

30 August 2019

Commissioner Romlie Mokak
Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East
Melbourne Vic 8003

Dear Commissioner,

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy – Save the Children submission

Save the Children welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Productivity Commission's development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. We support the development of this Strategy and the Commission's broad remit to recommend changes.

In this submission, we make recommendations about the following matters:

1. What should the Strategy's objectives be?
2. What evaluation approaches and methods should the Strategy use?
3. What principles should an Indigenous evaluation framework include?
4. What should the evaluation priorities be?

Our recommendations are summarised in **Attachment 1**. These recommendations are strongly informed by the partnerships we have formed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations over many years. **Attachment 2** provides a short case study describing one such partnership and illustrating points made throughout the submission: our partnership with Empowered Communities body Aarnja as part of the Woombooriny Amboon Angarriiya Partnership Initiative.

This submission has been developed with the advice of Save the Children's Reconciliation Advisory Committee and in consultation with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employee Network.

Save the Children's work and expertise

Save the Children is a leading independent international organisation for children and child rights. We have worked in Australia for more than 65 years, with and alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2018, over half of our direct programming work was in Australia, supporting around 30,000 children and adults across around 200 communities and locations in every State and the Northern Territory. This includes programs spanning supported playgroups, early learning and family strengthening services (including intensive support and domestic and family violence programs), school education engagement initiatives, and public health-informed youth justice programming.

Our approach is framed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People. We support the ACFID Practice Note on Effective Development Practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities,¹ and we are a proud signatory to the Aboriginal Peak Organisations NT Partnership Principles² and the Western Australian Ngulla Boodjar (Our Land) Ngulla Moort (Our Family) Ngulla Kaartadjin (Our Knowledge) vision statement.³

Consistent with our global approach to development, we work in genuine partnership with local Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs), prioritise building community capacity to embed sustainable change, and actively innovate and adopt place-based approaches that respond to community priorities and needs. We know that lasting and positive change only happens when people and communities are active agents in their own future.

While we are a mainstream (non-Indigenous) organisation, we provide our recommendations based on our programming experience, our policy and technical expertise, our global perspective, the knowledge and expertise of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, and what we have learned from the privilege of our work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in Australia over many decades.

What should the Strategy's objectives be?

The Issues Paper indicates that the Strategy's overriding objective is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This could be supported by the more specific objectives below.

Evaluation should drive improved design, delivery and funding of services

Evaluation and the evidence it generates should be embedded in policy development, program delivery and decision-making, to enable and drive effective long-term investment in pursuit of long-term goals.

Appropriate funding arrangements for service provision are particularly critical to achieving self-determination, community empowerment and improved outcomes.⁴ The Strategy can support these aims by creating mechanisms and incentives to ensure that evaluated outcomes, impact and other critical indicators are preconditions to program rollovers or scale-ups, and that evaluation results inform decisions about funding arrangements.

The Strategy should aim to support efficient allocation of funding to need, including through Australia's federal system of financial transfers. It is arguable that current arrangements for distribution of GST revenue to States and Territories do not adequately reflect the extreme level of disadvantage faced by remote Indigenous communities or the much higher cost of service delivery in remote settings, such as in many parts of the Northern Territory.⁵ Better evaluation can help ensure that the true needs of Australia's diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including variations in need across States/Territories, regions and settings, are accurately understood. This in turn can enable better decisions about the level, distribution and type of expenditure required to fully meet those needs.

Evaluation should be embedded in broader government decision-making processes. For example, the Government should require any new policy proposals to Cabinet to be accompanied by a funded evaluation plan for the proposal and a statement of how previous evaluations have informed the proposal. There are precedents for such requirements. The Hawke, Keating and Howard Governments all operated at various times with a requirement that Ministers' new policy proposals include a statement of proposed arrangements for future evaluation.⁶ This was part of a broader evaluation strategy requiring all programs to be evaluated every three to five years, annual three-year forward look portfolio evaluation plans, and publication of completed evaluation reports except in exceptional circumstances.⁷ The World Bank has identified Australia as a case study for best practice in monitoring and evaluation during the period that the strategy was in place (1987-1997) and commented on a more recent drop in the quality of evaluation in Australia.⁸

Structural barriers to high quality program evaluation should be addressed. In particular, program funding from government should include specific funding for evaluation activities, and there should be a focus on building evaluation capacity and an 'evaluation culture' within government. These are essential

investments to embed evaluation within the policy cycle. As a long-standing partner to government, Save the Children has observed a continuing diminishment in government's evaluation capacity over time. This can lead to government commissioning and accepting evaluation reports which do not provide robust evidence. For example, the evaluation of the cashless debit card trial in the Ceduna and East Kimberley regions⁹ was based on a methodology with a number of problematic elements which may have promoted a positive bias in the survey results, including selection of the sample population, survey question design and lack of respondent anonymity.

Evaluations should be planned during program design and integrated into the program logic and intended outcomes. Unfortunately, it is far more common for evaluation planning and activities to commence only near the end of a program, often without robust baseline data, making it very difficult to produce useful evaluations from which anything meaningful can be learned.¹⁰

The evidence base about 'what works' should be expanded and made available, accessible and useable, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Evidence should be robust, independently evaluated where possible, transparent and widely disseminated.

The evidence should be available in a single place, which includes existing resources such as those prepared for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse and new research. It should include underlying data in a form that can be analysed and disaggregated at least to program or community level. This can unlock improvement across sectors and empower communities and non-government organisations to understand and identify policy solutions to local problems. It should also include brief summaries and evidence reviews, as well as more detailed year-by-year data reports.

Particular consideration should be given to accessibility and useability by the communities to whom the evidence and data belongs and relates. This should be built into evaluation activity from the outset. It could include reporting back through appropriate community forums, translation into language, and presentation in plain language. To the greatest extent possible, researchers should actively engage communities in the findings once their work is complete. This is particularly pertinent when data is collected from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with, and ownership of, policy processes should be increased

As the Issues Paper suggests, increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into policy processes should be a core objective. The aim should be to "make evaluation relevant to communities" and increase accountability to communities of governments, ACCOs, service providers and partners, and evaluators.¹¹ Funding, policy and evaluation should be guided by common underlying principles aimed at supporting self-determination and empowerment to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes.

What evaluation approaches and methods should the Strategy use?

The solutions to underlying problems that will be effective and acceptable in individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are not always known in advance. This means that program flexibility and adaptability is important,¹² and effective initiatives often rely on a theory of change that depends explicitly on practice and adaptation, and not solely on program elements in the traditional sense.

The Strategy should recognise that randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are just one of a number of evaluation approaches that produce robust evidence. RCTs are "often not suited to the relatively uncontrolled environs of service provision or whole of community interventions"¹³ of the type that may address the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As Kelaher et al argue in a report for the Lowitja Institute: "[s]mall-scale qualitative evaluations are perfectly appropriate

for pilot programs, particularly to support proof of concept and to identify adverse effects before large-scale rollout. In fact, it could be wasteful to launch a large-scale [RCT] without such data”.¹⁴

It follows that the Strategy should have a strong emphasis on approaches and methods oriented towards evaluation of practice. Within this focus on practice, the role of relationships as the foundation of practice, and of equitable relationships in practice as an outcome in themselves and as the foundation of good practice, should be given appropriate methodological recognition. This would complement the components of the Strategy that deal with more traditional program evaluation.

The Murdoch Children’s Research Institute’s (MCRI) research into the evidence about what makes for effective children’s and families service delivery is highly relevant. The MCRI has found that “[o]n their own, evidence-based programs are insufficient to ensure better outcomes”.¹⁵ Its research indicates that evidence-based processes and the quality of the relationships between practitioners and parents, and the use of services that reflect the values of clients and the outcomes that are important to them, are equally important to achieving positive outcomes as evidence-based programs. Together, these components represent ‘evidence-informed practice’. **Attachment 3** summarises key relevant findings from MCRI’s work. While this research has been undertaken in relation to children’s and families services generally, it is highly applicable to services and programs relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and more broadly in Indigenous communities.

The Strategy could helpfully include utilisation-focused evaluation approaches which emphasise the usefulness of the evaluation to its intended users, with the aim of both the findings and the evaluation process itself being useful, and a focus on “real and specific users and uses”.¹⁶ We also recommend that the Strategy support qualitative evaluation approaches, including those with story-telling, narrative-based outputs, and seek to draw from good examples already developed by local organisations in doing so. The use of these methods is pivotal in documenting the quality of relational practice.

It is often pointed out that, to be most valuable, evaluation should focus on outcomes, yet commonly instead focuses on processes, inputs and outputs. It is critical that the Strategy be strongly focused on outcomes. An important caveat is that, for evaluation of programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it will often be valuable to also evaluate procedural aspects of programs in addition to (not instead of) evaluating outcomes. This is discussed in more detail below.

In general, consideration should be given to evaluation approaches and methods which enable holistic assessment of effects. Evaluation should be holistic in three related senses:

- *Broad and culturally-informed concept of outcomes.* As noted above, it is critical that the Strategy maintain a focus on outcomes. Evaluation should incorporate a holistic concept of the outcomes being measured, including by understanding outcomes in the context of the priority of relationships and kinship in Aboriginal culture¹⁷ through a concept of ‘outcomes within culture’. For example, health can be understood as extending beyond individual physical wellbeing to include the social, cultural, emotional and social aspects of wellbeing in which individuals are understood as members of communities and as subject to environmental and social determinants of health across the life course.¹⁸ A holistic view enables a broader perspective on the effects of the programs being evaluated. It is also more culturally appropriate and therefore more likely to be recognised, accepted and acted upon by communities themselves. In some cases, holistic measures developed in other contexts, but addressing similar evaluation challenges, may assist.¹⁹
- *Comprehensive understanding of effects.* In the context of programs affecting Indigenous communities, there will be instances where evaluation should extend to procedural and ‘internal’ factors as well as outcomes. For example, evaluations can assess “whether the *outcome* contributes to Aboriginal self-determination, and whether the *process* is participatory and empowering for the individuals and communities involved”.²⁰ In a similar vein, evaluation should

reflect the priorities of Indigenous communities, including the importance of kinship and authentic relationships as a process and an outcome.²¹ Formative and process evaluations and other approaches can be a valuable part of the evaluation methods mix. It is critical that, when processes (or, in some cases, inputs or outputs) are measured, this is done in a way that is thoughtful and deliberate, with measurement undertaken in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of a program's effects, rather than as a substitute for seeking to evaluate outcomes simply because they are more straightforward to measure.

- *Aggregate view of effects.* Where possible, consideration should be given to assessing all programmatic and other activities in a particular community (or affecting a particular family or – where possible – a particular individual), taken as a whole. Many initiatives affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are targeted at communities, and even initiatives targeted at individuals (such as income management) often have substantial spill-over effects on those individuals' families and communities.²² Often, positive change occurs as a result of multiple intersecting activities and efforts over time, not due to any single intervention. Evaluation should recognise this, while at the same time seeking to understand and articulate how the various programs and other activities relate to each other. An individualised and community-based (place-based) approach to evaluation will often be needed, with outcomes evaluated and measured at 'nested' levels of individuals, families, communities and regions.

What principles should an Indigenous evaluation framework include?

Indigenous rights should be explicitly recognised

These include the rights set out in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Awareness and respect for these rights should guide all evaluation activity. Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination, from which flows the rights to freely determine their political status and pursue economic, social and cultural development, including the rights to autonomy or self-government in matters relating to internal and local affairs, and to determine, develop and administer health, housing and other economic and social programs affecting them.²³ These rights have clear implications for how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be involved in evaluating programs affecting them.

Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and priorities should be comprehensively included

The evaluation framework should encourage genuine co-design and community ownership and leadership at every stage of the evaluation process wherever possible (recognising that, in some cases, community capacity to undertake these roles will need to be built and strengthened over time). The voice of the communities in which services are provided should ideally be present throughout the evaluation process, as part of an authentic relationship between government and communities.

Communities should ideally be genuinely involved with identifying priorities for support and intervention, selecting and designing policy and service responses, developing performance and outcomes frameworks and measures, planning and implementing program delivery, and evaluating program and practice effectiveness. Wherever possible, they should be engaged well before the evaluation stage.

Ideally, an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander researcher should form part of the core research team except in exceptional circumstances, where there should instead be a corresponding focus on building capacity wherever possible.

Government's role in this respect extends to leveraging pre-existing strengths and aspirations of Indigenous communities, as well as supporting capacity-strengthening in communities to enable local organisations and leaders to perform these evaluation roles over time.²⁴ This also creates opportunities for government innovation and enhanced 'user experience', community ownership and responsibility.

Evaluation must be with consent and meet a high ethical standard

The evaluation framework should translate ethical principles into practice, drawing on existing guides to ethical research in Indigenous communities, especially those written by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The goal of ethical research and evaluation is often highlighted in framework documents – for example, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy evaluation framework emphasises that its aims include ethical evaluation²⁵ – but this must be operationalised through practices, systems, norms, clear minimum standards and accountability mechanisms. Consideration could be given to establishing an ethics board specifically for evaluations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Government should take a genuine partnership approach to evaluation

Successful Indigenous development practice, including evaluation, requires high quality partnerships built on authentic relationships that are developed over time.²⁶ Such partnerships involve shared ownership and are based on a recognition of the strengths of each party and the benefits to each party. Capacity building within communities is a key enabler, to empower local staff, organisations and community leaders to increasingly carry out evaluation roles over time. Long-term continuity of funding and relevant policy, service delivery and governance frameworks are critical for such capacity building.

This partnership approach should also extend, in a different sense, across sectors, particularly with non-government service providers and partners. Policy development and service delivery roles and responsibilities span across sectors and are often performed through cross-sector partnerships.²⁷

Evaluations should be required to demonstrate benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Evaluations should be clear about how they will benefit the communities who are involved, including a 'do no harm' element in addition to positive benefits. These should include concrete and local benefits, and should generally reflect and include benefits identified and sought by the communities themselves.

Indigenous data sovereignty should be protected

Indigenous data takes many forms.²⁸ As well as being a fundamental right, sovereignty and control over this data can empower communities to hold others to account and challenge agendas and practices that are not oriented to community priorities or culturally respectful and appropriate. Protecting data sovereignty should include measures to support communities' right to govern their own data and retain control of it, and capacity-building in communities to enable this over time, where needed.

Evaluation should focus on contribution to outcomes rather than exclusively on attribution

The evaluation framework should recognise the value of evaluations measuring a program's contribution and focusing on lessons and recommendations for improvement or scale-up. In the context of the complexities of program impact and evaluation relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including that there are generally multiple initiatives operating in a community and targeting related outcomes at any given time,²⁹ analysing a program's contribution will often be more productive than seeking to directly attribute changed outcomes to specific individual interventions.

Innovation should be encouraged

The evaluation framework should encourage innovation in approaches to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's outcomes, and in how these are evaluated. In particular it should recognise and encourage contemporary place-based initiatives and appropriate evaluation approaches.

Place-based approaches target communities as a whole and aim to address complex problems through integrated responses. They include sophisticated methodologies such as 'collective impact' approaches to leverage existing community strengths and enable communities to come together to identify priorities and solutions, often by empowering local leaders and activating local governance and networks. Such approaches can enable meaningful and sustained improvement in outcomes where traditional programs have failed.³⁰ However, because they achieve their results through a community-led, adaptive process, they require different evaluation approaches from those that are appropriate to more top-down program interventions. For more detail about how collective impact partnerships can work in practice, and how they can themselves support better evaluation, see the case study at **Attachment 2**.

Encouraging innovation also includes supporting pilots and trials and recognising how they differ from more established programs and interventions. In some cases, this entails being realistic about the time initiatives may take to show impact and initially focusing on evaluation of process and lead indicators of impact. In other cases, it involves accepting a higher chance of failure and being prepared to rapidly move to the next promising initiative without delaying and waiting for a next scheduled round of funding.

The evaluation framework should be practical

The framework should be in a form that evaluators can pick up and use to help plan and deliver evaluations.

What should the evaluation priorities be?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's relationships (with family and clans) and outcomes should be a high priority. Compared with non-Indigenous children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to die during early childhood,³¹ ten times more likely to be in out of home care,³² and 17 times more likely to be in detention.³³ Yet while the challenges are undeniable, there is also opportunity. Nearly 45 per cent of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are below the age of twenty.³⁴ Despite the complexity and severity of the disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, meaningful change is possible within a generation if there is a focus on supporting children and young people, including to sustain relationships with family, clan and Indigenous languages.

The effectiveness of policy and programs targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged families with children in the early years should be a particular priority. The importance of the early years to children's development and life outcomes is now well recognised, yet the evidence base relating to specific programs and practices during this critical period remains relatively underdeveloped, especially in relation to early learning settings outside formal 'pre-school' or kindergarten, and in relation to supports and services for children aged 0 to 3 years old and their families. These other settings and services, such as playgroups, are especially important for vulnerable and disadvantaged children, who benefit the most from quality early learning,³⁵ and yet are most likely to miss out on it.³⁶

Save the Children suggests supported playgroups as a particularly high priority. The available evidence³⁷ and our extensive direct experience operating supported playgroups across the country through our Play2Learn programming model (which is unique in its dual-worker practice approach, national scale, and differentiated focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and other disadvantaged cohorts³⁸) support the view that supported playgroups have a large impact on children's and families'

outcomes and are an integral – and under-recognised – part of the early years service system, particularly in supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged children to stay developmentally ‘on track’ and keeping their families connected to mainstream services. However, evaluation of playgroup programs, including supported playgroups, remains limited.³⁹ This is a significant gap, given the high impact and return on investment of programs that support improved developmental outcomes in the early years.

Two other evaluation priorities that could be considered are cultural competence of mainstream service providers, and accessibility of services to communities. Both are systemic issues. Rigorous and culturally-informed evaluation of them would have significant flow-through benefits for other areas.

Save the Children also notes the importance of prioritising evaluation of both program effectiveness and the process of program implementation. A good program implemented badly may have no or even negative effects. It is critical that evaluation distinguishes between a program and its implementation (including the relational practices and cultural competencies that underpin its implementation).

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important work. If we can be of further assistance, or to discuss anything in this submission, please do not hesitate to contact myself or Howard Choo, our Australian Social Policy and Advocacy Adviser,

Kind regards,

Paul Ronalds
CEO
Save the Children Australia

Attachment 1: Summary of recommendations

1. The Strategy's objectives should be:
 - a. Evaluation should drive improved design, delivery and funding of services (see pages 2-3 for detailed recommendations);
 - b. The evidence base about 'what works' should be expanded and made available, accessible and useable, including to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (see page 3); and
 - c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with, and ownership of, policy processes should be increased (see pages 3 and 5-6).
2. The Strategy should recognise that RCTs are just one of a number of evaluation approaches that produce robust evidence, have a strong emphasis on practice-based evidence, include utilisation-focused evaluation approaches, and support qualitative evaluation (see pages 3-4).
3. The Strategy should have a strong focus on evaluating outcomes, although evaluation of procedural elements can also be valuable to enable a comprehensive view of a program's effects (see pages 4-5).
4. Evaluation should be holistic in three related senses (see pages 4-5):
 - a. Evaluation should be based on a broad and culturally-informed concept of outcomes, including an understanding of the priority of relationships and kinship in culture;
 - b. Evaluation should seek to assess all relevant program effects, including important aspects of processes as well as outcomes; and
 - c. Evaluation should seek to assess the aggregate effects of programs and expenditure in communities as a whole (or affecting particular families or individuals), including adopting individualised and community-based (place-based) approaches where appropriate.
5. The principles in an Indigenous evaluation framework should include (see pages 5-7):
 - a. Indigenous rights should be explicitly recognised;
 - b. Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and priorities should be comprehensively included;
 - c. Evaluation must be with consent and meet a high ethical standard;
 - d. Government should take a genuine partnership approach to evaluation, including: (i) capacity-building within communities to enable and empower local staff, organisations and community leaders to increasingly carry out evaluation roles over time; and (ii) in a different sense, partnership across sectors with non-government service providers and partners;
 - e. Evaluations should be required to demonstrate benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
 - f. Indigenous data sovereignty should be protected;
 - g. Evaluation should focus on contribution to outcomes rather than exclusively on attribution;
 - h. Innovation should be encouraged; and
 - i. The evaluation framework should be practical.
6. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's relationships (with families and clans) and outcomes should be a high priority (see page 7).
7. Policy and programs targeting vulnerable and disadvantaged families with children in the early years should be a particular priority, and particularly supported playgroups (see pages 7-8).
8. Cultural competence of mainstream service providers and accessibility of services to communities are other potential high priorities (see page 8).
9. Evaluation of program effectiveness and implementation should both be prioritised (see page 8).

Attachment 2: Woombooring Amboon Angarriiya Partnership Initiative case study

In the Dampier Peninsula, WA, Save the Children is the backbone organisation for an early childhood ‘collective impact’ initiative, the Woombooring Amboon Angarriiya Partnership Initiative (WAAPI). Developed in partnership with Empowered Communities body Aarnja, the initiative empowers Kimberley families within their communities to create positive social change for their children and young people.⁴⁰

Collective impact initiatives are an innovative way of using collaboration to create change on complex issues. Save the Children’s partnership approach incorporates the core ‘collective impact’ methodology and is designed specifically to incubate place-based, community-driven impact in an Australian context.

Many elements of the WAAPI initiative and lessons learned through its development are relevant to the development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. For example:

- A key strength of the WAAPI initiative is the governance structures developed and elected by the relevant families and communities. This local governance:
 - Provides a point of entry for the release of data into the community;
 - Enables this data to be provided in a way and to the segments of the community that is most relevant to community needs and priorities;
 - Ensures that the data is provided in a way that is understandable by community members and contextualised by relevant local information and issue; and
 - Brings communities together to decide what issues a community should mobilise around.

In this way, local governance supports community ownership of data and enables evaluation and research to drive community empowerment and changed outcomes at a local level.

- ‘Community navigators’ are integral to the WAAPI initiative. These are local leaders who are employed and steer the project, including by driving grassroots change. Supported by capacity-building and training, the community navigators have carried out household surveys in their communities to gather demographic and other data which is richer, more accurate and more useful to communities and local service providers than Australian Bureau of Statistics data.
 - This includes data about families’ priorities and concerns, how families wish to have information communicated to them, and what they wish to be approached about.
 - Community navigators have been able to collate this information and report it back to families and communities within a month, in targeted ‘pocket sessions’ where the information is more tailored and empowering for community members than if it were provided in larger forums.
 - There are significant opportunities to build the ‘knowledge brokering’ capacity of these local leaders and other community members, working between communities, governments, non-government service providers and partners, local industry and employers, training and skills providers and others.
- Regional leadership groups can play a powerful role in monitoring and evaluation within their communities, especially when formed based on language groups rather than just location. Provided with appropriate capacity-building, they can develop place-based local indicators and work with local providers to align activities around priorities. They can undertake community-level service mapping and have the knowledge to assign services to need. They can play an important role in freeing up data and working through red tape to facilitate access to data in a way that makes sense and can be cleansed and disaggregated to relevant geographical areas.

Attachment 3: Evidence-informed practice and effective children's and families services

Key findings from the Murdoch Children's Research Institute's research include:

- “On their own, evidence-based programs are insufficient to ensure better outcomes”.
- Evidence-based processes are important: “how services are delivered is equally as important as what is delivered [and] the quality of relationships between practitioners and parents are central to achieving the objectives of services”.
- Client and professional values and beliefs are also important: “for services to be effective they must not only use evidence-based processes and evidence-based programs, but must also reflect the values of clients and the outcomes that are important to them. Overall, the evidence indicates that regardless of their strength of evidence, programs are unlikely to be effective if the clients do not see them as addressing their most pressing concerns, or in ways that are inconsistent with family values”.
- Effective services are better understood as the result of an overall process of ‘evidence-informed practice’ which blends evidence-based programs, evidence-based processes, and client and professional values and beliefs, rather than as the result of successful evidence-based programs on their own. Indeed, “the evidence regarding the components described above indicates that all three make equally important contributions to achieving positive outcomes”.

For an overview of this research, and the source of all direct quotations above, see Moore, T., Arefadib, N. and Leone, V., 2017. *Using evidence in policy and programs*, Policy Brief Number 27, Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

For a more detailed treatment, see Moore, T., 2016. *Towards a model of evidence-informed decision-making and service delivery*, Working Paper No 5, Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.

References

- ¹ Available from https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/Effective-Development-Practice-with-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Communities.pdf (ACFID Practice Note, 2014). ACFID is the peak body for Australia's non-government aid and international development organisations.
- ² Available from <http://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/21070504-APO-NT-Partnership-Principles-Updated-version.pdf>.
- ³ Available from <https://wacoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Partnering-with-Aboriginal-Community-Controlled-Organisations-to-deliver-trusted-services-with-stronger-outcomes-Report-1.pdf>.
- ⁴ See generally Moran, M., Porter, D. and Curth-Bibb, J., 2014. *Funding Indigenous organisations: Improving governance performance through innovations in public finance management in remote Australia*, Issues Paper No 11, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse.
- ⁵ See Yothu Yindi Foundation, 2017. *Inquiry into horizontal fiscal equalisation*, Submission to Productivity Commission inquiry, available from https://www.pc.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0014/223124/subdr080-horizontal-fiscal-equalisation.pdf.
- ⁶ Mackay, K., 2011. *The Australian Government's performance framework*. ECD Working Paper Series No 25, World Bank, pp 3 and 14.
- ⁷ Lopez-Acevedo, G., Krause, P. and Mackay, K., 2012. *Building better policies: The nuts and bolts of monitoring and evaluation systems*, World Bank, p 199.
- ⁸ Lopez-Acevedo, Krause and Mackay, above n 7, pp 7, 10, 17, 197-209.
- ⁹ The evaluation report is available from <https://www.dss.gov.au/families-and-children-programs-services-welfare-quarantining-cashless-debit-card/cashless-debit-card-evaluation>.
- ¹⁰ See Cobb-Clark, D., 2012. *The case for making public policy evaluations public*, Policy Brief No 1/13, Melbourne Institute of Applied Economics and Social Research, University of Melbourne, p 5, citing Bamberger, M., Rugh, J., Church, M. and Fort, L., 2004. 'Shoestring evaluations: Designing evaluations under budget, time and data constraints', *American Journal of Evaluation* 25(1), pp 5-37.
- ¹¹ Kelaher, M., Luke, J., Ferdinand, A., Chamravi, D., Ewen, S. and Paradies, Y., 2018. *An evaluation framework to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health*, Lowitja Institute, p 39.
- ¹² See, eg, ACFID Practice Note, above n 1, p 6.
- ¹³ Muir, S. and Dean, A., 2017. *Evaluating the outcomes of programs for Indigenous families and communities*, CFCA Practice Resource – February 2017, p 7.
- ¹⁴ Kelaher et al, above n 11, p 29.
- ¹⁵ Moore, T., Arefadib, N. and Leone, V., 2017. *Using evidence in policy and programs*, Policy Brief Number 27, Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.
- ¹⁶ For a brief summary of utilisation-focused evaluation approaches and references to more detailed sources, see Better Evaluation, 2019. *Utilization-focused evaluation*, available from https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/utilization_focused_evaluation.
- ¹⁷ See Fasoli, L. and Ford, M., 2001. 'Indigenous early childhood educators' narratives: Relationships, not activities', *Australian Journal of Early Childhood* 23(2), pp 18-22, for an interesting perspective on this.
- ¹⁸ Kelaher et al, above n 11, p 52. We also highlight the work of Associate Professor Sheree Cairney in this respect: see, eg, Cairney, S., Abbott, T., Quinn, S., Yamaguchi, J., Wilson, B. and Wakerman, J., 2017. 'Interplay wellbeing framework: a collaborative methodology "bringing together stories and numbers" to quantify Aboriginal cultural values in remote Australia', *International Journal for Equity in Health*, vol 16, article no 68.
- ¹⁹ An interesting example is the Individual Deprivation Measure, which measures poverty by assessing individual deprivation using "15 key dimensions of life that women and men with lived experience of poverty say matter" in a way that is gender-sensitive and intersectional, and can measure individual levels of deprivation within a household: Individual Deprivation Measure, 2019. *Individual Deprivation Measure*, Australian National University, International Women's Development Agency and the Australian Government through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, available from <http://www.individualdeprivationmeasure.org> (navigate via: 'IDM' – 'Measure').
- ²⁰ Walker, R., Ballard, J., and Taylor, C., 2002. *Investigating appropriate evaluation methods and indicators for Indigenous housing programs*, AHURI Positioning Paper No 24, p 26 (emphasis in original).
- ²¹ Fasoli and Ford, above n 17.
- ²² Cobb-Clark, above n 10, p 6.

- ²³ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, especially arts 3 and 4; International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, especially art 23.
- ²⁴ See, eg, Malezer, L., 2013. 'Challenges in evaluating Indigenous policy', *Better Indigenous policies: The role of evaluation*, Roundtable Proceedings, Productivity Commission, pp 69-79.
- ²⁵ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018. *Indigenous Advancement Strategy evaluation framework*, Australian Government, p 3.
- ²⁶ ACFID Practice Note, above n 1, p 3.
- ²⁷ For an overview of relevant aspects of the relationship between the Australian Government and the non-profit sector over time, including in relation to accountability, evidence of impact and evaluation, see Ronalds, P., 2015. 'Federal government and non-profit relations in Australia', in Brothers, J. (ed), 2015. *Rebalancing public partnership: Innovative practice between government and nonprofits from around the world*, ch 7.
- ²⁸ Indigenous data has been defined by Professor Maggie Walter as follows: "Data about Our (Indigenous) resources and environments ... such as land information, history, geological information, titles, water information and similar. Data about Us include demographic data such as administrative legal, health, and social data; commercially held data such as our use of services; and our own data. Data from Us refers to traditional cultural information, archives, oral literature, ancestral knowledge, community stories and similar topics": cited in Melbourne School of Population and Global Health, Indigenous Studies Unit, 2017. *Report on the Indigenous data symposium: The importance of data sovereignty for communities*, The University of Melbourne, p 5.
- ²⁹ Cobb-Clark, above n 10, p 6.
- ³⁰ Useful summaries of the extensive literature about collective impact, including in an Australian context, include: Hanleybrown, F., Kania, J. and Kramer, M., 2012. 'Channeling change: Making collective impact work', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*; Kania, J., Hanleybrown, F. and Juster, J. S., 2014. 'Essential mindset shifts for collective impact', *Collective insights on collective impact*, Collective Impact Forum, pp 2-6; Smart, J., 2017. *Collective impact: Evidence and implications for practice*, CFCA Paper No 45, Australian Institute of Family Studies; Hogan, D., Rubenstein, L. and Fry, R., 2018. *Place-based collective impact: An Australian response to childhood vulnerability*, Policy Brief, Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children's Research Institute.
- ³¹ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2018. *Australia's health: June 2018*, chapter 6.3, available from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/ed34c67c-e1aa-4d4f-9ff2-366ea6f27b52/aihw-aus-221-chapter-6-3.pdf.aspx>.
- ³² Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2019. *Child protection and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, CFCA Resource Sheet – January 2019.
- ³³ AIHW, 2019. *Youth justice in Australia 2017-18*, available from <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/f80cfc3-c058-4c1c-bda5-e37ba51fa66b/aihw-juv-129.pdf.aspx?inline=true>.
- ³⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018. *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016*, 'Estimated resident Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous population, states and territories – 30 June 2016' data cube, available from <https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3238.0.55.001June%202016?OpenDocument>.
- ³⁵ Pascoe, S. and Brennan, D., 2017. *Lifting our game: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools through early childhood interventions*, pp 40 and 51.
- ³⁶ O'Connell, M., Fox, S. and Hinz, B., 2016. *Quality early education for all: Fostering creative, entrepreneurial, resilient and capable learners*, Mitchell Institute, pp 27 and 33.
- ³⁷ See generally Commerford, J. and Robinson, E., 2016. *Supported playgroups for parents and children: The evidence for their benefits*, CFCA Paper No 40, Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- ³⁸ For more information, see Save the Children, 2019. *Play2Learn*, available from <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/Our-work/Our-programs/Australia/Play2Learn>.
- ³⁹ See, eg, Commerford and Robinson, above n 37.
- ⁴⁰ For more information about WAAPI, see Bunning, J., Isaac, J., Smith, R., Augustine, J. and Sampi, B., 2019. *Dampier Peninsula's Community Navigators Empowering Kimberley Families through their Aboriginal-led Woombooriny Amboon Angarriiya Partnership Initiative (WAAPI)*, Nulungu Insights 4, Broome: Nulungu Research Institute, available from https://www.notredame.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0030/80769/Nulungu-Insights-4.pdf.