

Case Study

Indigenous Project

Working Visions with World Mosquito Program, Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council and Tropical Public Health Service | Dengue Out Program Northern Peninsula Area Cape York Qld

Working Visions led the Community Engagement and Communications Strategy planning and delivery for the Tropical Public Health Service (TPHS) Cairns, on the Dengue Out Program.

The Dengue Out Program is a collaboration between Tropical Public Health Service Cairns, the World Mosquito Program (WMP) and the Northern Peninsula Area Council (NPARC).

This ground-breaking program was carried out on the Northern Peninsula Area (NPA) of Cape York, which is made up of three Aboriginal communities – Umagico, Injinoo and New Mapoon; and two Torres Strait Islander communities – Seisia and Bamaga. The NPA region is approximately 1,000 kilometres north-west of Cairns by road.



Purpose of the Wolbachia release program:

Through the Dengue Out Program (DPO), to reduce the risk of dengue/Zika/chikungunya outbreaks in the targeted areas of Cape York and Torres Strait where the vector *Aedes aegypti* is prevalent.

What role the public had in the decision-making process:

Our promise to the NPA community was to not carry out the project unless we received community approval for (a) engagement activities to commence and (b) mosquito releases to commence post engagement activities.

The project objectives were:

- to establish Wolbachia in five locations in the NPA *Aedes aegypti* mosquito population entirely through egg releases, at a low cost and with strong support of the public and key stakeholders.
- to engage the community to be involved through hosting of mosquito release containers and mosquito monitoring (BG) traps. Target of 1:3 households.
- to educate the community on dengue, Wolbachia through targeted and culturally appropriate information, targeted engagement sessions and use of project champions.

A Community reference group (CRG) was established to verify that Dengue Out Program's NPA team carries out the community engagement and communication program in accordance with its commitments and its Public Participation. This was an integral component in the program.

The reasons for the use of the particular participation process:

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involves building trust and working within an established hierarchal system where identified people speak for, and represent, the community. It was important that the project identified and built relationships with those elders and community representatives and that those people were part of our Community Reference Group. We sought advice and confirmation in the early formation of the CRG that we had the correct cohort of leaders on our group.

The use of trusted community members as project Champions contributed to its success. CRG members were provided with key messaging, induction and background information (fact sheets, links to WMP's website) to ensure they felt confident in their role but also to assist them to engage their particular community/cohort.

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“As a boutique consultancy, based in far north Queensland, winning a Core Value Award allowed Working Visions the chance showcase authentic and culturally appropriate Indigenous engagement. As the Dengue Out Program - Wolbachia project -was a collaboration across four organisations and the entire community of the Northern Peninsula Area, the Award also provided the opportunity to highlight the work of our partners. It also provided cumulative recognition of our regional engagement work over many years.”

Describe how the public participation process responded to any challenges faced:

Planning, particularly risk identification and management, communication and flexibility were the key in responding to project challenges. Establishment of regular project meetings were essential as well as keeping Council, CRG members and TO's informed by phone and email.

We also utilised passive marketing to reinforce the program via the use of corflute signs which were tailored for each community and placed strategically in highly visible spots. The slogan “Keep Dengue out of NPA (or whichever community) became well recognised and often repeated as did the hashtag #NPA#1 (NPA being the first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in Australia – therefore globally – to be hosting the Wolbachia dengue project. The corflutes weathered cyclones, Sorry business and floods but were a constant reminder of the program and the importance of the NPA community being involved.

A strategic decision was to use the partnership with Council to provide communications into the Community. Council had established and well-recognised / utilised website and FB pages so instead of trying to steer community and stakeholders to a new website/FB Council distributed DOP information which was composed by WV and posted by Council media officer. This resulted in immediate recognition for the program, emanating from a trusted source.

How did you win the support or co-operation of communities/stakeholders for the project or improved relationships with them, or participation opportunities:

The first evidence for community support and participation is through the CRG providing approval to commence working in the community. Without building strong relationships with Council, the Traditional Owner group members and other stakeholders represented on the CRG the DOP could not have proceeded. Our promise to our public was to not carry out the project unless we received community approval for (a) engagement activities to commence and (b) mosquito releases to commence post engagement activities.

Strong community support with over 1:3 houses hosting mozzie boxes- out 979 households 380 signed up to have a mozzie box at their home and another 80 households have BG mosquito monitoring traps. This could be considered a fantastic response given that each household needed to understand the reason for hosting the mozzie boxes, the value this community led response has to the control of dengue in their community and also proves the effectiveness of the engagement processes.

The DOP used the Public Acceptance Model (PAM) as the evaluation tool, which was carried out in three stages:

1. Baseline survey – project start-up. To gauge the public's understanding and knowledge of dengue/Zika, Wolbachia and to inform messaging and CE activities required to properly educate and involve residents in the project.
2. Pre-release data – following engagement activities and prior to release commencement, evaluation is undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the engagement activities
3. Post-release – following releases community sentiment toward, and understanding of the project is measured.

Baseline data is presented to the CRG with pre-release data being presented to reinforce CE activities effectiveness. The PAM model aligns with WMP's evaluation and monitoring across global sites.