

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Standing Committee (NATSIHSC)

TO	The Productivity Commissioner, Romlie Mokak
FROM	NATSIHSC
RE	OOS 107
DATE	30 September 2019

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, issue paper.

NATSIHSC feedback:

General comments:

As the Productivity Commission develops a whole of government evaluation strategy for all policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people it is suggested that consideration be given to jurisdictional policies allowing flexibility to determine local priorities. More broadly, we suggest that future work on the Evaluation Strategy builds on the strategic direction provided through the National Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2016 - 2026, particularly Domain 6 and its Focus Areas of:

- Data, information and Planning
- Evidence-based evaluation and practice
- Research and knowledge transfer

<http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Publications/Reports>

Specific comments:

1. *How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, priorities and values be better integrated into policy and program evaluation?*

In order to better integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, priorities and values into policy and program evaluation, government departments and agencies need to:

- Consider the holistic concept of health and wellbeing by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
 - This will promote a strength-based perspective: culture equals health.
- Consider cultural determinants that promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspective of:
 - Self-determination
 - Freedom from discrimination
 - Individual and collective rights
 - Importance and value of Aboriginal culture
 - Protection from removal/relocation
 - Connection to, custodianship, and utilisation of country and traditional lands

- Reclamation, revitalisation, preservation and promotion of language and cultural practices
- Protection and promotion of traditional knowledge and Aboriginal intellectual property
- Understanding of lore, law and traditional roles and responsibilities
- Maximise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement
- Focus on genuine partnerships and shared responsibility
- Emphasise cultural security and self-determination
- Continue to build and promote Aboriginal capacity community control
- Be accessible and equitable
- Be accountable
- Be evidence-based and utilise validated methodologies and indicators that measure Aboriginal principles
- Co-design evaluations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to ensure perspectives and priorities are incorporated early on in the design
 - This will lead to genuine knowledge transfer and uptake of evaluation findings.

2. *What principles should guide Australian Government agencies' evaluation efforts?*

- General principles: ethical, accountable, respectful, confidential, competent, evidence-based, transparent, timely, responsible, responsive, robust and reliable, meaningful, translatable, valuable (ensuring results are implemented to inform policy development), strong data governance and intellectual property.
- Indigenous specific principles: partnerships, shared responsibility, community-ownership, capacity building, meaningful engagement, strength-based, self-determination, holistic concept of health, spirit and integrity, capacity building, meaningful, cultural competence, equitable benefit, reciprocity, survival and protection
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to be viewed as experts in Aboriginal health and wellbeing – empowerment, respect, ownership, and leadership
- The evaluation principles must provide guidance for evaluators regarding how to determine the most appropriate evaluation approach.

3. *What should be the priority policy areas for future Australian Government evaluation efforts?*

Priority areas that have been identified as being important, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during consultation, are areas highlighted by research as those that can make real differences and reflect and encompass key national policy documents. They are:

- Addressing risk factors:

reducing the modifiable risk factors that contribute to poor health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- Managing illness better:
 - ensuring accessible, culturally-secure broad range of services
 - promote engagement
 - strengthen family and community role.
- Building community capacity:
 - Re-empowered
 - Community development
 - Communities to take back care, control, and responsibility
 - Supporting community decision making.
- Better health systems:
 - Access to responsive, high quality and culturally-secure health services at the earliest possible stage
 - Building cultural responsiveness and competence
 - Active participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in planning, design and implementation of services and programs
 - Strong, responsive and cost-effective primary health care system to meet the need of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
 - Building linkages between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Controlled Community Health (ACCH) and mainstream services.
- Strengthened and skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce:
 - Requires the structural capacity and flexibility to successfully sustain and engage a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers at all levels
 - A workforce that is culturally relevant and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
- Data, evidence and research:
 - Need for improved evidence about what works
 - Work to improve the quality and accuracy of datasets with regards to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
 - All programs and services, whether mainstream or specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, need to be informed by evidence of what works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
 - Support quality data, research and evaluation to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policies and programs are clearly evidence-based and informed by robust health research and data systems
 - Assist in translation of evidence into policy and practice
 - Consistent monitoring and management of data.
- Addressing social determinants:
 - Considers the broader social, political, economic, cultural and environmental context in which people live and the impact these contexts have on health and wellbeing
 - The daily conditions in which people live influence health equity
 - A broad approach to address the social and cultural determinants of health is critical to achieve health equity
 - An integrated approach includes strengthening community functioning, reinforcing positive behaviours, improving education participation,

regional economic development, housing, environmental health and spiritual healing.

4. *How can evaluation results be better used in policy and program design and implementation?*

- The evaluation process must be considered and planned early in program design to ensure it aligns with the program's objectives and goals; and to ensure evaluation findings are relevant, useful, and strive to minimise "data limitations".
 - It is also imperative that evaluation findings are translated into practice and embedded in the future decision-making cycle for subsequent policy design through iterative cycles.
- Evaluations must capture information relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their needs
 - Evaluation approaches and methods must capture the holistic view of health and wellbeing.
 - This is best done at the beginning of program design to ensure evaluation results are relevant and consistent with the priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
- Evaluations must utilise, support and enhance the skills, expertise, and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Ensure evaluation objectives align with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and values
 - The local community must have input into developing the priorities of the program and the evaluation design
- Evaluation findings must be fed back in a meaningful way to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through a communication plan
- There must be transparent access to request for tenders, tender documents, evaluation reports, responses to evaluations, and program documentation
 - Development of a directory of current evaluations
 - This will maximise knowledge translation¹
- Ensure program funding structure supports capacity building around evaluation and information strengthening¹
- Inclusion of Utilisation Focused Evaluation (UFE) could be considered as an additional viable approach. UFE is distinguished by the personal identification and engagement of the primary intended users at the beginning to determine intended uses of the evaluation.^{2,3}

5. *What ongoing role should the Productivity Commission have in monitoring agencies' implementation of the strategy, and in evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more generally?*

- As outlined in the Issue Paper, there must be some role by the Productivity Commission to monitor compliance.

- This will ensure accountability and continued adherence to the standards expected for evaluations of policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Evaluation needs to be integrated into the way we all work – all government departments and agencies need to develop a culture of “evaluative thinking”⁴
- In monitoring the implementation of the strategy (and more broadly any policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people), government departments and agencies need to demonstrate:
 - consistency with the Productivity Commission’s Strategy
 - efficient allocation of evaluation efforts
 - effective conduct of evaluations
 - a culture of evaluative thinking; and
 - a contribution to more effective programs⁴.
- Whether this is formally mandated through legislation and/or administrative arrangements; or through more informal measures (such as the mere process of monitoring and public reporting) needs to be decided by agencies and departments under direct reporting to the Australian Government.
- There may be an opportunity through agreement between the Productivity Commission and the states to share information on government agencies affected by this Strategy.

Jade Daylight-Baker
NATSIHSC Chair
September 2018

References

1. Kelaher, M., Luke, J., Ferdinand, A., Chamravi, D., Ewen, S., & Paradies, Y. 2018, An Evaluation Framework to Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Users Guide, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
2. Patton, M.Q. (2008). Utilization-focused evaluation, 4th edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
3. Bowman, N. (2012, October). Utilization focused evaluation case studies - UFE in multijurisdictional/ tribal contexts. presentation delivered at: 26th Annual Conference of the American Evaluation Association, Minneapolis, Minnesota, USA. Retrieved from <http://comm.eval.org/EVAL/Resources/ViewDocument/?DocumentKey=b9d6508d-56f0-4b55-aaf7-f9aac4d451c1>
4. Commonwealth of Australia (2017). Department of Industry, Innovation and Science: Evaluation Strategy 2017-2021. Office of the Chief Economist, Canberra. Retrieved from https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3906/f/May%202018/document/pdf/department_of_industry_innovation_and_science_evaluation_strategy_2017-2021.pdf