

# Project Brief: Commissioning Stronger Evaluations of Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Programs

## Introduction

Billions of dollars are spent annually on Indigenous programs, services and initiatives yet, despite the need, there is limited evidence on what programs are effective for improving Indigenous health outcomes. The Productivity Commission has called for 'more and better' evaluations of Indigenous programs and commissioning processes that engage Indigenous communities, organisations and leaders. The commissioning of evaluations plays a significant role in the way program evaluations are carried out. It is through the commissioning process that the budget is set, the evaluators are identified, the aims and objectives of the evaluation are set, and many other aspects of the evaluation are determined.

This National Health and Medical Research Council funded project (GNT1165913) responds to a call from Indigenous leaders for opportunities to influence decision-making processes within the health system and across sectors for the commissioning of health programs to reflect Indigenous needs, priorities and views on program design, delivery and evaluation.

This project aims to identify how government (i.e., federal, state/ territory) and non-government (e.g., not-for-profit, foundation) commissioning practices can better support Indigenous engagement and leadership in the evaluation of health and wellbeing programs in Australia. To achieve this aim, the project will address the following three objectives:

1. To **characterise** the spectrum of commissioning practices of government and non-government organisations in contracting evaluations for health and wellbeing programs particularly the role Indigenous engagement and leadership during, and resulting from, the commissioning process. *To achieve this objective, interviews will be combined with a scoping review.*
2. To **identify** the issues, challenges and opportunities for Indigenous engagement and leadership across the spectrum of commissioning practices from the perspectives of: (a) commissioners/ policy makers; (b) service providers; and (c) the Indigenous community. *To achieve this objective, a series of case studies will be undertaken.*
3. To **translate** the findings into resources to support Indigenous engagement and leadership in the commissioning of program evaluations. *To achieve this objective, practical and accessible print and web resources supporting the uptake of promising strategies will be developed.*

The project is funded until October 2022.

## Project Advisory Group

A Project Advisory Group (PAG) is supporting the Research Team. The PAG is chaired by Professor Tom Calma (AO), an elder of the Kungarakan people and member of the Iwaidja tribal group. PAG members include:

Bobbi Campbell	Department of Veteran Affairs
Chris Bourke	Australian Hospital and Healthcare Australia
David Aanundsen	Australian Council for International Development Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Monitoring and Evaluation Learning Group
Dawn Casey	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Jessica Hartmann	Prime Minister and Cabinet
Janine Mohamed	Lowitja Institute
Kate Thomann	Department of Health
Sharon Clarke	Australasian Evaluation Society Cultural Capability and Diversity Committee
Tania Rishniw	Department of Health

## Research Design

The project has two phases: (1) Knowledge Development and (2) Knowledge Translation.

### *Phase 1: Knowledge Development*

#### Scoping Review

A scoping review will summarise and synthesise key concepts from different information sources to inform research, policy and/or practice on the commissioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health program evaluations. The scoping review will include a literature search of published and grey literatures, and interviews with key stakeholders. The scoping review will outline the different commissioning practices or models. Stakeholder interviews will flesh out and distinguish the different types of commissioning models, the conditions that underpin them, and their respective contexts of application.

#### Case Studies

Up to 12 realist case studies of completed commissioned evaluations will be undertaken. The case studies will include document review and interviews.

Interviews and yarning circles with Indigenous stakeholders will be conducted onsite so the program and its evaluation can be explored in its administrative and cultural context. Local Aboriginal Community Researchers will be engaged to help access documents, provide context around the program, assist with yarning circles, member check the results with community and communicate results to community.

Promising practices for each model and across all models will be presented to the PAG and at roundtable discussions at key conferences (e.g., CTG Indigenous Health Conference). To strengthen the Indigenous standpoint, the Aboriginal Community Researchers from each case study site will be invited to facilitate local discussions to inform recommendations.

### *Phase 2: Knowledge Translation*

Recommendations will be used to guide the development of resources to support government and non-government agencies to commission stronger evaluations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs. The PAG and feedback from local communities will inform resource development, which may include guidelines and videos with community stories, made accessible by a website.

## Research Team

The project is led by the University of Canberra and supported by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Investigators from a range of research institutions.

### Indigenous

Pro Vice Chancellor Bronwyn Fredericks (CI)  
University of Queensland

Professor Dennis Foley (CI)  
University of Canberra

Dr Yvette Roe (CI)  
University of Queensland

Ms Summer May Finlay (CI and Post Doc)  
University of Canberra

Dr Amohia Boulton (AI)  
Whakauae Research for Maori Health and  
Development

CI – Chief Investigator

AI – Associate Investigator

### Non-Indigenous

Professor Margaret Cargo (CI)  
University of Canberra

Professor Jenni Judd (CI)  
Central Queensland University

Professor James Smith (CI)  
Menzies School of Health Research