnant to the end of the first year of their new baby's life.

These changes include a review of the messages to ensure that the language and ideas behind the message are acceptable for ATSI dads. We are also developing new messages for dads who are working to support a mum experiencing perinatal depression or anxiety, for those where the family has experienced a miscarriage or perinatal infant death. There are also messages for dads whose babies arrive so early that they need to spend a period of time in neonatal intensive care.

This funding has also enabled SMS4dads to expand the amount of information on the website. [If you visit www.sms4dads.com](http://www.sms4dads.com) you will find a growing library of information and resources for dads and for those working with dads across their transition to fatherhood.

If you are a rural dad or somebody providing services to rural dads and want to share your experience with SMS4dads you can get in touch with us at [info@sms4dads.com.au](mailto:info@sms4dads.com.au)



Photo by Kaboompics.com from Pexels

Strengths of First Nations Fathers

# Deadly New Dads Video Competition



Here's your  
chance to win  
**\$3,000**



**TOTAL PRIZE POOL  
\$10,000!!**

**Entries NOW OPEN**

[SMS4dads.com.au/deadly-new-dads-video-competition](https://SMS4dads.com.au/deadly-new-dads-video-competition)

**SMS4dads.com**

# Researcher Profile

RICHARD PASCAL

I am a recently enrolled full-time PhD student at Curtin University, a Counselling Psychologist in private practice in a suburb about 50km south of Perth and a husband and a dad to two boys aged two and five. My journey here started over ten years ago as a psychology trainee in the child protection and juvenile justice sectors, where I observed that many fathers were absent in their children's lives and were often disengaged from services.

Since becoming a father in the last five years, I also experienced the joys and challenges of the fathering journey, especially in the first 12 months. My personal and professional experiences have influenced my work with children, their parents and broader systems and I have focused my recent clinical work on first-time fathers' psychological adjustment to parenting.

With a local parenting service, I also currently co-facilitate antenatal sessions for first-time parents, with a focus on fathers' roles, mental health, adjustment and support options. I see significant value in engaging fathers and providing them guidance and support very early in their parenting journey; however, specific antenatal intervention for Western Australian first-time fathers appears scarce, is implemented mostly through small local and grassroots efforts and is not routinely evaluated for impact.

My PhD project will aim to develop and evaluate, through a formative evaluation

process, an evidence-based antenatal program for first-time fathers, delivered through an online medium – the latter to circumvent some of the barriers to father engagement (e.g., social stigma, availability, content relevance, etc). Research on fathers' posts and behaviour online also suggests that new fathers in the perinatal period seek support, validation and guidance from experienced fathers and peers alike and the project will also consider and evaluate the role that peer-facilitation can play in such a program.

In developing the program, I would seek to consult, at a state and national level, fathers and their partners, as well as researchers and service providers in the field.



# UPCOMING EVENTS

We've rounded up the best fatherhood focussed events in the country.



## **CAPEA ONLINE PRESENTATION: EVIDENCE INFORMED PRACTICE WHEN WORKING WITH AUSTRALIAN FATHERS IN THE TRANSITION TO PARENTHOOD.**

**IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE UNIVERSITY OF  
NEWCASTLE**

Dr. Chris May presents an overview of the current status of paternal parenting education in Australia (based on a recent report to CAPEA) and a summary of the current state of research in key areas associated with the paternal transition to parenthood. The presentation will aim to stimulate a national conversation between providers about the role that evidence can play in informing the development of paternal perinatal intervention. The long term goals of this initiative are to initiate collaboration in striving for areas of consensus, the sharing of resources, and the development of a more collegiate state of practice.

[CLICK THIS LINK for webinar registration.](#)



## **AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF FAMILY STUDIES CONFERENCE 2022**

Join thought-leaders, researchers, policy makers, practitioners and change-makers for three days of insights, inquiry and thought-provoking discussion about putting families at the centre.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) 2022 Conference will imagine a future where putting families at the centre drives the work of researchers, policy makers, and service providers.

AIFS 2022 Conference is a must if you are a researcher or policy maker, or if you design, deliver or evaluate services for families, children and their communities.

[CLICK THIS LINK for conference registrati.](#)

## Fatherhood in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: An Examination of Barriers and Opportunities to Strengthen the Male Parenting Role



Traditional Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies value men's role as parents; however, the importance of promoting fatherhood as a key social determinant of men's well-being has not been fully appreciated in Western medicine. To strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male parenting role, it is vital to examine current barriers and opportunities. Yarning sessions were conducted with three remote Australian communities. A thematic analysis of data from the project identified barriers and opportunities to support men's role as parents. Services need to better understand and focus on men's psychological empowerment and to address shame and lack of confidence around parenting. Poor literacy and numeracy are viewed as contributing to disempowerment. Communities need to champion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male father role models. Biases and barriers should be addressed to improve service delivery and better enable men to become empowered and confident fathers.

Reilly, L. & Rees, R. (2017). Fatherhood in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities: An Examination of Barriers and Opportunities to Strengthen the Male Parenting Role. *American Journal of Men's Health*, 12(2), pp. 420-430. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557988317735928>

## Client, provider and community referrer perceptions of telehealth for the delivery of rural paediatric allied health services

**Objective:** To examine allied health client, provider and community referrer perceptions of telehealth for the delivery of rural paediatric allied health services to facilitate adoption.

**Design:** A qualitative design employed semistructured interviews with the three key stakeholder groups. Stakeholders were associated with BUSHkids (The Royal Queensland Bush Children's Health Scheme), a not-for-profit organisation serving children and families in Queensland, Australia.

**Conclusion:** Overall, telehealth was acceptable to stakeholders. Providers need training to facilitate child participation online and identify alternatives to physical touch. Co-learning opportunities should be used to address low provider and referrer self-efficacy.



Campbell, J., Theodoros, D., Russell, T., Gillespie, N., & Hartley, N. (2019). Client, provider and community referrer perceptions of telehealth for the delivery of rural paediatric allied health services. *Australian Journal of Rural Health*, 27(5), 419-426. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12519>

# Addressing the needs of first-time fathers in Tasmania: A qualitative study of father-only antenatal groups

**Objective:** To examine how first-time fathers in rural Tasmania experienced father-only antenatal support/education groups.

**Design:** Semistructured interviews with expectant fathers were used for this study. Purposive sampling was used to recruit fathers in 2014. Participants were recruited face-to-face via email through a government health service and not-for-profit organisation that runs a state-wide fatherhood program. Several participants were recruited through a company that holds antenatal education classes for men in a pub. Data were analysed thematically.

**Conclusion:** Tasmanian antenatal education/support programs need improvement. Providing men with multiple opportunities to connect with other fathers is critical to improving support. Groups can be improved by accounting for multiple and complex constructions of masculinity, increasing the number of sessions offered and altering the structure.



**Nash, M. (2018). Addressing the needs of first-time fathers in Tasmania: A qualitative study of father-only antenatal groups. Australian Journal of Rural Health, 26(2), 106-111. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajr.12371>.**

## “When I got the news”: Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period



**Issue addressed:** Paternal involvement during the antenatal period is recognised as a positive contributor to a child's health and developmental outcomes. Little is known about Aboriginal Australian men's experiences and perceptions during their partner's antenatal period.

**Methods:** A qualitative yarning methodology was used to explore the experiences of ten Aboriginal Australian fathers during their partner's antenatal period, in a remote Northern Australian town.

**Conclusions:** This study demonstrated that these Aboriginal men valued engagement with antenatal care (ANC) services and highlighted strategies to improve Aboriginal paternal involvement with ANC services. Enhancing ANC to be inclusive of fathers, through a local co-design process, could strengthen and support Aboriginal families to achieve improved health and wellbeing outcomes across the family system.

**Carlin, E., Cox, Z., Spry, E., Monahan, C., Marley, J. V., & Atkinson, D. (2021). “When I got the news”: Aboriginal fathers in the Kimberley region yarning about their experience of the antenatal period. Health Promotion Journal of Australia, 32(3), 513-522. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hpja.375>**





## Australian Fatherhood Research Consortium

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