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Indigenous Evaluation Strategy - Draft

**Danila Dilba Health Service
Submission**

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Contents

Introduction.....	3
Background.....	3
About Danila Dilba	3
Overarching Comments.....	3
Specific Issues and Comments	4
A Rights Based Approach	4
Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges	4
Conclusion	6

Introduction

Danila Dilba Health Service welcomes the opportunity to comment on the final draft Indigenous Evaluation Strategy and the associated Guide to Evaluation Under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

Background

About Danila Dilba

Danila Dilba is Darwin's only Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service and provides services to most of the Indigenous population in the region – 70% of the population visits a clinic in any one year. Danila Dilba is a membership based organisation and is governed by an Aboriginal board elected by our members.

Danila Dilba provides both comprehensive Primary Health Care and community services. Danila Dilba currently employs approximately 180 staff and has eight general practice clinics across the greater Darwin region. Comprehensive primary health care encompasses the range of health care offered by general practice but extends beyond that to provide:

- Primary health care services for people of all ages
- Access to specialist and allied health professionals, through collaborative service models
- Primary prevention through health promotion to help people get more control over their health
- Care coordination for clients with complex and chronic health needs
- Support for self management and secondary prevention for people living with chronic conditions
- Social and emotional wellbeing services
- Drug, alcohol and tobacco services
- Outreach services to clients
- Support services for young people including young people in juvenile detention.
- Family support and antenatal care through the Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program and Midwife collaborative model of care.

Overarching Comments

DDHS notes and supports several key aspects and intentions of the draft IES, specifically:

- The central principle of *“Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges”*
- The incorporation of evaluation across the policy and program cycle
- The inclusion of mainstream programs/policies under the IES
- The principles – credible, useful, ethical and transparent
- The provision of guidance on types of evaluation, when and for what they are suitable
- The commitment to and focus on building capability and culture of evaluation.

However, Danila Dilba finds the draft IES lacks a genuine reflection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and participation in the whole of the evaluation process. This lack is also reflected in the Guide which provides little to compel agencies to engage meaningfully in the stages of the evaluation process. Despite an overarching principle stated as: *centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges* the draft Strategy does not reflect such centring in its detail or in the Guide. While the draft Strategy describes this principle as being about recognising the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, knowledges and cultures and building genuine partnerships to define policy and program outcomes, decide on evaluation questions, evaluation methods and interpretation, the detailed content of the Strategy and Guide do not take this description forward.

Specific Issues and Comments

A Rights Based Approach

The most fundamental point is that the strategy should be grounded in a human rights based approach, particularly reflecting Article 3 of the UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Self determination must be at the very foundations of policies and programs relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Embedding the principle of self-determination in the strategy and guide for evaluation is, while only a starting point, a very important step in achieving self determination. The draft strategy does not reflect a recognition of and commitment to a rights based approach or an aim of self determination. In reviewing the draft as suggested below, rights must be the starting point.

Centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges

In our view, the Strategy does not successfully translate this principle into action and the entire strategy should be reviewed to truly implement this important principle. This submission will not provide detailed comment on the content of the draft Strategy but will simply highlight some examples to illustrate our concerns.

More important than a discussion of the detail of the Strategy and the Guide is the underlying philosophies and principles that should guide the Strategy and should be fundamental to the review we are proposing.

Despite the extensive consultations undertaken in the development of the draft strategy and the detailed background paper, the strategy does not effectively capture the strong desire of the Aboriginal organisations and individuals who engaged with the Commission to be equal partners in the important work of evaluation. It is the essence of self-determination and human rights to be heard as equal partners in the design, implementation and review of the policies and programs that impact both positively and negatively on the daily lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples. The Coalition of Peaks has undertaken extensive work over a long period with government to develop the detail of ways of working in partnership. DDHS suggests that the Productivity Commission engage with the Coalition to review the draft Strategy and Guide learning from the work already done and reflected in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

In addition to a rights based approach, DDHS suggests two key areas of consideration for this review and its conduct.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The recently finalised National Agreement on Closing the Gap ¹, particularly Priority Reform One – Formal Partnerships And Shared Decision-Making provides practical and principles based direction that would guide this review of the draft strategy. The strategy, and importantly the Guide must now reflect the principles and commitments of this overarching commitment to genuine partnership.

The National Agreement is relevant to all aspects of the strategy and guide and is particularly pertinent to the proposed Office of Indigenous Policy Evaluation and Indigenous Governance Council. The National Agreement should provide the basis for formation, role and operation of the OIPE and especially for the formation of the Indigenous Governance Council. In this context, the Coalition of Peaks, in its own words, was formed as an act of self determination, accountable to communities and is working to maximise participation and decision-making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in shared decision-making with Australian governments ². The mechanism to engage and ensure accountability at the national level in the context of the evaluation strategy already exists and the Commission should immediately engage with the Coalition in responding to issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders regarding this strategy and the need for it to be further reviewed.

A capacity development approach

There is an enormous body of work both nationally and internationally that articulates and demonstrates the importance of a community development or capacity development approach in all aspects of program and policy development and implementation that impacts on the lives of Indigenous peoples. The current draft strategy reads as very government centric and the guidance given to agencies in the guide neglects the opportunities of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in line with the well developed approaches of community development and the Australian evidence of what works in programs and policies designed to deliver for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

DDHS recommends as a starting point in reviewing the strategy, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 10 Default Positions for Capacity Development which, while designed to guide international development activities, have equal relevance to capacity development and the centring of Aboriginal voices and knowledge within a colonised country and system. The default positions proposed by the UNDP are:

1. Don't rush.
2. Respect the value system and foster self-esteem.
3. Scan locally and globally; reinvent locally.
4. Challenge mindsets and power differentials.
5. Think and act in terms of sustainable capacity outcomes.
6. Establish positive incentives.
7. Integrate external inputs into national priorities, processes and systems.
8. Build on existing capacities rather than creating new ones.

¹ <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FINAL-National-Agreement-on-Closing-the-Gap-1.pdf>

² <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/our-story/>

9. Stay engaged under difficult circumstances.
10. Remain accountable to ultimate beneficiaries.³

The UNDP notes particularly the constant risk of agencies dominating development efforts and undermining local initiatives. Adopting these default positions to underpin the strategy and guide the proposed review could support a more development focussed and less government centred strategy.

These principles are supported by the evidence review conducted by the AIHW in 2013 and synthesised in the issues paper :*What Works? A review of actions addressing the social and economic determinants of Indigenous health*⁴. Consistent with the UNDP default positions, the “*What works*” paper found, among others, the following features of approaches that are effective:

- active involvement of Indigenous communities in every stage of program development and delivery, in order to build genuine, collaborative and sustainable partnerships with Indigenous peoples, and build capacity within Indigenous communities
- valuing Indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs and practices which are important for promoting positive cultural identity and social and emotional wellbeing for Indigenous Australians
- clear leadership and governance for programs, initiatives and interventions

The *What Works* paper distils also the things that don’t work and notes the dangers of top down approaches and the failure to fully engage with Indigenous people and organisations.

Conclusion

There is a real opportunity to build on the good work already undertaken and the enormous efforts already put in by many stakeholders into the design of the draft strategy and guide. However, it is necessary to embed a rights based approach to the strategy and to review with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners through the Coalition of Peaks the efforts to carry forward the worthy principles in the strategy and ensure that they are fully translated into ongoing genuine partnerships for policy and program development and evaluation.

³ <https://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/capacity-building/taking-default-positions-for-capacity-development.html>

⁴ <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/8eab67d7-1752-45e7-aa82-ffaf33ce7e13/ctgc-ip07.pdf.aspx?inline=true>