



Commissioner for Children and Young People
Western Australia

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Dear Chair

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy: Productivity Commission Issues Paper June 2019

As Commissioner for Children and Young People in Western Australia I have a statutory responsibility under the *Commissioner for Children and Young People Act 2006 (WA)* to advocate for the views of children and young people to be heard in decision making that affects them. In undertaking these responsibilities I must give priority to Aboriginal children and young people and those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged for any reason. I must also have regard for the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (the UNCRC).

It is within the context of my role as an independent, statutory office and the functions outlined above that I provide the following comments in relation to development of a whole-of-government evaluation strategy, to be utilised by all Australian Government agencies, for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; inclusive of children and young people.

In inquiring into the issue of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, the Commission is considering opportunities to lead the way in evaluation of government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

I would like to bring to the Commission's attention feedback from an Aboriginal Forum, held in August 2018. The forum provided 72 Aboriginal leaders with an opportunity to discuss Aboriginal-led solutions to improving the well-being of Aboriginal children and young people in WA¹. The key recommendation for action relevant to your work is that **'Programs and services working in the Aboriginal community must be:**

- **Aboriginal-led** – the right of self-determination
- **Rights-based** – rights of the child as well as Aboriginal rights
- **Client centred** – place child at the centre
- **Place-based** – locally identified issues with local solutions
- **Evaluated** and appropriately **resourced**'.

¹ Full report at <https://www.ccyp.wa.gov.au/media/3220/summary-report-aboriginal-forum-23-august-2018.pdf>

While the document discussed above was a result of senior Aboriginal people, children and young people also need to be heard. Consistent with the Commissioner's ***Statement of Commitment to WA's children and young people and under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child***, all children and young people have the right to express their views and to have their opinions taken into account in regard to decisions that affect them.²

Children and young people want to:

- feel valued, respected, listened to;
- feel that their ideas are taken seriously; and
- be involved in making decisions and influencing matters that affect them.

They say that these things are important for their wellbeing. This is a consistent message from children and young people whenever they are consulted.³

Although my consultation with Aboriginal children and young people does not specifically focus on the type and process of evaluation of policies and programs, Aboriginal children and young people do provide feedback, which clearly demonstrates that asking what they want and involving them in decision-making processes ensures the program or service provided for them is relevant to meeting their needs. This makes Aboriginal children and young people more likely to access the service and have a positive experience using the service, which can ultimately lead to better outcomes for their health and wellbeing⁴.

In conclusion, I would like to draw your attention to a number of publications that discuss the importance of involving Aboriginal children and young people in policy and program development including evaluation:

- *Aboriginal children and young people speak out about culture and identity*⁵, Policy brief, June 2011
- *Aboriginal children and young people speak out about the importance of education*⁶, Policy brief, April 2011
- *Listen to us Report, 2015*⁷
- *Engaging with Aboriginal Children and Young People Toolkit*⁸, 2016

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Productivity Commission on the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

Yours sincerely

COLIN PETTIT

Commissioner for Children and Young People WA

19 August 2019

² United Nations General Assembly 1989, *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Article 12, United Nations, Treaty Series.

³ Commissioner for Children and Young People WA 2011, *Children and young people speak out about being acknowledged and involved in decisions policy brief*, Commissioner for Children and Young People WA, viewed 21 December 2017, <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1306/policy-brief-wellbeing-research-being-acknowledged-and-involved-in-decisions-participation-may-2011.pdf>

⁴ <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/engaging-with-aboriginal-children-and-young-people-toolkit/section-2-getting-your-organisation-ready/>

⁵ <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1305/policy-brief-wellbeing-research-aboriginal-children-on-culture-and-identity-june-2011.pdf>

⁶ <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/media/1304/policy-brief-wellbeing-research-aboriginal-children-and-young-people-speaking-out-about-importance-of-education-april-2011.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/projects/consultation-with-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children/>

⁸ <https://www.cyp.wa.gov.au/our-work/resources/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/engaging-with-aboriginal-children-and-young-people-toolkit/>

Appendix 1 Framework of actions to improve the well-being of Aboriginal children and young people.

<p>Aboriginal leadership and self determination</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow through on the implementation of the Uluru Statement and treaty discussions at a state and federal level to transfer power/control and responsibility to the community. • Aboriginal communities need recognised representative groups working across the state to identify issues and solutions at a local level, and to ensure policies and programs recognise the differences in urban, regional and remote contexts. • In addition to having access to decision makers and decision making power/ influence, Aboriginal communities need access to localised data and resources to support the issues being prioritised and the solutions being identified.
<p>Cultural context</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services and programs must address children and young people's needs in the context of their family, community and culture. Include families in discussions and intervene early to support families and provide them with the skills and assistance they need. • Aboriginal people must have access to culture. Connection to culture supports the strength and resilience of "our young people, who are our future". • Be strengths based. Children and young people need the resources and supports around them to see the positives in being Aboriginal. Current practices reinforce negative stereotypes, low expectations and negative relationships. • Education needs to be available to assist all Australians to understand the trauma that has affected and continues to affect Aboriginal people. Appropriate supports to heal the trauma need to be implemented.
<p>Roles of Aboriginal community, government and not-for-profits</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal community members must collaborate with government and the not-for-profit sector on 'What's next?' Resource Aboriginal people to lead the design, planning, development, funding, implementation and evaluation processes for programs and services in communities. • Increase opportunities for networking, training and capacity building that bring together non-government organisations, government and Aboriginal community to support better outcomes. • Provide independent monitoring and oversight to ensure organisations are held accountable for performing their roles and work seamlessly with other organisations.
<p>Systems and services</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop long-term social policies and programs with targets set across election cycles, to more effectively address the magnitude of the trauma and the complexity of the issues. • Funding should be proportionate to the needs of children and young people and their families. Complex issues require resources and multi-layered solutions, with a focus on trauma informed practice and positive outcomes for the service user and their family. • Funding should reflect the service user. Where there is high representation of Aboriginal people, funding and resources need to be put into Aboriginal organisations, programs and services. • Simplify compliance processes and focus on transparency and measurable outcomes. The need to spend public monies appropriately is acknowledged; there needs to be a balance between necessary compliance and allowing organisations to carry out their work.