



3 September 2019

Mr Romlie Mokak  
Commissioner  
Productivity Commission  
Locked Bag 2  
Collins St East  
Melbourne VIC 8003

Dear Mr Mokak,

### NHMRC Submission – Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

NHMRC welcomes the development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (IES) and the opportunity to provide comments.

I note that NHMRC is referred to a number of times in the issues paper and in particular through reference to the document, *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders 2018*.

NHMRC is the leading national investor in health and medical research, advancing health and medical knowledge to improve the health of all Australians. It is a statutory authority within the Australian Government Health portfolio. The *National Health and Medical Research Council Act 1992* requires us to:

- Raise the standard of individual and public health throughout Australia
- Foster the development of consistent health standards between the various states and territories
- Foster medical research and training and public health research and training throughout Australia
- Foster consideration of ethical issues relating to health.

NHMRC is committed to improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with a target of at least 5 per cent of funding under the Medical Research Endowment Account on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health each year.

In 2017-2018, this target was achieved, with 5.9 per cent of MREA expenditure – approximately \$49.6 million – directed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is a major health issue for NHMRC and to assist us bringing a stronger focus on this, the NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus was established under Section 39 of the NHMRC Act. Its role is to provide advice to the Council and the CEO on issues relating to Indigenous health research. The committee comprises Indigenous representatives currently on NHMRC Council and Principal Committees, as well as early career researchers. Current membership comprises: Professor Sandra Eades, Associate Professor Daniel McAullay, Professor Yvonne Cadet-James, Associate Professor Yvette Roe, Dr Odette Pearson, Dr Sean Taylor and Associate Professor John Gilroy.

While NHMRC funds health and medical research, some of which may include an evaluation component, we do not have specific expertise in the conduct of evaluations. However, as flagged in the issues paper, we endorse the use of ethical guidelines specific to researchers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

NHMRC released two revised ethics guidelines for research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in 2018. *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

*Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders* provides a set of principles to ensure research is safe, respectful, responsible, high-quality and of benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

*Keeping research on track II* was developed to provide advice on how these values and principles can be put into practice in research. Both of these guidelines support the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*.

The *NHMRC Indigenous Research Excellence Criteria* (IREC) is an important mechanism in the assessment of research grant applications. To qualify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, at least 20% of the research effort and/or capacity building must relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Qualifying applications must address the IREC as follows:

- Community engagement - the proposal demonstrates how the research and potential outcomes are a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with relevant community engagement by individuals, communities and/or organisations in conceptualisation, development and approval, data collection and management, analysis, report writing and dissemination of results.
- Benefit - the potential health benefit of the project is demonstrated by addressing an important public health issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This benefit can have a single focus or affect several areas, such as knowledge, finance and policy or quality of life. The benefit may be direct and immediate, or it can be indirect, gradual and considered.
- Sustainability and transferability - the proposal demonstrates how the results of the project have the potential to lead to achievable and effective contributions to health gain for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, beyond the life of the project. This may be through sustainability in the project setting and/or transferability to other settings such as evidence-based practice and/or policy. In considering this issue the proposal should address the relationship between costs and benefits.
- Building capability - the proposal demonstrates how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and researchers will develop relevant capabilities through partnerships and participation in the project.

Panels consider these criteria in their overall assessment of the application, together with the scheme-specific assessment criteria outlined in the scheme-specific funding rules.

Finally, *NHMRC Road Map 3: A strategic framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through research* (Road Map 3) was developed to guide and communicate the NHMRC objectives and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research for the next decade. The Road Map 3 Action Plan outlines 20 action items to implement with three of these being to monitor and evaluate progress. NHMRC has committed to produce annual report cards at the end of each calendar year. The 2017 and 2018 report cards are attached for your information.

I hope the above information is useful to your review. Please contact Alan Singh if you wish to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,

**Professor Anne Kelso AO**  
Chief Executive Officer