Indigenous Evaluation Strategy:

CatholicCare NT and The Australian Centre for Social Enterprise submission to the Productivity Commission

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This submission has been prepared by the
The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise
In partnership with CatholicCare NT

Introductory remarks

CatholicCare NT is a significant not for profit organisation that has been operating in the NT for over 25 years. We have operational sites and infrastructure in the following communities, Darwin, Palmerston, Katherine, Tiwi Islands, Daly River, Wadeye, Katherine, Tennant Creek, Ali Curung, Alice Springs, Santa Teresa, Finke, Titjikala, APY Land, Maningrida and Jabiru. Our investment in local communities ensures that our services are driven by local people and are responsive to community need. CCNT operates a broad range of therapeutic, case management and community development programs.

CatholicCare NT and The Australian Alliance for Social Enterprise (TAASE) based at the University of South Australia have an established research partnership. The research undertaken within the terms of that partnership includes extensive and in-depth research and collaboration in remote Aboriginal communities throughout the Northern Territory.

In responding to the *Issues Paper* this joint submission by CatholicCareNT and TAASE focusses on five key questions from the paper:

1. Which evaluation approaches and methods are particularly suited to policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

2. What factors (for example, circumstances or program characteristics) should be considered when choosing the most appropriate evaluation approach or method, and why?

3. Which evaluation approaches are best suited to encouraging self determination and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges? Why are they suitable?

4. How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and priorities currently incorporated into the design and conduct of Australian Government evaluations of Indigenous specific and mainstream policies and programs? How could this be improved?

5. Is evaluation funded out of program budgets or from a central evaluation budget within agencies?

In all, 17 recommendations are made for the consideration of the Productivity Commission.

The Productivity should also note and consider the previous CatholicCare NT and TAASE submission: *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory: CatholicCare NT submission to the Productivity Commission*.

1. Which evaluation approaches and methods are particularly suited to policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Per Productivity Commission Issues Paper, we note and agree with the following points:

- There is growing recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement must extend beyond evaluation to the design and implementation of policies themselves. This model of partnership between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the policy process is often referred to as 'co design'. (Issues Paper, p. 14).
- Developmental evaluation is fast paced and iterative, and intended to provide timely feedback as the program develops. The evaluator is part of the design team and evaluates both process and outcomes. It is often used where the solution to a problem is not immediately clear or where the environment in which the policy is being implemented is changing. (Issues Paper, p. 15).

Drawing from these points, we note the importance of genuine and culturally appropriate co-design that iteratively informs evaluation.

Within any research or evaluation environment it is imperative that the methods reflect a sensitivity to how mainstream Western practices – even when researchers and evaluators are mindful of the communities that they are working in – can contribute to "colonial and post-colonial intrusions" (Botha 2011, p. 315). Indeed, the very act of the 'doing' can exacerbate or contribute to the underlying conditions that sustain ongoing inequality and social exclusion.

There is a dissonance that is indicative of the schism between Western research practices and Indigenous knowledges. When designing an evaluation what cannot and should not be sidestepped is that the consequences of colonisation and the presence of continuing trauma is a living and ongoing process. There is an unresolved tension whereby research and evaluation systems are a product of Western or 'mainstream' practices that are 'imposed' in order to find solutions to complex social issues that are the very product of these practices (see Land, 2015, p. 26).

This gap between Western research and evaluation practices and Indigenous knowledge systems cannot be simply papered over. There are emerging practices that allow for a more meaningful dialogue between these worlds. Yet this is an area that requires constant vigilance by the non-Indigenous researchers and evaluators to not contribute to "re-colonizing" the participants (see Land, 2015). For the non-Indigenous researcher or evaluator, it is essential that any methods or processes deployed operate in accordance with decolonising principles (see Kendall et al, 2011, Walker et al., 2013), and that these efforts are iterative and reflexive throughout the design and evaluation periods.

The Indigenist research principles detailed below, provide an excellent starting point. Any national framework around an evaluation strategy must incorporate a series of first principles that reflect Indigenous knowledges and lifeworlds.

Indigenist Research Principles

- Recognition of our worldviews, our knowledges and our realities as distinctive and vital to our existence and survival;
- Honouring our social mores as essential processes through which we live, learn and situate ourselves as Aboriginal people in our own lands and when in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
- Emphasis of social, historical and political contexts which shape our experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands

Source: Martin, K. & Mirraboopa, B. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: a theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27:76, p. 205.

Indigenist research principles

The next point of acknowledgment needs to be around a commitment to qualitative methods that closely align with how Indigenous knowledges tie into research practices. Having said this, qualitative methods in and of themselves remain Western research practices (Botha, 2011) and the emphasis has to be centred on how this space can be bridged. This means that any evaluation design must be co-developed and navigate an Indigenist research perspective that works alongside Western practices (see Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003).

Quantitative Research

Qualitative Research

Indigenous Research
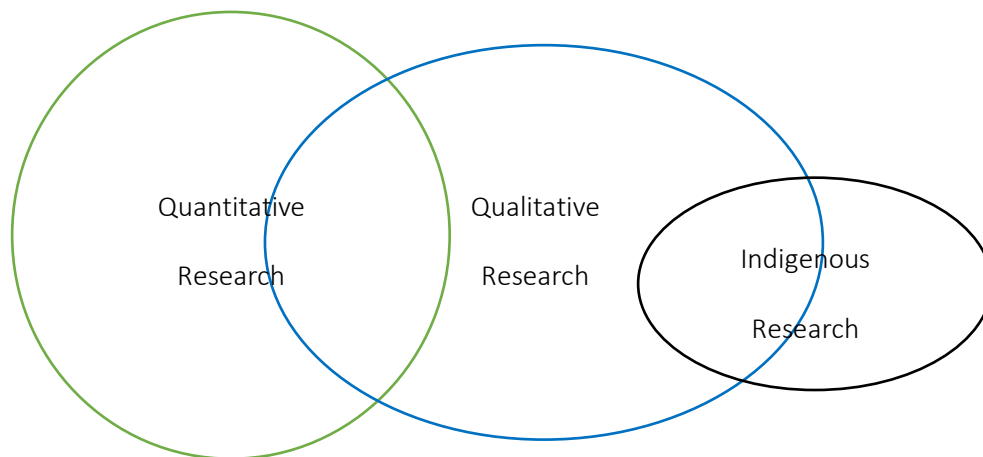
Mixing methods to generate indigenous research methodologies. Adapted from Botha (2011).

Importantly, this must incorporate iterative program development, delivery and evaluation. This will require ongoing consultation in respect to design and evaluation. This is expanded upon below (see response to question four).

Recommendations

1. Through a consultative process, adopt Indigenist research and evaluation principles as a bedrock to evaluation design and implementation.
2. Link practices informed by Indigenous knowledges with mainstream and established qualitative research and evaluation approaches.
3. Ensure that there is sufficient funding for development, training and ongoing support for evaluation methods that are informed by Indigenous knowledges.

2. What factors (for example, circumstances or program characteristics) should be considered when choosing the most appropriate evaluation approach or method, and why?

There are three important factors that should inform evaluation design with an Indigenous setting:

1. Has the method or approach been co-designed with Aboriginal people?
2. Has the evaluation been embedded in co-design of the program?
3. Are the outcomes appropriate to Aboriginal needs?

Meeting the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders requires a shift away from universal and unidirectional mainstream thinking that has been reinforced by many funding bodies. In short, it is essential that partnerships with communities are prioritised to ensure that Indigenous knowledges are respected and integrated into the co-design of service provision and embedded evaluation and measurement approaches.

The diagram below is adapted from a conversation with an Elder about the importance of finding shared ground (see Louth & Goodwin-Smith, 2018). The Elder (who drew a version of the image below) felt that it was only Aboriginal people who are compelled to understand the mainstream way of doing things, with little or no interest by government to sit, listen and understand Aboriginal lifeworlds. Until that occurs the area marked 'Indigenist approaches' in the diagram will be compromised due to the unidirectional expectations around knowledge.

Elder: "they need to come to us"

Aboriginal Law   Indigenist Approaches   Mainstream Law

Mainstream expectations (unidirectional)
CHANGE
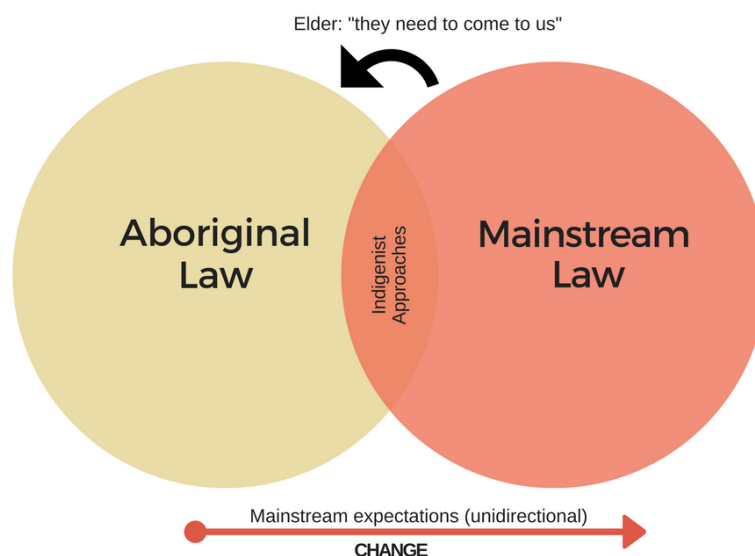
Indigenous knowledges should be at the forefront of designing and developing evaluation processes. What must not happen is that efforts to appropriately engage are not be simply subsumed by mainstream practices (see Gibson, 1999). Understanding Indigenous life experiences and knowledges, which vary across communities and nations, should frame the development of outcomes and the consequent evaluation.

There is space and opportunity to explore **community** and **cultural literacy** (Vass, et al., 2011). Adapting work related to health literacy (Zarcadoolas, et al. in Vass, et al., 2011), the following two definitions offer a starting point:

Community literacy: "knowledge about sources of information, and about agendas and how to interpret them, that enables citizens to engage in dialogue and decision making."

Cultural literacy: "recognizing and using collective beliefs, customs, world-views and social identity relationships to interpret and act on (as well as produce) information" (p. 36).

For instance, consider measurement. CatholicCare NT have incorporated both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is, however, worth noting that qualitative methods more closely align with Indigenous knowledges. (see Botha, 2011; Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003). In particular, **storytelling has emerged as a powerful evaluative and measurement tool**. However, it is both expensive and time-consuming. This cost must be acknowledged by funding bodies (and is explored further below)

Recommendations

4. Evaluation approaches and methods must engage with and incorporate Indigenous knowledges. This will allow for the development of culturally appropriate alternatives that challenge the unidirectional and universalised mainstream expectations that accompany the setting of the majority of program KPIs and what it is that is to be measured and consequently evaluated.
5. Ensure that the development of outcomes incorporates an understanding of the contributing factors that sustain entrenched inequality.
6. Elevate the importance of narrative-based qualitative measurement to best practice status.
7. Ensure that community-led decision making is a core component of any collaborative approach to evaluation.
8. Build systems approaches where possible through the development and co-ordination of shared outcomes *between* programs.

3. Which evaluation approaches are best suited to encouraging self determination and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges? Why are they suitable?

Per Productivity Commission Issues Paper, we note and agree with the following points:

- Participatory evaluation involves stakeholders and program participants in the evaluation process. It covers a broad range of types of participation and there can be disagreement about what participation means. Participation can occur at any stage of the process, including design, data collection, analysis, management and reporting (Issues Paper, p. 15).
- Developmental evaluation is fast paced and iterative, and intended to provide timely feedback as the program develops. The evaluator is part of the design team and evaluates both process

and outcomes. It is often used where the solution to a problem is not immediately clear or where the environment in which the policy is being implemented is changing (Issues Paper, p. 15).

Drawing from these points, we note the importance of participatory approaches that involve Indigenous people in co-designing evaluations. We similarly note the importance of such involvement being embedded in the early stages of program design, especially to ensure that program objectives (which set the preconditions for performance measurement) align with Indigenous needs. This approach values Indigenous knowledges and enables self-determination of community outcomes.

We note the importance of the principle of co-production being embedded throughout the life of the evaluation. Co-production has become synonymous with innovative approaches to service delivery. It emphasises service user involvement in planning and decision making, and has become the approach of choice for government (Ottmann et al., 2010). Co-production is not clearly defined in the literature and is understood differently in different organisational contexts. Agencies and evaluators must come to an agreement on their understanding of co-production, how they will go about it, and how it may align with their vision and values (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013).

In general, the key features of co-production involve:

- Strengths-based assumptions which define service users as people with assets with skills and which build on people's existing strengths and capabilities
- Breaking down the barriers between service users and professionals (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013)

Co-production contains four processes which describe the partnership between service providers and clients:

1. Co-design, including planning of services
2. Co-decision making in the allocation of resources
3. Co-delivery of services
4. Co-evaluation of the service.

These processes the component parts of a co-production approach to program design, delivery and evaluation (Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2013).

The co-production principle of co-design means that research starts with the questions *what do we want to know and why do we want to know it?* The co-design process then moves to a conversation predicated on the question *how are we going to find out?* The life of the project remains embedded in co-production principles of co-execution and co-evaluation which guide the consortium through an iterative and mutually invested process.

As a core tenet of co-design with Indigenous people and communities, we recommend that the centrality of two-way capacity building is recognised. Co-design never begins with the more traditional academic inquiry, *what's your answer to my question?* It shifts the traditional research relationship away from one in which subjects are researched on, and in which research expertise comes from outside the community. It recognises local expertise and invites the translation of community knowledge and capacity into the research. It also invites the translation of knowledge and capacity into the community through a process of "full participation and influence by community members throughout all stages of the research process" (Stoecker, 2012, p.91).

9. Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders knowledges in evaluation processes and ensure that Indigenous stakeholders be incorporated accordingly through participatory processes of co-production which begin at the program design stage and embed Indigenous interests in program objectives.
10. Acknowledge the centrality of a two-way capacity building exercise to ensuring cultural appropriateness and relevance in program evaluation and design.

4. How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, perspectives and priorities currently incorporated into the design and conduct of Australian Government evaluations of Indigenous specific and mainstream policies and programs? How could this be improved?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives need to be better incorporated when it comes to design and conduct of program delivery and evaluation. A significant issue here is the reductive mainstream methods that look at programs and their evaluation in isolation.

There needs to be a shift away from **single contracts** and a move towards **inter-program sharing** and **measurement**. To focus on prioritisation of single programs and their evaluation, will simply repeat the known limitations of this type of service delivery.

The frustrations around the lack of a holistic design and evaluation are not unique to Australia or the Northern Territory. Drawing from Canadian experiences of integrated service delivery in Indigenous communities, the ability to join up across programs is challenged repeatedly dues to funding rules, competitive tendering, short-sightedness, through to administrative and governance issues:

> *For First Nations that are blazing new trails for communities across Canada to realize their vision of comprehensive, community-centred strategy to address children's development holistically and contextually, the path has not been smooth. Participants in the research identified many sources of frustration—for example, with the duplication of grant applications and accountability requirements, over-specialized training programs, premature termination of funding for pilot programs, and the tendency towards competition among departments in their community. If integration and intersectoral coordination makes so much sense, why are we not doing more of it? What are the barriers? Whose needs are being served by perpetuating top-down, expert-driven approaches that reproduce fragmented patchworks of programs and services?* (Ball, 2010, p. 48).

Instead there should be a focus on **service integration** and **iterative program development** with evaluation built in and responsive to community led iterative changes. The core focus should be on improving social determinants[1] overall and *not* just the successful administrative deployment and measurement of a particular program. To achieve this there needs to be consultation with community,

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[1] Social determinants refer to the underlying and reproduced social, economic and health factors that impact life conditions, inequality and social mobility (see Marmot, et al. 2012).

an emphasis on localised information and data, and space for organisational learning and ongoing program development and evaluation.

Finally, iterative program development, delivery and evaluation needs to be incorporated. This would mean that consultation and the development of any program (including how it integrates with other programs) should form a part of the reportable activity for the first six to twelve months of its delivery. This will ensure appropriate community involvement, the opportunity to feedback key lessons, and the production of a truly localised and tailored program that responds genuinely to local need. Moreover, supported iterative program development will allow for innovation and the identification of efficiencies and appropriate evaluative methods.

Recommendations
11. Encourage the management of multiple contracts by NGOs as an opportunity to coordinate and develop shared outcomes and measurements across programs.
12. The iterative development of a program – inclusive of the evaluation component - should be a reportable activity for the first six to twelve months of the delivery of the program.

5. Is evaluation funded out of program budgets or from a central evaluation budget within agencies?

In short, evaluation needs to be built into program budgets. Local knowledge and expertise should not be abandoned in favour of a centralised evaluation process. However, this needs to be considered alongside concerns that have been repeatedly voiced about increasing reporting and adding to existing burdens, and that this may result in power being shifted from community control to that of funding bodies (Dwyer, et al. 2011). To mitigate against this, appropriate partnership models should be considered.

There is also the issues of the complexity and number of different programs delivered by CatholicCare NT and other NGOs of comparable size, where the burden of managing multiple sources of funding is a serious consideration that needs to be acknowledged. Contract management has become a job in and of itself and reflects a significant increase in administration both in terms of the overall amount and the required higher-level nature of these responsibilities. Effective, meaningful and appropriate evaluation further adds to individual workloads and the organisational commitment of already stretched resources. Time and investment are required to ensure that programs and organisations are evaluation ready – this needs to be reflected in funding arrangements. This will also ensure that there is appropriate rigour for outside evaluator.

Contract administration and the development and deployment of evaluation frameworks requires significant capacity to ensure the compliance and effectiveness of program delivery and appropriate evaluation. Funding bodies can benefit from this arrangement as NGOs of a medium to large size are in an excellent position to leverage efficiencies and to incorporate localised knowledge, data and community informed evaluation processes. Moreover, NGOs like CatholicCare NT are well placed to collaborate with communities and Aboriginal corporations to ensure that compliance, outcome development and evaluations across multiple contracts has genuine local buy in and that governance and skill development is cascaded throughout the service provision network with all partner organisations.

Finally, there needs to be a role and funding for external evaluations. While this is a burgeoning sector, university partnerships offer both expertise and the ethical oversight to provide evaluations that do

not cause harm and can provide genuine and innovative feedback for future improvement and better practice. With the capacity of universities to disseminate knowledge in the public domain, they are also the link between continuous improvement or performance monitoring and the generation of a broader evidence base for practice.

Recommendations

13. Ensure that funding for programs incorporates the increasing cost associated with appropriate and rigorous evaluation and measurement.
14. Recognise the increased administrative burden that has been placed upon NGOs to manage multiple and highly complex contracts, inclusive of evaluation requirements. This must include a recognition of and funding support for the cost of evaluation and cost of developing a workforce with the requisite skills base to run evaluations or evaluation ready programs.
15. The management of multiple contracts offers opportunities to meaningfully collaborate with communities and Aboriginal corporations to ensure that the benefits of funding arrangements promote better outcomes, capacity development and improved measurement and evaluation.
16. Ensure that culturally appropriate partnering and evaluation design are supported through funding arrangements.
17. Note the importance of university partnerships to provide independent evaluation with appropriate expertise and ethical oversight.

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