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*First Nations music as a determinant of health in Australia and Vanuatu: political and economic determinants.*

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**Graphical abstract**
First Nations music as a determinant of health in Australia and Vanuatu: Political and economic determinants

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Abstract
This article reports on findings that indicate how First Nations musical activities function as cultural determinants of health. Drawing on early findings from a three-year Australian Research Council funded project titled *The Remedy Project: First Nations Music as a Determinant of Health*, we detail Australian and Ni Vanuatu First Nations musicians’ reported outcomes of musical activity using a First Nations cultural determinants of health framework. The broader findings indicate that our respondents see musical activity as actively shaping all known domains of cultural health determinants, and some surrounding political and social determinants. However, this paper focuses specifically on the political and economic determinants that emerged in analysis as the most dominant sub-themes. We argue that this study provides strong impetus for continued investigation and reconceptualisation of the place of music in cultural health determinant models.

Lay summary
This article looks at how making and performing music, recording music and listening to music helps the health of First Nations peoples in Australia and Ni Vanuatu. Music is an important part of the lives of First Nations peoples from these places and so research was done to try to understand why it is meaningful. Music can be used as an outlet for personal feelings, and can also be a way that groups of people can express common concerns. First Nations musicians talked about how music makes them feel, and how music is used to strengthen relationships between people, and between people and their culture. Musicians also talked about how music helps them express their political and economic goals. The findings backed up existing First Nations’ models of health that say that health for First Nations People’s needs to be thought
about in a holistic way. The findings also showed that the relationship between music and health needs to be studied more so that we can better understand how it helps maintain links with the past, gives a guide for the present, and opens options for the future.

**Keywords**
First Nations
Music
Health determinants
Culture
Wellbeing
This article explores how contemporary First Nations musical activity influences cultural determinants of health in Australia and Vanuatu. Our intention is to investigate the potential of musical activity as a resource for culturally safe and strength-based health promotion with diverse First Nations People internationally. Despite ongoing investment in social and health services, inequalities for First Nations People internationally continue to escalate (Bond & Singh, 2020; Wentworth, 2020), while conventional health promotion approaches to addressing those disparities are not pervasively working (Bond & Singh, 2020; Dick, 2015). Consequently, there are growing calls for creative and First Nations led responses to health promotion. Alongside health professionals, educators, policy makers, and researchers, musicians are working towards health and wellbeing by, inter alia, facilitating active music making across a wide range of contexts (Parkinson & White, 2013; United Nations, 2015). Our research responds to that momentum, enquiring into the ways that First Nations music might help shape cultural and social determinants of health and wellbeing.

The authors come to this topic with diverse First Nations and non-Indigenous heritages alongside mixed disciplinary and artistic backgrounds (see Acknowledgements). This paper is structured as follows: We first contextualize the research. We then outline the research approach and key findings about how First Nations engagements with music map onto existing frameworks for cultural health determinants. We conclude by discussing our findings and considering directions for future research.

BACKGROUND

For millennia, First Nations Peoples have practiced music and song alongside other art forms to maintain and influence powerful cultural, environmental, and social factors that affect Country and community wellbeing. First Nations music may be defined in part as music
originally created by First Nations People, and the First Nations identity of the performer(s) (Bracknell, 2019). First Nations music in Australia encapsulates a diverse range of culturally, geographically, linguistically, and functionally diverse genres, including the vocal idioms of mainland Australia and Tasmania usually accompanied by percussion, dancing, and, more rarely, didjeridu. Equally, it can include music created by First Nations peoples across a wide array of popular and folk music forms, and Western art music styles, which can also be deployed as proclamations ‘of contemporary black identity’ (Clough, 2012, p. 296). Stern (2014, p. 2) identified that music in Vanuatu “is not only a leisure activity” but also a “constituent part of social relations”. Music plays an “important role in the sharing of cultural practices” including reggae (national and international), string band, Melanesian Christian religious music and Kastom (traditional) music.

First Nations music will always be inherently contemporary, because creative innovation is intrinsic to sustaining even the most stable song traditions (Hale, 1984; Lord, 1960), and longstanding local First Nations genres have long converged with more recent global music styles (Corn 2000; Patrick 2015; Ottosson 2015). Digital technologies such as mobile phones have been significant in the proliferation of First Nations music practices and listening internationally (Stern, 2014). Despite Western music being deployed as a form of settler-colonial indoctrination (Radich, 2002; Haebich, 2018), popular music is neither exclusively Western nor colonial (Bracknell, 2022), especially not the rock, reggae, and hip hop that spread into First Nations communities with obvious “elements of African diasporic blackness” (Webb & Bracknell, 2021).

First Nations music has been recognized as a resource for self-representation, economic participation, and health and healing in First Nations communities (Barney & Mackinlay, 2010;
Bracknell, 2020). Yet, much existing research has focused on simple ‘cause and effect’ interventions rather than capturing complex resonances between music, culture, and health outcomes (DeNora & Asdell, 2014). Broad benefits of music making approaches such as choirs and song writing include improved mental health (Guerin et al, 2011), social connection (Solis, 2015; Bartleet et al, 2016), justice outcomes (Corn, 2016), self-esteem (Culp, 2016), employment (Guerin et al, 2011), cultural continuation (Bracknell, 2020; Barwick, Laughren & Turpin, 2013; Emberly, Treloyn & Charles, 2017; Marett, 2005); and self-expression (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2004; Evans & Sinclair, 2016). Research has also identified that the process of negotiating and preparing to make music strengthens cultural identity and enhances relationships and connections (Salmon et al, 2019; Guerin et al, 2011; Bracknell et al., 2021). Hence, First Nations cultures manifest and maintain a multitude of connections between health, wellbeing, music, arts, and community cohesion. While multiple studies show the broad benefits that music participation can bring for First Nations Peoples, little research has explicitly explored music as a cultural determinant of health. Researchers from our ongoing three year study, *The Remedy Project: First Nations music as a Determinant of Health*, recently conducted a scoping literature review relating to First Nations health determinants and music. The review included 46 studies of which only one study explicitly linked music to health determinants (Bartleet et al., 2018). Other studies discussed the importance of music as a form of cultural expression within cultural determinant of health (Sivak et al, 2019).

**FIRST NATIONS CULTURAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH**

In keeping with First Nations Peoples’ long-voiced perspective of holistic wellbeing, health determinants frameworks have moved away from a predominant focus on social determinants of health and wellbeing toward *cultural determinants* (Verbunt, et. al., 2021). For
example, the Australian National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023 highlights the critical importance of cultural determinants in overall wellness for First Nations peoples, recognizing that culture encompasses relationships to spirituality, country, community, and practices that may promote positive wellbeing, including health engagement (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). Internationally, similar conclusions have been reached regarding First Nations music and its promising potentials as a social and cultural health determinant (Ironside et al, 2021; Rieken, Tanaka & Scott, 2006; Salmon et al, 2018).

Hunter and Garvey (1998) observed that a feature of emergent health promotion frameworks was their prioritization and reinvigoration of First Nations ideas in forms that were complementary to, and at times critical of, the prevailing health models used to understand, determine, and assess First Nations Peoples’ health and wellbeing. These models foregrounded the need to recognize how First Nations Peoples understood their health and wellbeing – in terms of what they saw as the things that sustained, promoted, and diminished them (Hunter & Garvey, 1998). Resulting culturally informed determinants of health approaches have been described as “a strength-based perspective, acknowledging that stronger connection to culture and country build stronger individual and collective identities, a sense of self-esteem, [and] resilience” (Lowitja Institute, 2014, p. 2). Those strengths move focus away from deficit constructions of First Nations health that view First Nations People as unable to reach socio-economic standards set by dominant Western ‘norms’ for good health and wellbeing outcomes (Verbunt, Luke, Paradies, Bamblett, Salamone, Jones & Kelaher, 2021).

As an anchor point for data collection and analysis, we used the widely cited cultural determinants of health model pictured in Figure 1 (Gee et al., 2014). Gee et al.’s model was used
in most studies selected for a recent literature review conducted for our project. Other Indigenous frameworks included the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* and *The Rumbalara Aboriginal Cooperative holistic model of Indigenous Well-being* (2008). Gee et al.’s (2014) framework offers a strength-based approach which outlines several domains for holistic health and wellbeing. Those domains highlight the complex interplay of cultural, political and social determinants of health for First Nations Peoples (Gee et al., 2014.) For the present research, the place and role of music in this picture is of primary concern and the ways in which that role is the same and different in different contexts for diverse First Nations Peoples globally is a key question.

RESEARCH APPROACH

To explore the topic and scaffold later research, we conducted an Indigenist qualitative pilot study (Hart, Straka, and Rowe, 2017) and yarning to examine First Nations music as a cultural determinant of health. We use the term ‘Indigenist’ to describe research that foregrounds and values diverse First Nations ideas, concepts, and knowledges covered in the literature while promoting First Nations participants’ agency and co-leadership in research processes. Hart et al. (2017) argue that such foregrounding of First Nations agency and knowledges can effectively occur when non-Indigenous researchers are collaborating, as is in the case in this research (Hart et al., 2017, p. 333).

Indigenist research paradigms recognise ongoing oppression, intergenerational trauma and grief of colonisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Chamberlain et al, 2021). Within that overarching approach, yarning as a qualitative data collection technique champions First Nations knowledges and ways of being (Dudgeon et al, 2021; Bernades, et al 2020). Participant voices are centred in the research approach empowering and privileging Aboriginal worldviews and self-determination. Yarning is a process of exchange that involves deep listening of storytelling that can create new meaning and understanding (Carlin et al 2021; Bernades et al, 2020). It promotes First Nations oral traditions and cultural practice and can build partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, negating Western power dynamics of researcher as experts (Dudgeon et al, 2021).

Using those principles, we conducted ten in-depth interviews with First Nations musicians and music facilitators across Australia and Vanuatu using a “yarning” method, an Australian First Nations term for building relationships and having conversations through storytelling (Bessarab & Ng’Andu, 2010). First Nations People in both countries have undergone
and survived the vicissitudes of European colonization. Both are included in the broader research project alongside Ao Te Aroha New Zealand and, given the clear differences between Vanuatu and Australia in respect of First Nations’ political and constitutional self-determination, they are both appropriate sites for pilot research.

**Ethics**

Griffith University and University of the Sunshine Coast Human Research Ethics Committees provided ethical review and clearance for this pilot study. Following advice from community research advisors, participants were offered a printed ethics consent information pack in English, which researchers discussed verbally with each participant prior to interview. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim with transcripts returned to participants. Participants were offered a thank you gift of either a gift card or goods of an equivalent value. Participants selected whether they wished to be identified in the research. Researchers shared the draft manuscript with participants for their review and approval prior to publication. Other than Authors 1 and 2, the interviewees were not personally known to the research team. That combination of existing relationships and social distance provided opportunities for researchers to adopt Indigenist relational protocols while enabling robust data interpretation.

**Participant recruitment**

Participants were recruited through existing professional research and music industry relationships with Authors 1 and 2. Aligned with Indigenist research approaches (Hart et al., 2017), such relationships can form a foundation for deep and reciprocal research encounters and yarning. Prior relationships were also a clear pragmatic consideration given that several well-known First Nations musicians approached to participate in the research, but with whom we did
not have established relationships, did not answer the invitation. Participants include four Ni Vanuatu musicians (two male identifying and two female identifying) and five First Nations musicians from Australia (two female identifying and three male identifying). No participants identified themselves to researchers as gender diverse. The group reflected geographical and cultural diversity between Australia and Vanuatu and across cultural groupings within each continent. Interviews were conducted in English.

**Yarning interviews**

Yarning style semi-structured in-depth interviews were used to promote flexible dialogue and storytelling with diverse participants (Bessarab & Ng’Andu, 2010). Interview questions are included in Appendix 1. Ten interviews were conducted in person (n=8) and via telephone (n=2) by Authors 1 and 2 who were professionally known to participants based on previous music activity. In some cases, a single researcher conducted the interview (n=4) while in others both researchers were present and contributed to the relational and conversational interview process (n=6). Participants completed the interviews on their own in most cases (n=9). However, one interviewee invited his wife to join the recorded interview conversation. One interviewee withdrew from the study, leaving nine interviews for in-depth analysis.

**Data analysis**

Themes and sub-themes were checked and refined by Authors 1, 2, 3, and 5. Data analysis combined *a priori* deductive and data-driven inductive thematic analysis (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). To generate broad understandings of the links between the nature and functions of First Nations musical activity and cultural health determinants, we first searched all interview transcripts for the phrases “music is”, “music was”, “music can be”, and “music does” with
stemmed words and synonyms using NVIVO 12. We then created data driven (inductive) subthemes from that data (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). An example of a data-driven theme that did not fit within Gee et al.’s conceptual framework is ‘Communicating’ (see Figure 2). We matched and categorized data driven subthemes to the deductive *a priori* cultural health determinant domains/themes in Figure 1. We added inductive, data-driven themes such as “communicating” when quotations did not clearly match existing modelled domains. Due to the multilayered nature of participant stories and experiences, some quotations were coded to more than one health determinant theme.

To accommodate participant stories and reported experiences, our analysis expanded Gee et al.’s original recognition of “political determinants” (*Figure 1*) to include political and *economic* determinants. By “political” we mean the ways in which power is produced, distributed, exchanged, and exercised. By “economic” we mean ways in which material goods are produced, distributed, exchanged, and accessed. Consistent with Indigenist research, we intersperse our textual account of findings with exemplars of participants’ music to offer readers an opportunity to experience multimodal and ‘felt’ (Kelly, 2019; Wiebe, 2019) meanings around our topic and the diverse First Nations contexts, music, and people involved.

**FINDINGS**

Findings indicate that musical activity is functioning as a positive or protective determinant of health across all cultural health determinants domains included in Gee et al.’s model. *Figure 2* summarizes the full list of themes and sub-themes that emerged from analysis. We list themes with examples of subthemes in brackets here: Physical Body (physical neurological effects of music and health promotion); Place and Country (connection to Country,
nature and environment and music moveable across places); Spirit and Ancestors (spiritual and healing); Communicating (stories- storytelling and promoting people, places, music); Mental Emotional Wellbeing (resilience, shame); Cultural Heritage (cultural renewal and instruments traditional and other); Political Economic (expression of voice and political agency and music industry and income and musical activism) and; Families and Communities (children – music for and with and music for communities).

In this article we focus on the Political and Economic theme/domain as the highest coded theme in the data. Political determinants of health such as self-determination and empowerment are strongly linked to cultural determinants of connection to culture and strengthening identity. Those determinants are viewed as key components of health and wellbeing of First Nations Peoples (Bernades et al, 2020; Dudgeon et al, 2020; Cairney et al, 2017). There were several examples of musical activity functioning as a negative or limiting health determinant which we report below.

Political and economic health determinants were a stronger topic of conversation for First Nations participants in Australia, but relatively balanced between male and female participants across both countries. All political and economic sub-themes are presented in Figure 2 and selected sub-themes are included under headings below.
Figure 2: Proportion of interview data coded to each health determinants domain
Music industry and income

Music industry and income was the most frequent sub-theme in the political and economic domain. Australian participants discussed the workings of the mainstream music industry as a limiting factor for cultural and financial success. That was not a significant feature of Ni Vanuatu participants’ stories, potentially due to the vastly different commercial music landscape in Vanuatu. Stories of music-related income notably intersected with women’s stories of gender equity, cultural practices, and independence, particularly in Vanuatu. Female participants from both countries spoke about musical activity as a positive way to develop income, often for the benefit of their families and communities. For example, when asked what music had done for her family, Meriam, Quandamooka, and PitaPita singer songwriter, musician, registered nurse, and single mum Rochelle Pitt Watson remarked “Oh geez, music has brought me finances, straight off!” Cecelia Wari, matriarch of the Leweton Cultural Village Water Music Ladies performance group underscored the importance of music enterprise and income in a restricted local employment context:

… if the women weren't doing water music, what other kinds of jobs would they do? … What other employment is there if you're not, say you couldn't do water music anymore, what kind of jobs would the women have to go and do?

Self-determined music enterprise was a key source of income for female participants. Income related benefits from music activity also supported gender independence and custom cultural practice. Celia Lulumle of the Leweton Cultural Village in Espiritu Santo said that if men attempted to enter or make income from women’s musical forms, “we say no. We stop them. That's not yours, that's only for ladies. That's only women's business, not men's business”
(Celia Lulumle, Leweton Cultural Village, Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu). She spoke about her job as a “house girl” prior to her working full time in Leweton water music.

Not only a house girl, like doing everything for my boss. If he's not here, then I have to look after the office … The water music helps me. I can build my own house. I can pay for my school, like my children's school fees.

Such stories highlight links between First Nations music, financial independence, cultural practices, and gender that have flow on effects for the health and wellbeing of families and communities. This also confirms the growing body of evidence that shows gender equality significantly contributes to advancing economies and more sustainable development in local communities (UN Women, 2022). A promotional documentary film featuring Cecelia Wari and Celia Lulumle is included at this link. It is part of a DVD set often sold to tourists that attracts income for the women and families in Leweton Village. That income has been significantly impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Musical activism and human rights**

Musical activism was another strong sub-theme in the political-economic domain. Activism is conceived as deliberate attempts to change power relations by promoting social change and justice through music. Activism was most associated with upstream health determinants such as climate change and human rights. For example, Aiden Teri of the Banban Bamboo Band in Espiritu Santo, Vanuatu, remarked that musicians in Vanuatu were advocating for human rights in West Papua through songwriting and public release of music:
Vanuatu now is the first country that's fighting for West Papua ... not by talking, but by singing. We compose some songs for the West Papuans. ... We want our [neighbours] in West Papua to be free like us. … it's making a big change now.

While some sing for people in other countries, Rochelle Pitt Watson wanted to “aim for my people … my music needs to influence them and support them and uplift them”. Conversely, singer and songwriter for Aboriginal band Coloured Stone, Uncle Bunna Lawrie, aims for a ‘human’ audience to promote a sense of positive obligation and justice that is relevant to all people:

So that’s what we’re trying to get across, songs about hope, peace, love and doing the right thing as a sensible human being, you know? What else [is music] supposed to be … my passion is all about … teaching people through my music and songs. It’s about making them wake up and understand what our responsible duties are on planet earth as a human being. (Uncle Bunna Lawrie, Mirning, Australia)

Uncle Bunna shared reports of improved self-esteem, identity, hope, and wellbeing for young Aboriginal audiences saying, “[t]hey can’t thank me enough to tell you that you’ve changed their lives – ‘You’ve stopped us from petrol sniffing’, or ‘You’ve stopped us from marijuana’, ‘Until I heard ‘Black Boy, the colour of your skin’ it gave me hope.’” (Uncle Bunna Lawrie, Mirning, Australia). The film clip for *Black Boy* is featured [here](#).

Worimi Australian theatre and film producer, community arts and cultural development practitioner, writer, artistic director, and musician Lydia Fairhall also recounted stories of transformation in First Nations communities inspired by other prominent bands such as the
Warumpi Band. Fairhall and others emphasized music as a ‘platform’ for documenting and sharing important stories focused on social change.

Climate change activism was the strongest area of activism reported in the study, particularly by male participants from both countries. Australian Torres Strait Saibai Islander musician Al Bartholomew spoke of the urgent need for climate change action and environmental justice with links to songwriting:

> It’s a distressing, in your face reality for Saibai Islanders, that the sea wall will eventually have to be rebuilt. But the level of the sea keeps on going up and up. I can write a song about that, and it would raise awareness not just to Islanders but all Australians.

Similarly, Ni Vanuatu Tanna musician Desmon Wolam’s songwriting recorded historical testimony to significant and catastrophic climate change events:

> … it's [a song written by Wolam] about ... Cyclone Pam. But then it's [also] for the climate change. So, in the song I was talking about once upon a time, the Cyclone came and hit the island and there was some mother crying over a dead... baby son ... There was one time Cyclone came and hit the island and destroy the island. But it never stops the people playing music and continue the life that they're living. Yeah. So, despite the big challenge with the changes of climate … we're still strong … it means music is everything already. So, music is still fire up, fire up … music is still booming ... life still continue.

Wolam’s song *One Planet One World* available online captures his passion for climate change prevention with links to peace and global solidarity.
**Expression, voice, and political agency**

Musicians emphasized the role of music in claiming political voice and agency, which are tied to known social health determinants such as self-determination, sovereignty, and human rights. For example, Rochelle Pitt Watson said her music is about “giving people that strength to stand up and speak and be counted”. Lydia Fairhall similarly summarised the strong connections between First Nations music and political agency:

> For us, the separation between self-determination and music is just non-existent. It's one story, and I think about that across all of the arts. We are an arts-based culture, and the advancement of our political rights, of our self-determination has really been driven through the arts. … There's just no separation between our own individual stories and that broader political agenda, and I think it's done incredible work in bridging non-Indigenous Australia and Indigenous Australia as well.

Wiradjuri musician Chris Anderson’s cultural development work with Brisbane based asylum seeker and refugee music collective The Scattered People offers an example of the ways music connects across cultures to form community (Author’s own, 2015; Lenette, Weston, Wise, Sunderland & Bristed, 2016). Anderson and members of the Scattered People collective perform his song *Sweet Marmanya* as a tribute to the international musical aid agency Musicians Without Borders.

Further examples link music with nationhood, independence, and identity. Cecelia Wari spoke about singing the Vanuatu national anthem to remind contemporary audiences of the intentions of Ni Vanuatu People who fought for and formally won independence from French and English colonial invaders in 1980. Lydia Fairhall similarly spoke about powerful connections between music, nationhood, and identity, saying: “[y]ou play music to know who
you are, to know where you come from, and for the country to know who it is.” Hence music and song become both an intention and a practice for sharing information and messages of strength, independence, identity, and sovereignty across generations and between cultures.

Uncle Bunna Lawrie expanded on the collective, agentic, and political nature of claiming voice through music, saying:

It [music] inspires them [young people] to speak for themselves, speak for their families, speak for their community and speak for the rights for the justice, for the injustice … they’re getting up everywhere in the community and in the bush and they’re singing and doing what they were so scared to do. [They] talk about land rights.

While some Australian participants reported limited opportunities for First Nations musicians to access ‘mainstream’ audiences due to racism in the music industry, Lydia Fairhall saw musical activity as a platform for countering pervasive deficit constructions of First Nations People:

I play music because I feel this obligation to shine a light on the wellbeing of our people, and of my life, and of our communities, and of the planet. Because I really don't believe that we're here to identify problems and just be applying physical solutions to them. I feel like my most connected work culturally is about amplifying what's really working, and how amazing we are, and how beautiful our communities are, and how grounded we are. That's the main reason why I play now, is to share that narrative ... it's like "Look how fucking awesome we are, and how well we're doing, and how wise we are."
These responses emphasize the potential interdependence of musical activity, cultural strength, and self-determination that are central to cultural health determinants approaches to health and wellbeing promotion.

**Cultural economies**

Musicians discussed the phenomenon of walking in and across culturally divergent, and at times conflicted, practices and contexts as part of their musical lives. For example, Chris Anderson commented on both problematic and beneficial intersections between dominant Eurocentric economic systems in Australia with enduring traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic systems and practices. He remarked that First Nations musicians operated across those different, sometimes competing, cultural economies in Australia. Rochelle Pitt Watson extended on the sub-theme, saying:

… if Aboriginal people and our people are allowed to practice their culture and their music in that culture [Australian music industry], this music industry here [in Australia] would be totally different to what it is today, yeah.

Pitt Watson’s music industry experiences were shaped by being a finalist in the 2014 Australian reality television series *X Factor*. Pitt Watson later released a TEDx talk repositioning her musicality in culture and family (Pitt Watson, 2019).

Notably, Al Bartholomew remarked that music can provide a space for individuals, communities, and different generations to grapple with the difficulties of “walking in these two worlds and how they collide, where they intersect and where they don’t.” His powerful rendition of Yothu Yindi’s international hit *Treaty* offers a further example of how music invites both First Nations and non-Indigenous Peoples to grapple with such collisions and intersections.
**Negative or challenging outcomes and effects**

Participants spoke about potential negative or challenging outcomes from engaging in music. Chris Anderson spoke about the limited career pathways for musicians and the wider devaluing of music and the arts in terms of public policy and resourcing which could disproportionately affect First Nations musicians due to overlaps with racism and socio-cultural exclusion. Lydia Fairhall and Rochelle Pitt Watson discussed limitations of the music industry in terms of First Nations cultural content and respect for musicians and artists. Celia Lulumle discussed the potential for water music in Vanuatu to produce jealousy and division in communities when musicians could earn incomes from music performance that were not available to others in a sparse local employment environment. Al Bartholomew remarked on the potential for intergenerational conflict as traditional songs were performed and interpreted by new generations.

Finally, Lydia Fairhall reported that women are often not writing or performing music in remote communities. That was attributed to a range of factors including the uneven focus of music activities on men, the profile of First Nations male professional musicians, and women’s experiences of shame for example during music performance. Referring to some communities with whom she has worked, Fairhall questioned: “So, how do we take the shame factor for women who, for over 2000 generations, were singing up? And somehow, it's been broken down at the moment. So, how do we fall in love with it again, and own it again?” Those themes, alongside her deep connection to Country, were captured in Fairhall’s contribution to the 2020 Women of the World (WOW) showcase.

**DISCUSSION**
Existing international determinants of health models rarely acknowledge music and arts as activities that can function as determinants of health in themselves, or shape other determinants (Stewart & Irons, 2019; Sunderland et al., 2018). The purpose of this study was to explore links between First Nations musical activity and cultural determinants of health in Vanuatu and Australia. We did so as part of a three-year study examining the potential for First Nations musical activity to support culturally safe and strength-based health promotion for First Nations People internationally. Musicians and music facilitators outlined a strong role for First Nations musicians and music activities in both being and shaping political and economic health determinants. Participating musicians most often framed experiences linked to music as positive and protective, although some negative or challenging experiences were also reported.

Notably, a high proportion of findings coincided with the outer circle of Gee et al.’s (2014) model - which includes political and social determinants - however it was at times hard to map participant reflections and experiences to its domains. We argue that conceptual and theoretical developments in cultural, social, and political health determinants models may be warranted to incorporate the depth, breadth and complexity of musical effects indicated in this study and existing music research. This study confirmed existing research on the role of First Nations music in: fighting for climate justice and promoting tourism and livelihood (Dick, 2014; Hayward, 2011, 2014; Grant, 2019); promoting and sustaining First Nations cultural practices and related economies (Dick, 2015; Regenvanu, 2009); and claiming First Nations political agency and voice in ways that are self-determined (Corn, 2000, 2016; Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2000; Stern, 2017). We argue that, given the findings related to cultural economy and the limits of the music industry, there is need for more research on the role of First Nations music in
traditional/custom/kastom and Eurocentric “mainstream” economies and industries across countries.

Health and wellbeing, and the conditions that support it, are recognized internationally as human rights (Hunt, 2009). More broadly, human rights are recognized as key social and political health determinants (Schulz and Northridge, 2004). There is a long history of First Nations People using music to advocate for rights, especially land rights (Dunbar-Hall & Gibson, 2000). Music and arts are also central to cultural and intellectual property rights as expressed in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN, 2007). Participants’ explicit references to human rights in this study highlighted how First Nations musicians are advocating for their sovereignty rights alongside that of First Nations People in other countries such as Papua New Guinea.

The study showed that musical activity has the potential to provide First Nations women with sources of income that promote independence, self-determination, and family benefit including children’s access to education. Such benefits echo Dick’s (2015, p. 52) finding that, “in the context of broad structural support for customary practices, communities leveraging traditional wisdom [such as traditional music] into commercial realms are able to generate livelihoods and maintain cultural heritage transmission”. Participating women reported that economic independence through music relied on preserving their musical spaces for women. By achieving independence there, First Nations women in Vanuatu demonstrated how they resist the uneven focus on men’s musical traditions observed elsewhere (Doubleday 2008; Koskoff 2014; Barney 2007).

Finally, Fairhall’s observation that women’s musical activities have been “somehow… broken down” reflects known patterns in remote First Nations communities, where gender
relations have been fractured through colonization and are constantly being renegotiated and ‘restructured’ in new socio-political contexts (Atkinson, 2002, p. 37). Distinct cultural traditions can result in musical activity as part of daily life rather than limited to performance. While song has always been vitally important to First Nations communities, some of our languages may not have a discreet term for music, instead conceptualizing it as fundamental to performance and to life itself. For example, in the Pitjantjatjara language of Australia’s centre, the word ‘inma’ encompasses all phenomena (dance, music, storytelling and visual design) marking performance (Ellis et al. 1978). As reported by the Ni Vanuatu water music performers in this study, roles within local First Nations performance traditions may be allocated in accordance with gender and kinship, meaning that in some places either women or men may be integral to certain parts of a performance but not regularly involved in singing. Recent opportunities for women to perform as rock bands at Maningrida in the Northern Territory, particularly in the case of Ripple Effect Band, have been embraced to improve wellbeing among local women who have traditionally had few opportunities to sing and play (Kell et al., 2021).

Limitations

We note several study limitations. First, musicians' observations of perceived social, cultural, and political impact from musical activity were often profound, but we are unable to evidence those impacts at this time. Second, participant numbers were low for this study (n=9), but that was seen to be appropriate to the exploratory stage of research. Third, no known cultural health determinant models significantly account for the role of music, which limited the degree to which researchers could map participating musicians’ experiences in ways that highlighted the inherent or intrinsic health and wellbeing effects of musical activity. Fourth, while we included exemplars of participating musicians’ music in the findings section to enhance readers’
embodied and ‘felt’ (Kelly, 2019; Wiebe, 2019) experiences, that content was not analyzed as part of the study due to word count limitations. Fifth, the yarning questions relating to self-determination and human rights could have led to higher representation of how music impacts political and economic health determinants within data. Finally, in their systematic review of music, dance, and social determinants of health, Sheppard and Broughton (2020) found that existing literature does not sufficiently cover middle aged participants, men, First Nations People, LGBTIQ+ People, and migrant populations. While our study responds to the need for First Nations-specific research, and research with men, we do not have data on participants’ ages or LGBTIQ+ identification.

**CONCLUSION**

This study affirms that First Nations music has its historical roots in cultures for which music, dance, and visual arts are central to cultural and material existence, to the intergenerational perpetuation of cultural, spiritual and technical knowledge, and to the maintenance of social cohesion and wellbeing. As such, music necessarily carries formulas of inclusion for all members of a culture, of education, of storytelling, and of self-determined industry and economic creativity. The rich insights shared by the musicians in this study demonstrate the ‘applied’ nature of First Nations music and the complex ways in which First Nations’ music can shape, and be shaped by, interrelated political and economic determinants. Those range from macro ‘upstream’ societal-level determinants to ‘downstream’ community and individual factors. We see evidence of music activating upstream macro issues such as climate change and human rights through its activist and pedagogic capacities. But we also see how music can promote micro and inter-personal level health determinants that can build up incrementally to much broader agendas.
Specifically, the examples show how music making can make space for positive political determinants to flourish, characterized by an active political voice, agency, self-determination, rights, sovereignty, and equity. Across the spectrum of music examples shared, we see the strong correlation between musical activity with cultural strengths and self-determination, which are central to cultural determinants of health and wellbeing. We also see how music can work in holistic ways to traverse cultural health determinants domains where political-economic dynamics of community relations, for example, intersect with mental and emotional wellbeing and connect to cultural heritage and Country. These perspectives provide a strong rationale for further investigation into the role of music in health determinants models and as a means by which a strengths-based appreciation of First Nations peoples sing back to the deficit approaches previously employed to understand us.

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List of Figures


Figure 2: Proportion of interview data coded to each health determinants domain

APPENDICES

Semi-structured interview questions
1. Why do you play music?

2. What have been the effects of your music on your community?

3. What have been the effects of your music on other communities including non-Indigenous people?

4. What has Indigenous music generally done for Indigenous peoples’ human rights and sovereignty?

5. What does self-advocacy mean to you? Is there a different term you would use?

6. What does self-determination mean to you? Is there a different term you would use?

7. What outcomes have you seen from your music?

8. What are some frustrations you have had in sharing your stories through music?