

INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY

Submission from The Fred Hollows Foundation to the Productivity Commission *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy*

The Fred Hollows Foundation (The Foundation) is a leading international eye health non-government organisation that has been actively programming in Australia since 1999.

We continue the legacy of former Australian of the Year, the late Professor Fred Hollows who believed everyone should have the same access to good eye health.

By working in collaboration with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and the eye health and vision care sector, The Foundation commits to ensuring that a world-class eye health system is in place and accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Our work complements the broader self-determination movement in Australia, aligns with the eye care sector's vision and approach and is supported by political leaders. The Foundation's strong presence and reputation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye care sector, together with our strong partnerships, is why we have chosen to make this submission to the Productivity Commission on its development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy.

Recommendations

The Foundation supports the development of a principle-based framework to form the basis of a whole-of-government Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. The Foundation recommends that the principles underpinning the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should be determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Foundation makes recommendations to the Productivity Commission in four areas in response to the Issues Paper.

The **principles** of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should include:

- 1. Ensuring the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent.
- 2. Respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' political, social, economic and cultural situations, their priorities, principles and preferences.
- Operating with transparency and accountability, and providing meaningful feedback to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- 4. Using strengths-based approaches that create sustained positive change and maximise the positive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- 5. Working with humility and self-reflection, understanding differences in worldviews, and eliminating power imbalances.
- 6. Ensuring evaluations do no harm.

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy's **objectives** should include:

7. Strengthening the Australian Government's capacity to use evaluations of policies and programs to respond to the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.



The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should **integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge**, **priorities and values** by:

- 8. Using participatory approaches to evaluation led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and ensuring voices that are not usually heard are prioritised.
- 9. Adhering to local cultural protocols and using culturally appropriate data collection tools and approaches.
- 10. Ensuring data sovereignty by protecting knowledge and intellectual property. The strategy should build in mechanisms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' leadership and ownership of data, and use of locally owned data to inform the design and implementation of locally determined solutions.

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should **ensure evaluation results are used to inform and guide policy and program design** by:

11. Developing a public database of all evaluations commissioned by the Australian Government in relation to policies and programs impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and report on how the learnings from the evaluation have been used.

Recommendations in practice

The Foundation provides the below examples to illustrate how the recommendations can be successfully put into practice by the Productivity Commission in the development of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. Examples from The Foundation's Indigenous Australia Program (IAP) have been included to provide further information and guidance.

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Recommendation	What this means in practice		
1. Ensuring the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to selfdetermination and free, prior and informed consent.	 Evaluations of government policies and programs are led and governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Engagement and negotiation with evaluators should achieve mutual understanding about the proposed evaluation's purpose, scope and expected benefits. Evaluation facilitators should provide opportunities for people to define their own space and meet on their own terms.⁴ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should decide and determine how information, such as history, stories, community issues and culture, is defined and represented in evaluations. The way in which this information is used and interpreted needs to be determined to by the community.⁴ 		
	The Fred Hollows Foundation example:		
	The lead evaluator on The Foundation's Banatjarl Girls Culture Camp Evaluation was an Aboriginal woman from the region and had been supporting the Banatjarl Women's Council over a long period. She worked directly with and took guidance from a Community Reference Group (CRG) during all stages of the evaluation. The role of the CRG was to assist the lead evaluator to		



		see the process from the community perspective and to provide advice regarding how cultural integrity could be maintained at all times. The CRG assisted the lead evaluator with designing the evaluation, creating the questions, developing a participatory qualitative data collection evaluation tools, interpreting the findings, and liaising with the participants, interviewees, families and wider community members. ⁵
2.	Respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait	Development of evaluation outcomes should be determined by the priorities and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. ¹⁷ The Foundation outcomes should be determined by the priorities and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. ¹⁷
	Islander Peoples' political, social, economic and cultural situations, and their priorities, principles, and preferences.	 The Fred Hollows Foundation example: In evaluating its Trachoma Elimination Project, The Foundation engaged an evaluator to facilitate a two-day workshop for community-based workers, program staff and partner organisations to work together to co-design a monitoring and evaluation framework. This was important for this project as the data had to come from several sources and the process enabled stakeholders to determine the key measures for defining success, and a
3.	Operating with	commitment to sharing these common measures of success. 16 12 The evaluation process and outcomes should seek to maximise the
	transparency and accountability, and providing meaningful feedback to Aboriginal and	positive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities involved, as well as maximise their input and voice at all stages of the evaluation. Benefits and value arising from the evaluation should be shared with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities involved. ⁴ • Feedback should be two-way, and the way findings are shared should be decided by those involved in the evaluation. ⁶
	Torres Strait	The Fred Hollows Foundation example:
	Islander Peoples.	During the evaluation of the Early Childhood Nutrition and Anaemia Prevention Project, participant quotes and photos from the project were developed into a publication to share with participants living in other remote locations to generate discussion about results. The discussion points, interview data and stories of 'Most Significant Change' from community-based workers, mothers, community members, health centre staff and other stakeholders were then incorporated into the final evaluation report to complement health data from primary health care services. ²
4.	Using strengths- based approaches that create sustained positive	Strengths-based approaches use tools and techniques that use affirming positive language to pull out and draw on the successful elements. These approaches find out 'what felt right or good', what elements built the energy of the participants, and what has been successful. Been successful. 16 6



change and maximise the positive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Fred Hollows Foundation example

- The Foundation's evaluation of the Women's Development Project took a strengths-based approach. Speaking to the evaluator (an impartial outsider without any established relationship with the women) was difficult for most community-based women, especially when it came to discussing any challenges. However, one of the strongest elements of the evaluation process was having an Aboriginal co-researcher as a partner in the design process. The co-researcher was originally from one of the communities and with many links to the women involved. As a result, a ready-made trust existed that helped, in combination with some culturally appropriate data collection tools that she developed, alleviate any hesitation the women could have had in talking openly with the evaluator.⁷
- Working with humility and selfreflection, understanding differences in world views, and eliminating power imbalances.
- Everyone involved in the evaluation should create a space for selfreflection and careful consideration regarding personal assumptions and beliefs. Cultural humility is an important step in helping to redress the imbalance of power inherent in relationships between practitioners and those they serve and collaborate with on shared activities.³
- All parties should seek to understand difference in world views and the influence of these world views on perceptions of success, process, respect and benefits.
- Strengths-based evaluation approaches will also provide an opportunity to demonstrate respect for different world views.³

The Fred Hollows Foundation example

- In the Indigenous Australia Program, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples work alongside other Australians to design and implement evaluations. In this work environment it is understood that being culturally humble does not mean giving up one's values, but deepening an understanding of these values and those of others, and thus navigating cultural differences in ways which reduce the negative aspects of power imbalance. Some of the ways this is implemented in practice includes: Acknowledging and recognising the custodians of the country that we are on, always being considerate and communicating information to build trust and contribute to two-way learning, respecting communities' past experiences of research and evaluation, being sensitive and seeking clarification in a patient and respectful manner and seeking and following local protocols relating to the area we are working in, including local communication protocols.
- Ensuring evaluations do no harm.
- Actively ensuring that the wellbeing of participants in evaluations is protected. This may include making sure that no unfair burden is placed on certain individuals or groups, and peoples' privacy, human rights and dignity are protected.



 Ensure that the evaluation process and outcomes do not contribute to discrimination, marginalisation or exclusion of individuals or groups.³

The Fred Hollows Foundation example

- As part of The Foundation's evaluation of the Indigenous Peoples Human Rights and Advocacy Training Program for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, led by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program officer, the Most Significant Change (MSC) approach was used. Participants were invited to participate in the design, story collection and analysis stage of the MSC process. Informed consent was gained at three stages of the story collection and analysis process to ensure that the participants understood where their story was being shared and to keep everyone informed. Options for the information sheet and consent form were provided in written or verbal formats. The story teller could agree by verbally indicating their consent on the digital recording device or providing written consent.¹⁸
- 7. Strengthening
 Australian
 Government
 capacity to use
 evaluations of
 policies and
 programs to
 respond to the
 aspirations of
 Aboriginal and
 Torres Strait
 Islander Peoples.
- Evaluation should be an essential part of all policy and programs, rather than 'something done at the end of... a program', and it should be 'situated within practices that support best practice and continuous quality improvement'.⁶
- Evaluations should be part of a continuous quality improvement process, and findings should feedback into the program/project management cycle.¹⁵
- This should include an evaluation capacity building approach, which
 involves developing an organisational culture of collective learning
 using ethically and culturally responsive strategies, ensuring the
 systems sustainably and continuously support the use of quality
 evaluation and develop the Australia Government's capability and
 capacity to routinely and efficiently monitor and evaluation
 projects.¹⁵

The Fred Hollows Foundation example

- In 2014, The Foundation undertook a readiness appraisal to assess
 the extent to which working in a cross-cultural context IAP had the
 necessary conditions to support an Evaluation Capacity Building
 (ECB) approach. The appraisal considered IAP's characteristics,
 identified existing resources and assessed relevant ethical,
 learning, training and mentoring requirements.
- IAP used the results of this appraisal to develop its cross-cultural protocol, develop and implement processes to embed evaluative thinking, and incorporate mechanisms for building the evaluation skills and knowledge of staff at The Foundation.^{9 10}



- 8. Using participatory approaches to evaluation that are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and prioritise voices that are not usually heard are prioritised.
- Participatory approaches should strengthen the level of engagement with participants, increase the opportunity for voices to be heard that are not normally heard, and generate discussion.¹⁷
- Whether these are appropriate and how they are used in the cultural context should be determined by the people involved in the program.¹⁷
- This must happen during the whole evaluation process, from
 planning to dissemination of findings, and the implementation of any
 proposed changes in policy or program as a result of the findings.
 This includes the commissioning of evaluations, and The
 Foundation refers the Productivity Commission to the NHMRC
 Project: Commissioning Stronger Evaluations of Indigenous Health
 & Wellbeing Programs as an important piece of research to inform
 commissioning approaches in the future.

The Fred Hollows Foundation example:

- The Foundation has used a process similar to the 'World Café' technique at the Katherine Regional Eye Care workshop. This involved a structured conversational process to facilitate open discussion and link ideas across a larger group. The optometrists, ophthalmologists, regional eye coordinators, government hospital staff and representatives from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and non-government organisations, moved between a series of tables where they continued a discussion in response to a set of questions. The questions were predetermined by an external evaluator and focused on the specific goals of the project.²⁰
- Adhering to all local cultural protocols and use culturally appropriate data collection tools and approaches.
- Culture should underpin the design of all evaluations as the accuracy and quality of the data collection will depend on the appropriateness of the tools used, and the cultural responsiveness of those collecting the data.
- Australian Government evaluators will need to seek local cultural guidance and ask questions in each context to ascertain what is determined to be respectful and trustworthy, and to demonstrate sensitivity.

The Fred Hollows Foundation example:

• The Foundation is committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are leading the evaluation process and designing tools that are appropriate for the context. In the IAP's Women's Development Project evaluation, laminated pictures and small gifts were placed within each layer of a parcel and were unravelled to music. Each image illustrated different events in the life of the project. The external evaluator asked the participant unravelling the image to describe: 1) what was happening in the picture; and 2) how this event had impacted on/changed her life. The evaluator and the IAP's Aboriginal co-researcher, who created



	the tool, facilitated the activity when necessary. However, the activity largely ran itself, with the women often working as a group to answer the questions. ⁷
10. Ensuring data sovereignty by protecting knowledge and intellectual property. It should build in mechanisms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples leadership and ownership of data, and use of locally owned data to inform the design and implementation of locally determined solutions.	 The contributions of all individuals, groups, communities and services involved in the evaluation must be explicitly recognised. Participants should be consulted as to how they would like to be identified or described in the evaluation. Traditional owners and Elders should be acknowledged where appropriate.⁴ The Fred Hollows Foundation example: The Foundation is working with regional eye health coalitions to support the use of local data to inform local decision-making (regional coalitions are made up of representatives from the relevant eye health care stakeholders in the region). For one region, this has meant the establishment of a Data and Information Systems working group that leads, oversees and monitors the development, implementation and review of an agreed eye health data framework for the region. The eye health data framework will support and improve the regional coalition's strategic, operational and clinical decision-making through the collection, collation and analysis of relevant eye health information, including patient outcome and service level data.¹³ This will involve developing and implementing an eye health data sharing protocol that will support the facilitation of sharing, analysis, use and dissemination of data for the coalition. It will also include establishing baseline data and KPIs that will support the monitoring of progress, performance and service improvement at a regional and local level.
11. Developing a public database of all evaluations commissioned by the Australian	 This is integral to avoid potential duplication of efforts while utilising the findings from already conducted evaluations. The National Indigenous Australians Agency could perform this function, to ensure greater transparency and better coordination across all agencies.
Government in	The Fred Hollows Foundation example:
relation to policies and programs impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	The IAP uses Development Effectiveness bulletins to ensure access to relevant and timely information, promote internal reflection, shift attitudes around data and support the development of a culture of evaluation. The bulletins were developed as a tool for internal communication purposes, to allow frank and open discussion among staff about challenges and what did not work well. But the demand for information from sources outside The Foundation revealed the need to share the bulletins externally.

Conversations about lessons learned can now be shared with

and report on how



the learnings from
the evaluation
have been used.

partners via the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, and form part of a broader knowledge-translation package.¹¹

Indigenous Australia Program Evaluation Framework

The following description of The Foundation's IAP evaluation framework is included in more detail to assist the Productivity Commission in developing its own strategy. IAP uses a principles-based framework for all its work in Australia. Alongside its principles, IAP also developed cultural protocols to specifically guide the evaluations of programs impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Together these form the framework within which all evaluations are commissioned and implemented.

IAP operates within the broader evaluation framework of The Foundation, and through its principles and protocols has contextualised guidance around evaluations so that it is relevant and culturally-responsive to its work in Australia. Monitoring and evaluation is included from the program design phase of all our work.

A detailed example of how IAP has implemented its approach is also included in addition to the above examples.

IAP Principles

Our principles are informed by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹⁹, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan³, and the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory principles¹. Taking a rights-based approach to health, we are committed to working with communities, non-government organisations and governments, to ensure equity in the accessibility and responsiveness of eye health services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control and self-determination

We believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Peoples and organisations are best-placed to deliver services to their own communities. We seek to strengthen Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and promote the active engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in decisions that affect their lives.

- **Principle 1:** The Foundation upholds the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander Peoples to self-determination and free, prior and informed consent.
- Principle 2: The Foundation works alongside, and respect the leadership and priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector.
- Principle 3: The Foundation actively supports efforts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and peoples to achieve equity in social and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
- Principle 4: The Foundation supports, and actively encourages other non-Aboriginal and Torres
 Strait Islander organisations to support the development of the Aboriginal Community Controlled
 Health Services sector.
- **Principle 5:** The Foundation does not operate in direct competition with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.



Strong partnerships

In Australia, we deliver through partnerships. We establish collaborative relationships with other organisations who are willing to work with us in transparent and mutually-beneficial ways. We work towards common goals, co-create solutions, and share resources, risks and rewards.

- **Principle 6:** The Foundation works sensitively and with respect for our partners' political, social, economic and cultural situations, and for their priorities, principles, and preferences.
- **Principle 7:** The Foundation operates with transparency and is accountable to those we work for and with patient-centred, evidence-based care.

We take a patient-centred approach and seek to ensure eye care is delivered at the right time, in the right way, by the right team, in the right place. We seek to understand and improve the patient experience of care and journey through the health system. To ensure our work is evidence-based and has a sustained positive impact, we actively engage all key stakeholders, use best-practice approaches, and engage in continuous quality-improvement. We use a rigorous internal review process and data to make decisions about where resources should be allocated and where improvements can be made.

 Principle 8: The Foundation's work is focused on creating sustained positive change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, is informed by evidence, considered from the patient perspective, and based on need.

IAP Cultural Protocols

A cultural protocol is important to ensure that everyone involved in an evaluation follows the appropriate pathway to working in a community setting. The Foundation believes a cultural protocol is essential to in continue to ensure ethical and culturally appropriate approaches to evaluation. The purpose of the document is to assist IAP staff and external evaluation consultants to ensure that activities are undertaken with the appropriate respect for, and participation of, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities.

There are three elements to the protocol:48

Reciprocal respect

This section outlines the importance of meaningful engagement and the need to maximise positive benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities involved. Recognition of diversity, and the need to understand the differences in world views and the influence of these world views on perceptions of success, process, respect and benefits is also included as part of reciprocal respect.

The responsibilities of evaluators are outlined in the section, noting the responsibility of evaluators to follow practices related to the 'do no harm' concept, and actively ensure that the wellbeing of participants is protected. It should include ensuring that the evaluation process does not contribute to discrimination, marginalisation or exclusion of individuals or groups.

Cultural Humility

This section outlines the importance of self-reflection and navigating cultural differences in ways that reduce the negative aspects of power imbalances.



Acknowledgement

This section outlines the need to protect knowledge and intellectual property, respond to community priorities and provide meaningful feedback to community, as well as the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander control. It also outlines representation issues, noting that published evaluation material should not expose information that would be considered confidential or sensitive by the individuals or communities involved, and neither should it reinforce negative stereotypes.

IAP acknowledges that it is important that this protocol is used in conjunction with the specific cultural and communication protocols for the individual community participating in the evaluation.

The Foundation suggests that the Productivity Commission develops cultural protocols to guide all Australian Government evaluations as part of the development of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, whilst acknowledging that all local protocols must take primacy and always be adhered to.

Regional eye health approach¹⁴

This section outlines a collaborative regional approach that used participatory processes to improve eye care services, in particular the coordination of these eye care services, in a region in the Northern Territory²⁰. To inform this work, a range of information was collected, including regional eye care service mapping, eye care service delivery data, as well as feedback on the performance of the eye care system according to stakeholders, patient and community perspectives on eye care and the workforce availability and gaps.

Based on this comprehensive 'current picture', stakeholders collaborated to improve eye health care services. This was developed following structured conversation that invited individual perspectives which were then considered in light of the broader stakeholder perspective. Helpful processes included an Eye Care Systems Assessment, focus-group guided enquiry, a polling process called 'dotocracy', and critical reflection. Importantly, these structured approaches happened on an existing platform of collaboration and trust between the stakeholders. This culminated in a regional, collectively-owned eye care work plan, which articulated the 'common vision,' prioritised activities, set targets, and listed responsibilities. Guided by this regional work plan, stakeholders worked together to improve regional eye care services. Activities included: increasing services towards population-based targets; addressing gaps in the local and regional eye health coordination workforce; continuous quality improvement (both service and system level); training in eye care checks and referral pathways for primary health care staff'.¹⁴

The impact of this in improving service delivery was noted in a number of areas, including increases in the frequency of eye exams, and numbers of referrals, and completion of referral pathways to ophthalmology.

Using participatory methods resulted in 'improved coordination, integration and strategic alignment of projects... Taking a strengths-based approach, the various challenges for eye care (e.g. competing health priorities, accessing data, waiting lists, patient access barriers) were viewed as opportunities for improvement that were achievable by working together'.¹⁴

Other pre-existing frameworks

In providing this submission, The Foundation acknowledges that there are a number of guidelines already in existence and a substantial body of work that has already been undertaken in this area. The Foundation urges the Productivity Commission to draw on this evidence when developing its Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. This includes:



- An Evaluation Framework to Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health https://croakey.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Evaluation_Report_FINAL-copy.pdf
- Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs
 https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/evaluating-indigenous-programs
- Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework
 https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/ias-evaluation-framework.pdf
- NHMRC Project: Commissioning Stronger Evaluations of Indigenous Health & Wellbeing Programs https://www.canberra.edu.au/research/institutes/health-research-institutes/commissioning-stronger-evaluations-of-indigenous-health-and-wellbeing-programs
- ACFID (Australian Council for International Development) Principles and Guidelines for ethical research and evaluation in development
 https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID_RDI%20Principles%20and%20Guidelines%20for%20ethical%20research12-07-2017.pdf
- ACFID Value for Money discussion paper https://acfid.asn.au/sites/site.acfid/files/resource_document/ACFID-Value-for-Money-Discussion-Paper.pdf
- AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (GERAIS).
 https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies
- Australasian Evaluation Society, Code of Ethics: https://www.aes.asn.au/join-the-aes/membership-ethical-guidelines/7-aes-codes-of-behaviour-ethics.html
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit and Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, Data Sovereignty Communique. http://www.aigi.com.au/indigenous-data-sovereignty-communique/
- National Health and Medical Research Council, Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders and Keeping research on track II. https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/research-policy/ethics/ethical-guidelines-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-health-welfare/health-performance-framework/contents/overview
- Better Evaluation Sharing information to improve evaluation: Indigenous Evaluation
 https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/themes/indigenous_evaluation

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Contact

For further information, please contact:

Shaun Tatipata

Manager – Indigenous Australia Program

The Fred Hollows Foundation

Darwin, Northern Territory

Office: 08 8920 1400