



## Indigenous Data Network:

PUTTING INDIGENOUS DATA BACK IN  
COMMUNITY HANDS

Indigenous Data Network - Indigenous Studies Unit  
Melbourne School of Population & Global Health  
The University of Melbourne VIC 3010



Indigenous Evaluation Strategy  
Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East  
MELBOURNE VIC 8003  
[www.pc.gov.au/Indigenous-Evaluation](http://www.pc.gov.au/Indigenous-Evaluation)

Indigenous Data Network  
Indigenous Studies Unit  
Melbourne School of Population & Global Health  
The University of Melbourne VIC 3010  
[data-indigenous@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:data-indigenous@unimelb.edu.au)

3 August 2020

Dear Commissioner,

### RE: SUBMISSION TO THE MAY 2020 DRAFT INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY

This submission is made in response to the Productivity Commission's May 2020 Draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (the Draft Strategy), on behalf of the Indigenous Data Network (IDN). The IDN is an initiative of the Indigenous Studies Unit, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, University of Melbourne. The IDN is overseen by a steering committee of senior Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics and is staffed by experts in Indigenous data governance.

The objective of the IDN is to establish a national framework for the coordination of Indigenous-led organisations and others engaged in the holding, controlling and processing of data generated by and about Indigenous Australians. The IDN maintains partnerships with a number of peak and regional Indigenous community-controlled organisations and Commonwealth, state and territory government departments and agencies, which are engaged in the governance of Indigenous data. Further information about the IDN can be found on the IDN website<sup>1</sup>.

### Submission Points: Draft Strategy Action 5 and Action 6

The Draft Strategy recommends that Australian Government agencies foster a culture of evaluation in relation to policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians, through the implementation of 12 actions. Of these 12 actions, Action 5 and Action 6 focus specifically on improving agencies' use of data as a basis for enhanced evaluation of policies and programs. As Australia's leading initiative on the development and implementation of Indigenous data governance policies and procedures, we make the following recommendations with regard to Action 5 and Action 6.

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://mbspgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-equity/research-group/indigenous-data-network>

## Recommendations in Relation to Action 5

Action 5 of the Draft Strategy recommends that government agencies should ensure that they have access to, or are able to collect, the data that they need to effectively undertake evaluation of their policies and programs. As part of Action 5, the Draft Strategy advises that government agencies consider three questions in targeting relevant data for access and/or collection:

- What data are needed to answer evaluation questions?
- What data are needed to produce credible results?
- What existing data are available and suitable for the evaluation, and what additional data should be collected?

The Draft Strategy further recommends that in order to ensure that the data accessed and/or collected is relevant for evaluation purposes, it should be managed in a manner that uses:

- Appropriate Indigenous data governance arrangements, including partnerships with Indigenous people in the development, collection, use and management of data;
- Appropriate data standards;
- Appropriate data sharing and release protocols, and;
- Ethical and culturally safe data collection processes.

The IDN supports these recommendations. However, we also strongly suggest that the Productivity Commission further specify its recommendations by naming existing national-level Indigenous data governance organisations and guidelines as key to implementation of the Strategy in its final form.

In particular, we recommend that the Indigenous Data Governance (IDG) Working Group be named as the primary source of advice for government agencies on what data is relevant, credible, available and appropriate to the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Indigenous people. The IDG Working Group is convened by the Indigenous Data Network, and comprises key Commonwealth, state and territory government agencies, together with national and regional Indigenous community-controlled organisations.

The IDG Working Group was founded following a meeting of leading government agencies and community-controlled organisations in Shepparton, in June 2019<sup>2</sup>. The Working Group's terms of references were formally adopted at a second meeting in Shepparton in November 2019 by inaugural members<sup>3</sup>. The Kaiela Institute, which is developing a local approach based on the principles outlined by the Productivity Commission, hosted the meetings. Current IDG Working Members include the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the

---

<sup>2</sup> <https://mispgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-equity/research-group/indigenous-data-network/news-and-events/idn-in-shepparton-workshop-with-the-kaiela-institute>

<sup>3</sup> <https://mispgh.unimelb.edu.au/centres-institutes/centre-for-health-equity/research-group/indigenous-data-network#news-and-events>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Coalition of Peaks, Empowered Communities, The National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network, the Victorian Department of Health and Human Services, the University of Melbourne, the Queensland University of Technology, and others.

The IDG Working Group meets regularly to develop targeted task-specific strategies and expert subgroups for advice on, and implementation of, data-driven initiatives across government and the community-controlled service sector at a national level. The IDG Working Group is therefore ideally positioned to support the Productivity Commission and government agencies in implementing the draft Strategy's Action 5, by drawing on a wide range of relevant expertise both within Indigenous community-controlled organisations and government.

### **Recommendations in Relation to Action 6**

Action 6 of the Draft Strategy calls for the development of a data dictionary to guide government agencies on how to most effectively collect and use data for policy and program outcomes important to Indigenous people. Action 6 further advises that the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) should work in partnership with Indigenous communities to develop and validate core indicators relevant to Indigenous people, which agencies can use when collecting data for monitoring and evaluation.

The IDN supports these recommendations. However, we would also like to draw the Productivity Commission's attention to the AIHW's existing membership of the Indigenous Data Governance Working Group, described above, as well as the AIHW's existing formal partnership with the IDN. Under this partnership, the AIHW, IDN and Coalition of Peaks are currently collaborating in the implementation of the Commonwealth's Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 on Community Data, as announced earlier this year by the Prime Minister<sup>4</sup> and Minister for Indigenous Australians<sup>5</sup>.

Under these existing arrangements, a major step forward in the development of a national data dictionary has already been undertaken in collaboration with the AIHW. A comprehensive framework of terms, definitions, and principles for best-practice Indigenous data governance, together with an index of the location of data assets generated by and about, and relevant to, Indigenous people, held both by government and others, is already in the process of being developed. We submit that, rather than duplicating this initiative by the AIHW, IDN and Coalition of Peaks, government commit to supporting the current initiative.

---

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/communique-coalition-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peak-organisations>

<sup>5</sup> <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/wyatt/2020/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-led-data-project-underway>

## Summary

In summary, with regard to the Productivity Commission's advice on the use of data in the development of evidence-based evaluation undertaken by government, we support the principles and objectives outlined in both Action 5 and Action 6. However, we submit that, with regard to both actions, significant practical steps have recently been taken to address precisely the issues outlined in those actions. We encourage the Productivity Commission to name the Indigenous Data Governance Working Group, convened by the Indigenous Data Network, as the primary vehicle for supporting and guiding agencies' use of data in the development of enhanced evaluation processes.

Yours sincerely,

---

Dr James Rose

**National Coordinator | Indigenous Data Network**

**Senior Research Fellow | Driving Research Momentum**

Indigenous Studies Unit, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health

The University of Melbourne, Victoria 3010, AUSTRALIA

Phone +61 3 834 43248;