



Australian Government
Productivity Commission

Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

Productivity Commission
Issues Paper

June 2019

The Commission has released this issues paper to assist individuals and organisations to prepare submissions.

It contains and outlines:

- the scope of the project
- the Commission's procedures
- matters about which the Commission is seeking comment and information
- how to make a submission.

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- the scope of the project
- the Commission's procedures
- matters about which the Commission is seeking comment and information
- how to make a submission.

Participants should not feel that they are restricted to comment only on matters raised in the issues paper. The Commission wishes to receive information and comment on issues which participants consider relevant to the project's letter of direction.

Key project dates

Project commencement	10 April 2019
Due date for submissions	23 August 2019
Release of draft report	February 2020
Final report to Government	July 2020

Submissions can be lodged

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The Productivity Commission

The Productivity Commission is the Australian Government's independent research and advisory body on a range of economic, social and environmental issues affecting the welfare of Australians. Its role, expressed most simply, is to help governments make better policies, in the long term interest of the Australian community.

The Commission's independence is underpinned by an Act of Parliament. Its processes and outputs are open to public scrutiny and are driven by concern for the wellbeing of the community as a whole.

Further information on the Productivity Commission can be obtained from the Commission's website (www.pc.gov.au).

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1 What is this project about?

Background

What has the Commission been asked to do?

The Commission has been asked to develop 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. As part of this strategy, the Commission has been asked to:

- establish a principles-based framework for the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians
- identify priorities for evaluation
- set out its approach for reviewing agencies' conduct of evaluations against the strategy.

The Letter of Direction indicates that the Commission will have an ongoing role — in terms of monitoring agency performance against the Strategy, refining the Strategy and potentially conducting evaluations itself.

The motivation for this project

There are increasing calls from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community for a greater focus on monitoring and evaluation to improve program design, delivery and accountability. 'Too often, evaluations of key Indigenous reforms have been of limited usefulness for Indigenous people and policymakers. The evidence about what works, including for whom, under what circumstances, at what cost, and why, remains scant' (Empowered Communities 2015, p. 90).

Since the introduction of the Closing the Gap framework in 2008, there has been extensive reporting on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, it has been estimated that less than 10 per cent of Indigenous-specific programs are evaluated (Hudson 2016, p. 1). Where evaluations have been conducted, many 'have lacked a suitable measure of rigour and independence' (Department of Finance and Deregulation 2010, p. 12).

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy presents an opportunity to lead the way in evaluation of government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Productivity Commission has long identified the potential for increased use of evaluation to improve policy-making and outcomes, both generally (for example, in its five yearly productivity review, *Shifting the Dial* (PC 2017, p. 204) and for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Participants in a roundtable conference convened by the Commission in 2012 agreed that significant gaps existed in the

evidence base for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (PC 2013). The 2015 National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) assessment report argued that ‘evaluation is the key to designing policies that achieve positive outcomes for Indigenous Australians’ (PC 2015, p. 168).

Objectives of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

Delivering better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Letter of Direction suggests that the overriding objective of the project is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Beyond this it is likely that views may differ on other objectives of the Evaluation Strategy. For example, many people will see the need to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into policy processes as a core objective, while another objective might be building the evidence base about ‘what works’, or ensuring value for money in providing services. Clarifying and detailing the objective(s) of the Strategy is an important part of the Commission’s task, both for informing the development of the Strategy and, ultimately, for identifying what a successful Strategy would look like.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples provides relevant context

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (box 1) was endorsed by the Australian Government in 2009. The Commission considers that the UNDRIP situates the strategy within a broader international context of promoting greater self-determination for indigenous peoples. Of particular relevance to this project is a commitment by signatories to the UN Declaration to facilitate and enable greater involvement by indigenous peoples in setting priorities and making decisions about policies and programs that affect them. The *Uluru Statement from the Heart* (NCC 2017) expresses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s understanding of their sovereignty and proposes a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Australian Constitution. Though the Australian Government has not taken up the proposals in the Statement, it remains an expression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and self-determination

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) affirms the individual and collective rights of indigenous peoples. It constitutes the minimum standards for the survival, dignity, security and well-being of indigenous peoples. It was adopted on 13 September 2007, with Australia endorsing it on 3 April 2009. While not legally binding, the Declaration is, instead, intended to outline principles for governments to work towards.

The UNDRIP has six foundational rights: individual and collective access to human rights; equality and freedom from discrimination; self-determination (discussed below); self-governance; participation in the life of the State; and nationality. It also outlines rights to land and resources, education and information, cultural and spiritual identity and indigenous-owned institutions.

Beyond the foundational rights, there are several rights outlined in the Declaration that are of particular relevance to the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. These include the right of indigenous peoples to:

- participate in decision-making affecting them (article 18)
- determine and develop priorities and strategies to exercise their right to development and be actively involved in developing, determining and administering programs (article 23)
- promote, develop and maintain institutional structures (article 34) for their own development and decision-making (articles 18 and 20)
- the improvement of their economic and social conditions in the areas of education, employment, vocational training and retraining, housing, sanitation, health and social security (article 21).

States also have an important role to play, including in consulting and cooperating in good faith and obtaining free, prior and informed consent when policies affect indigenous peoples (article 19); and taking appropriate measures to achieve the Declaration (article 38) including the provision of financial and technical assistance (article 39).

Self-determination

The right to self-determination is set out in articles 3 and 4 of the UNDRIP. It is seen as a 'foundational right' in that the other rights cannot be fully enjoyed without it, but also that furthering the other UNDRIP rights furthers self-determination. Self-determination is the right indigenous peoples have to 'freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (article 3). In exercising this right they have the right to 'autonomy or self-government' (article 4).

Self-determination can mean different things to different groups and there is no predetermined outcome of what self-determination looks like. Self-determination acknowledges that different groups have different worldviews. Improving self-determination may take the form of encouraging indigenous self-governance at the local level, ensuring indigenous participation in the design, delivery and monitoring of programs and building culturally-appropriate programs that incorporate and build on indigenous peoples' own initiatives.

Sources: AHRC (2010); UN (2007).

QUESTIONS ON OBJECTIVES

What objectives should a strategy for evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people seek to achieve?

To what extent are the evaluation practices of Australian Government agencies consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples? How could practices be improved in this respect?

The Commission's approach

What is an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

The Commission considers that an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should represent a comprehensive approach to ensuring evaluation is embedded in the development and implementation of Australian Government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It needs to be much more than just a 'tick and flick' exercise for agencies.

Figure 1 Elements of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy



The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy should (figure 1):

1. Develop a principles-based evaluation framework for policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to be applied by all Australian Government agencies — discussed in section 4 of this issues paper.
 - Importantly, this framework should provide guidance to agencies about planning for, administering and responding to evaluations at different points in the policy design and implementation cycle. It cannot be limited to the conduct of evaluation exercises. The role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in evaluation will be an essential component.
2. Identify Indigenous evaluation priorities for the Australian Government (section 5).

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- A key element of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is the identification of evaluation priorities. Not all policies and programs affecting Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people will justify a significant investment in evaluation, and the net benefits of evaluation are likely to vary materially across programs. Evaluation priorities could be identified in a broad way — for example, in terms of size, location, service area or applicability to other policies and programs, or more narrowly, by listing individual policies and programs in priority order.
3. Identify the processes and institutional characteristics needed to promote the adoption and success of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (section 5).
- This might include: developing an evaluative culture, capacity and capability in Australian Government agencies; appropriate data protocols for sharing and linking relevant data; compliance and monitoring arrangements to hold agencies to account; processes to encourage policy-makers to consider evaluation evidence when developing or revising policies; and a process for reviewing and revising the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy itself over time.

QUESTION ON COMPONENTS OF THE INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY

Do you agree with the main components of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy suggested by the Commission? Should other components be included? If so, why?

Who and what is covered by the Strategy?

Four in every five dollars spent by the Australian Government in providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is spent through mainstream programs and services (SCRGSP 2017) (see section 2 for more information). To examine the full spectrum of policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Evaluation Strategy must therefore cover both mainstream programs (provided for all people) and Indigenous-specific programs (programs provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people specifically).

QUESTION ON APPLYING THE STRATEGY TO MAINSTREAM PROGRAMS

What is the best way to address mainstream programs in the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

The Evaluation Strategy will apply directly only to Australian Government agencies. However, the Commission recognises that other stakeholders, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, state, territory and local governments, not for profit entities, business and communities are key stakeholders, and partners, in policy implementation and evaluation. This project will draw on their knowledge and experience with a view to ensuring

the Evaluation Strategy has the potential to be used more widely and therefore promote increased use of evaluation beyond Australian Government agencies.

Developing the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is essentially the first stage in a process to improve evaluation practice and use across the policy cycle. Beyond this, the Letter of Direction envisages an ongoing role for the Commission in reviewing agencies' progress in implementing the Strategy, as well as the Commission undertaking evaluations in areas in which there may be value in it doing so. The Strategy itself will be a living document and ongoing review will be essential.

2 Government policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

There are myriad diverse policies and programs — mainstream and Indigenous-specific — that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some of these policies and programs could have positive or negative features rendering them particularly instructive for informing the development of an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. And some might be considered especially high priority candidates for evaluation. The Commission welcomes views on the lessons that can be drawn from existing programs.

The following sets out major policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a basis for identifying lessons to inform the Evaluation Strategy.

Closing the Gap

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) pledged in December 2007 to close key gaps in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Six Closing the Gap targets were introduced, in the context of the overarching NIRA negotiated between the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. A school attendance target was subsequently added in 2014 and, following the expiry of the (unmet) remote early childhood education target in 2013, an expanded early childhood target was added in 2015 (ANAO 2019b).

With four of the seven targets due to expire in 2018, the Australian Government, and state and territory governments, initiated consultation for updating Closing the Gap. COAG has pledged to ensure that the design and implementation of the next phase of Closing the Gap is a partnership, with governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sharing ownership of, and responsibility for, a jointly agreed framework and targets and ongoing monitoring of the Closing the Gap agenda. A formal *Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019–2029* between Commonwealth, state and territory governments, the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, and the Australian Local Government Association came into effect in March 2019 (COAG 2018; DPMC 2019b; JCOCTG 2019).

The Joint Council established by COAG is the first ever COAG Council that includes members from outside governments, through membership of representatives of the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations. This represents a major shift in partnership arrangements with government ministers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders working together as equal partners, recognising that ‘shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, through their representative organisations, in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Closing the Gap framework is essential to closing the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians’ (JCOCTG 2019, p. 1).

Only two of the current seven Closing The Gap targets are on track (box 2).

The lack of progress against the Closing the Gap targets (box 2) highlights the potential benefits from better evaluation of policies affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Better and more systematic policy evaluation would lead to better policy planning, design, implementation, and greater avoidance of duplication. It would provide the basis for successful policies and programs to be expanded, and less successful programs curtailed. The Australian National Audit Office has noted:

Over the period the NIRA has been in place, an overarching evaluation strategy or framework to measure the impact of programs on Closing the Gap targets has not been developed. Stakeholders consulted by the ANAO over the course of the audit commented on the lack of evaluation linked to the Closing the Gap framework, noting a need for more and better evaluation to inform policy and program development. (ANAO 2019b, p. 57)

As discussed in the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report (SCRGSP 2016), while these Closing The Gap outcomes are reflective of the overall Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and experiences means outcomes can vary markedly by geography, age, sex, employment status and other factors. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience little or no economic disadvantage compared to non-Indigenous Australians, while some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are highly disadvantaged. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, regardless of their level of socioeconomic disadvantage may also experience racism and discrimination.

Policy evaluation also needs to be cognisant that outcomes may be the result of not only recent social influences and government programs, but also those from historical actions from decades earlier. For example, many health outcomes later in people’s lives are the result of events, environments and access to services many years earlier. The impacts of inter-generational trauma, institutional racism and discrimination negatively impacts the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, leading to further socioeconomic disadvantage. Employment and economic outcomes also reflect education and schooling earlier in people’s lives. Lack of involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making can also adversely affect outcomes.

Box 2 **Only two Closing the Gap targets are on track**

There are currently seven Closing the Gap targets. Only two targets, early childhood education and Year 12 attainment, are on track to be met.

The target to halve the gap in child mortality rates by 2018 is **not on track**. Since the target baseline (2008) Indigenous child mortality rates have declined by 10 per cent but the gap has not narrowed as the non-Indigenous rate has declined by around 35 per cent.

The target to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 is **on track**, with 95 per cent of Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education in 2017.

The target to close the gap in school attendance by 2018 is **not on track**. Attendance rates for Indigenous students have not improved between 2014 and 2018 (around 82 per cent in 2018) and remain below the rate for non-Indigenous students (around 93 per cent).

The target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is **not on track**. The Australian Government's *Closing The Gap Report 2019* concluded, drawing on Australian Bureau of Statistics data, that between 2010–12 and 2015–17, Indigenous life expectancy at birth improved by 2.5 years for Indigenous males and by 1.9 years for Indigenous females, leading to a small reduction in the gap but a large gap remaining.

However, a 2017 report by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, measuring over a longer timeframe and using different methods, concluded the gap was in fact *widening*:

... life expectancy at birth increased for both Indigenous males and females during the ... period ... 2001–2005 to 2011–2015 ... However, greater increases in life expectancy at birth occurred for non-Indigenous males and females, meaning that the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians widened during the reference period (AIHW 2017, p. vii).

The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment or equivalent by 2020 is **on track**, with the gap halving from 36 percentage points in 2006 to 24 points in 2016.

The target to halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018 is **not on track**, with a disproportionate share of Indigenous children remaining below national minimum standards in reading and numeracy compared with non-Indigenous students.

The target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 is **not on track**, with no improvement in the Indigenous employment rate and the gap widening.

Sources: AIHW (2017); DPMC (2019b).

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy

The Australian Government implemented the Indigenous Advancement Strategy to consolidate the wide range of Indigenous policies and programs being delivered by Government into five overarching programs. The program streams are:

- Jobs, Land and Economy
- Children and Schooling
- Safety and Wellbeing
- Culture and Capability

-
- Remote Australia Strategies.

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy reflects the Australian Government's objective of achieving better results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in three priority areas – school attendance, employment outcomes and community safety, and seeks to simplify arrangements for organisations delivering services at the local level. In the 2018-19 Budget, the Australian Government allocated \$5.1 billion to the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, over four years to 2021-22.

Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, funded providers are expected to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design and delivery of projects (DPMC 2019c).

The Indigenous Australians' Health Programme

The Australian Government established the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) in July 2014, to consolidate funding streams for the then primary health care, child and maternal health programs, Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory and programs covered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Chronic Disease Fund. The Australian Government will spend \$3.9 billion on Indigenous health under the Programme between 2018-19 and 2021-22.

The IAHP seeks to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with access to effective high quality, comprehensive, culturally appropriate, primary health care services in urban, regional, rural and remote locations across Australia. This includes services provided through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services wherever possible and appropriate (DoH 2018).

The National Disability Strategy

The National Disability Strategy, of which the National Disability Insurance Scheme represents a key action, is an agreement to guide policies supporting people with disability across Australian, state and territory and local governments from 2010 to 2020. It is a mainstream strategy designed to support all Australians, together with their families and carers.

The Australian Government Plan to Improve Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People with Disability is part of the National Disability Strategy, and highlights five priority areas for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability:

- access to appropriately designed shelter and to live in accessible, well-designed communities that are fully inclusive of all their residents
- the right to:
 - be free from racism and discrimination

-
- have their rights promoted
 - a disability-inclusive justice system
 - capacity to achieve their full potential through participation in an inclusive high quality education system that is responsive to their needs. People with disability have opportunities for lifelong learning.
 - together with their families and carers, having opportunities to gain economic security through employment and business ownership, enabling them to plan for the future and exercise choice and control over their lives.
 - attainment of the highest possible health and wellbeing outcomes throughout their lives, enabled by all health and disability services having the capability to meet their needs (DSS 2017).

Ahead of the development of a national disability strategy for beyond 2020, the Department of Social Services engaged the Social Policy Research Centre of the University of New South Wales to undertake an independent review of implementation of the *National Disability Strategy 2010–2020*. The review included a desktop review of documents about the implementation of the strategy and targeted stakeholder consultations.

Stakeholders felt that the strategy, as a national statement and national policy framework, was a good response to Australia’s obligations under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and agreed the principles and goals of the strategy were important and valuable. However, stakeholders were overwhelmingly critical of implementation processes and outcomes. It was suggested that specific barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people needed to be better addressed in the policy design and implementation stages (including through inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives in these processes) (Davy et al. 2018).

The Community Development Program

The Community Development Program (CDP) is an employment and community development service for job seekers in remote Australia, seeking to develop and strengthen the skills base and contribute to communities through a range of activities. It was designed around the social and labour market conditions in remote communities. CDP participants with activity requirements are expected to complete up to 20 hours per week of work-like activities that benefit their community (DPMC 2019e).

The CDP was introduced on 1 July 2015, replacing the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) which had, in turn, replaced the longstanding Community Development and Employment Projects Program (CDEP) (FPARC 2017).

An evaluation of whether the CDP had been effective in its first two years in achieving its key objectives of increasing participation and employment outcomes in remote communities was undertaken in 2018. The evaluation was a combination of fieldwork undertaken by

Winangali in partnership with Ipsos, and an analysis of administrative data undertaken by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. It found there were diverse views on how the community had changed since the introduction of the CDP.

- Of the almost 1000 community members surveyed across the eight remote communities, 21 per cent felt the community was better off since the introduction of the CDP, 32 per cent said the community was the same, and 36 per cent said the community was worse off. Varying views were expressed both within and between communities.
- Using administrative data, after controlling for the characteristics of participants and labour market conditions, the introduction of the CDP was estimated to have increased the share of participants achieving a 26 week job outcome by around one percentage point, up from a base of around 5.7 per cent under the RJCP (DPMC 2018c).

Indigenous Procurement Policy

The Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) was launched on 1 July 2015 and seeks to leverage the Australian Government's annual procurement spend to drive demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander goods and services, thereby stimulating Indigenous economic development and growing the Indigenous business sector.

The IPP has three main elements:

- a target number of contracts that need to be awarded to Indigenous businesses (3 per cent in 2018-19)
- a mandatory set-aside, requiring Indigenous businesses to be approached first to quote on contracts delivered in remote areas and for all contracts valued between \$80 000 and \$200 000
- minimum Indigenous participation requirements in contracts valued at or above \$7.5 million in designated industries (with the number of industries designated to be increased in 2020) (DPMC 2019d, 2019a).

From 1 July 2019, a target based on the value of contracts awarded will be introduced. This reflects concern that many contracts won by Indigenous businesses have been of low value. The change is designed to ensure Indigenous businesses win higher value contracts at a level closer to those of non-Indigenous businesses. The target will initially be set at one per cent for 2019-20 and will be increased by 0.25 per cent annually until it reaches three per cent in 2027 (DPMC 2019a).

In 2017-18, the Australian Government awarded 4597 new contracts, valued at \$802 million, to 735 Indigenous businesses (DPMC 2019d).

There have been concerns that businesses might have gamed the system by exaggerating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ownership levels (often known as 'black cladding'). The Australian Government has allocated additional resources to confirm businesses,

including joint ventures, are majority Indigenous-owned, and required all joint ventures to register on the Indigenous Business Directory (Scullion 2018).

QUESTION ON GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

What lessons from these and other major Australian Government programs impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people would be useful in developing an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

Population characteristics

There were an estimated 798 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia at 30 June 2016, representing 3.3 per cent of the total Australian population. This proportion varied across jurisdictions, from 0.9 per cent in Victoria to 30.3 per cent in the Northern Territory (table 1) (SCRGSP 2019).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is estimated to live overwhelmingly (81.3 per cent) in major urban or regional cities, with only 18.7 per cent of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population living in remote areas (although this proportion is 76.6 per cent in the Northern Territory) (figure 2).

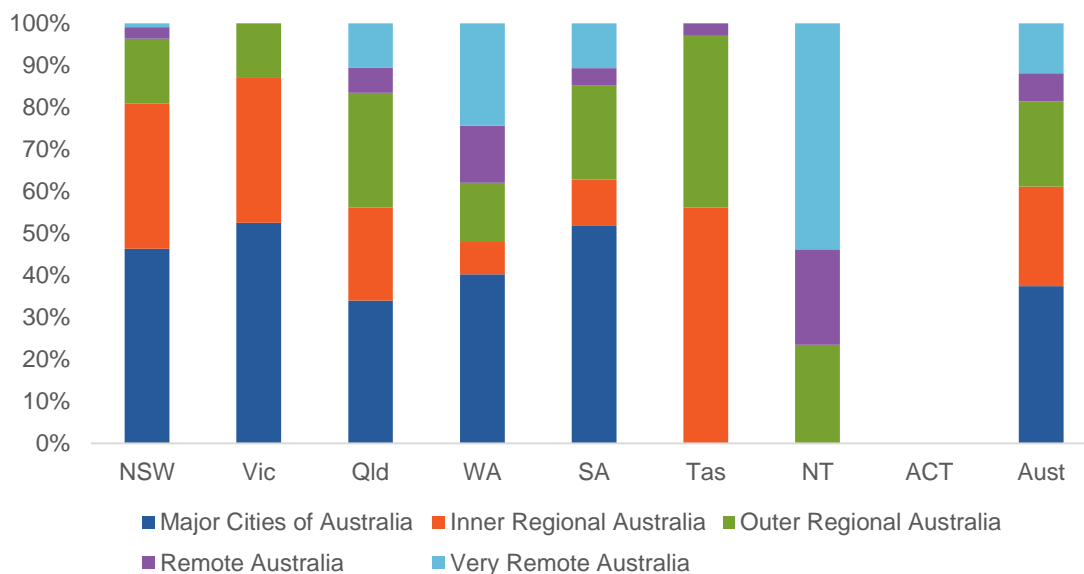
Table 1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by state and territory^a
As at 30 June 2016

	<i>Number</i>	<i>Per cent as proportion of State or Territory</i>
New South Wales	265 685	3.44
Victoria	57 767	0.94
Queensland	221 276	4.57
Western Australia	100 512	3.93
South Australia	42 265	2.47
Tasmania	28 537	5.51
ACT	7 513	1.86
NT	74 546	30.34
Australia	789 365	3.30

^a Projections data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and Estimated Resident Population for 2016 (used to calculate proportions) are not comparable as they are sourced from different data collections.

Source: SCRGSP (2019).

Figure 2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by location^a
As at 30 June 2016



^a Data unavailable by remoteness area for the ACT.

Data source: ABS Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2016 (cat. no. 3238.0.55.001).

Expenditure information

In 2015-16¹, total direct government² expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was estimated to be \$33.4 billion. The estimated direct expenditure per person was \$44 886 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, around twice the rate for non-Indigenous Australians (\$22 356). The higher per person expenditure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reflects the combined effects of:

- greater *intensity of service use* by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (representing \$14 349 or 63.7 per cent) — reflecting the greater needs of and the younger age profile of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population
- higher *cost of providing services* (representing \$8181 or 36.3 per cent) — for example, because of more remote locations, or because of provision of targeted services in addition to mainstream services (for example, Indigenous liaison officers in hospitals) to ensure provision of appropriate and accessible services.

¹ This is the most recent year for which data on this expenditure breakdown are available. Data are obtained from the 2017 *Indigenous Expenditure Report* (SCRGSP 2017).

² Direct expenditure refers to government expenditure on services and payments provided directly to individuals, non-government service providers and local governments. Transfers between governments (indirect expenditure) are excluded to avoid double counting (SCRGSP 2017).

The Australian Government accounted for \$14.7 billion (43.9 per cent) of direct Indigenous expenditure in 2015-16, with \$18.8 billion (56.1 per cent) being provided by state and territory governments (SCRGSP 2017).

Government expenditure on mainstream services accounted for 82 per cent of direct government expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in 2015-16, with Indigenous specific services accounting for the remaining 18 per cent (SCRGSP 2017).

3 Evaluation concepts and practice

What is evaluation?

Evaluation is a widely used and long-standing policy making practice in Australia. In broad terms, it refers to the systematic process of collecting and analysing information to enable an assessment of an activity, project, policy or program (Department of Finance 2016). Evaluation can point to ‘what works’, highlight problems and provide evidence of good practice (HM Treasury 2011, p. 7). It can also examine the efficacy of policy implementation and identify how this may be improved. Previous work by the Commission has highlighted the importance of evaluation as part of evidence-based policy making (PC 2010).

Approaches to policy and program evaluation

Evaluation *approaches* (box 3) are distinct ways of thinking about, designing and conducting evaluations. Evaluation *methods* are the procedures or techniques used to obtain findings (for example, surveys), and can incorporate quantitative and/or qualitative information.

Each evaluation approach has strengths and limitations in different contexts. For example, randomised control trials (RCTs) are often considered to produce the strongest form of evidence, but provide limited insights about how or why the program worked (or did not work), and results may not be applicable to ‘real world’ circumstances. For policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, participatory approaches can be an effective way of incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views into evaluation design. 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’. The NSW Government’s OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) Plan espouses this approach (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs 2018).

Box 3 **Approaches to evaluation**

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.

Experimental designs generally take the form of a randomised control trial (RCT). RCTs randomly allocate individuals into a policy ‘treatment’ group or a control group. As both groups are subject to the same conditions, except for exposure to the policy, any subsequent differences between groups can be attributed to the policy.

Realist evaluation seeks not to determine ‘what works’, but ‘what works, for whom and in what contexts’. It recognises that policies are unlikely to work in every circumstance, and focuses heavily on the specific context to examine *how* an intervention leads to change. In general, realist evaluation incorporates program logics that outline in theory how a policy might achieve an outcome and then tests these logics with stakeholders.

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.

Economic evaluation uses systematic quantitative methods to assess choices and achieve optimal outcomes, such as analysing a program’s costs and benefits. There are particular challenges with measuring intangible costs and benefits.

Sources: Better Evaluation (nd); Guijt (2014); Katz et al.(2016); PC (2010).

Ultimately, the choice of approach should take into consideration the evaluation’s purpose, the nature of the program or policy, its stage of implementation, resource constraints including budget, time and data, and the target population or group. There may also be merit in using multiple approaches and methods in an evaluation — for example using a statistical design to quantify an impact and pairing this with a participatory approach to gain more understanding of what is influencing outcomes (PC 2010). Indigenous-specific approaches to evaluation are becoming more widely recognised and valued. Such approaches seek to explicitly incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges into evaluation (box 8, in section 4), and bring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices to the fore. They recognise long histories of culture, lore and practice in evaluating what works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies. These approaches have a particular focus on self-determination, often requiring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities be involved in shaping the evaluation (Katz et al. 2016). Even though such approaches do not dictate a particular method, there are a growing number of Indigenous-specific data collection methods, such as ganma (knowledge sharing), yarning (storytelling) and dadirri (listening) (Laycock et al. 2011).

For evaluators, there may be tensions between relying on Western evaluation approaches and methods, and adopting models that are specific to Indigenous contexts. The Commission is seeking views on how evaluation can better incorporate Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander knowledges and voices, and how Indigenous and Western approaches may be successfully integrated.

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION APPROACHES AND METHODS

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

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

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

In what ways can Indigenous and Western evaluation approaches be successfully combined?

What are the benefits, costs and challenges associated with implementing randomised control trials? What are the most satisfactory alternatives, and why?

What are the benefits, costs and challenges of evaluation?

Evaluation can have wide-reaching benefits

For governments and policy-makers, evaluation is crucial for building an evidence base about what works and why. It can determine whether a policy or program is producing its intended outcomes, or whether there are better ways of achieving those outcomes (Rogers et al. 2015). Evaluation helps decision-makers direct scarce resources to programs that make the greatest contribution toward the achievement of objectives. Ultimately, broader society benefits when governments are transparent and accountable for their performance and activities, when public funding is allocated more efficiently, and when public policy is improved.

The benefits of evaluation are not limited to governments (table 2). For example, it offers opportunities for service providers to learn and reflect on how to improve organisational capacity and service delivery. Evaluation can also empower communities to help shape the policies that affect them, while program users benefit from better programs and, ultimately, the achievement of better outcomes.

Table 2 Benefits of evaluation for stakeholders

<i>Stakeholder</i>	<i>Potential benefits</i>
Government	Information to assist policy making Improved ability to achieve government priorities Efficient resource allocation Highlights achievements and opportunities to strengthen performance Encourages greater trust in government
Agencies	Stronger evidence base for advising government and resource allocation Builds an agency's capacity for innovation and continuous improvement Allows staff to develop knowledge, skills, capability and experience Supports a culture of monitoring and improving performance
Program providers	Formal mechanism for learning and reflection Evidence for the value of a service Improved service delivery and client satisfaction More opportunity to shape public policy
Communities	Better government services Enhanced Indigenous voice Improved information and government reporting Transparent and accountable government Public funds used more efficiently

Source: Adapted from ACT Chief Minister's Department (2010).

Common evaluation challenges

Evaluation of policies and programs is rarely straightforward and involves costs, risks and challenges. The more common and well-documented challenges include (Gray and Bray 2019; Muir and Dean 2017; PC 2010, 2017):

- the time, resource and practical constraints facing government agencies
- conflicting evaluation objectives among stakeholders
 - For example, policy makers may be interested in cost effectiveness and performance against a relatively narrow set of outcomes, while program managers, participants or communities may see success differently. This can mean evaluation never gets off the ground, or the credibility of results is compromised
- difficulty coordinating and overseeing evaluation activities (especially where the evaluation is large and involves multiple stakeholders)
- attributing outcomes to the policy or program under evaluation (especially where multiple programs with similar objectives are delivered to the same population or group)
- the long-term nature of some policy and program objectives can limit the usefulness of short-term evaluations (for example, preschool programs aimed at improving outcomes in later life)

-
- establishing the counterfactual (what would have happened in the absence of a program)
 - obtaining the data and evidence required for evaluation (especially if it is not considered in the early stages of policy development).

In many cases, it will be possible to overcome some of these challenges — for example, by planning for evaluation early in the policy cycle (section 4), or scaling the evaluation so it is proportionate to the policy or program under consideration. Indeed, expensive ‘gold standard’ evaluation is unlikely to be viable for very small programs with limited budgets (although these low cost programs can be very successful so there may be benefit in conducting smaller scale evaluations) (Hudson 2017). There will always be instances where evaluation is not feasible or cost-effective.

Other issues in Indigenous policy and program evaluation

Some additional factors should be considered to enable successful evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Evaluation timeframes are problematic if they do not factor in the need for genuine relationship building and community participation (Hudson 2017, p. 6). If external consultants are used, they may not have adequate local knowledge to ensure effective engagement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations themselves may lack funding, incentives or support to develop an internal evaluation or data capacity, while the day-to-day demands of service delivery can detract from efforts to assess the value of those services (Muir and Dean 2017). Government silos that create structural inefficiencies in program delivery may also lead to evaluation overburden; organisations may report to separate agencies on programs with overlapping objectives, while the data and learnings from evaluation may not be shared. These issues can be particularly challenging for evaluation in remote communities.

QUESTIONS ON THE CHALLENGES OF EVALUATION

How can the challenges and complexities associated with undertaking evaluation be overcome — both generally, and in Indigenous policy specifically?

In what circumstances is evaluation of policies and programs unlikely to be feasible or cost-effective?

Current evaluation practice

Australian Government

Evaluation at the Commonwealth level has undergone substantial reorientation over time, from rigid requirements and a centralised model of cross-agency monitoring, toward a more flexible and decentralised approach (Gray and Bray 2019, pp. 11–12). There is currently no

single, overarching framework for evaluation for Australian Government agencies. The Department of Finance oversees performance and financial reporting arrangements under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (PGPA Act) but there is no requirement for agencies to undertake or report on evaluation.

Initial research by the Commission for this project has revealed a diversity of practices across government. Some agencies have developed extensive evaluation guidelines, strategies and systems — others have very little in comparison. The level of transparency of evaluation activities across the Commonwealth is low and there is limited data on how much is spent on evaluation. Recent reports have indicated that evaluation practice among Commonwealth agencies is lacking and should be improved (box 4).

State and territory governments

Most Australian state and territory governments have published guidelines on evaluation for government programs, but these are largely silent on how to evaluate the impacts of policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As with the Australian Government, recent reviews have indicated that evaluation can be better utilised by state and territory governments to inform policy and program development (AONSW 2016; QPC 2017). Nevertheless, jurisdictions have introduced initiatives to improve the evidence base on what works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Examples of such initiatives include:

- the Victorian Government recently announced a commitment to creating an Aboriginal-led evaluation and review mechanism, whereby government, Aboriginal organisations and government-funded organisations will be held accountable to the Aboriginal community. It issued a *Discussion Guide* in February 2019 and is in the early stages of consultation (Victorian Government 2019).
- the Queensland Government Statistician's Office delivers statistical, demographic research and program evaluation services across government. The Queensland Government also committed to developing a best-practice evaluation framework and establishing an independent body to evaluate and oversee its performance as part of its response to the 2017 Queensland Productivity Commission report into *Service Delivery in Queensland's Remote and Discrete Indigenous Communities* (Queensland Government 2018).
- the NSW Government's OCHRE Plan is supported by a three-stage evaluation strategy and will be conducted over ten years. Evaluations will provide evidence to improve the effectiveness of OCHRE projects and inform the NSW Government on any possible future expansion (Katz, Newton and Bates 2016).
- the Northern Territory Government has an extensive, accessible digital repository for health program evaluations, which is maintained by the Department of Health. Much of the work on Indigenous health is conducted in partnership with specialist organisations and institutes, such the Menzies School of Health Research.

Box 4 Reports and audits on evaluation performance**Evaluation in the Australian Public Service: Current State of Play, Some Issues and Future Directions (Gray and Bray 2019)**

This research paper formed part of a wider review of the Australian Public Service (APS). It found near universal support for greater evaluation efforts, but raised concerns about the quality and extent of evaluation and whether evaluation efforts were being appropriately targeted. The review also pointed to reviews from the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) and Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) that criticised the state of evaluation in the APS. It considered the need for a strong centralised body that sets priorities and provides oversight, as well as the impetus to build an evaluation culture in the APS.

Independent Review into the Operation of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 and Rule (Alexander and Thodey 2018)

This review examined whether the PGPA Act was achieving its objectives in line with its guiding principles. It acknowledged the difficulty in creating effective performance reporting and noted the importance of strong and sustained leadership to encourage improvement. It observed that evaluation practice had fallen away, but that it could be reinvigorated through attention from senior leadership.

Evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs (ANAO 2019)

The ANAO assessed the design and implementation of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (DPMC's) evaluation framework for the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). It found that, five years after the IAS was introduced, the Department was in the early stages of implementing an evaluation framework with the potential to deliver high quality, ethical and inclusive evaluation, focused on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Implementation of the framework was considered 'partially effective' — management oversight arrangements were developing, and evaluation advice provided to program area staff was relevant and of high quality. The ANAO found that the framework lacked a reliable methodology for measuring outcomes, and as evaluation procedures were still in development, it was too early to assess whether evaluations were being conducted in accordance with the framework. It recommended that the DPMC develop comprehensive procedures to support evaluation implementation as well as structured criteria to prioritise evaluation by assessing significance, contribution, risk, and gaps in evaluation coverage.

Delivery and Evaluation of Grant Programmes (ANAO 2015)

The ANAO examined the management, delivery and evaluation of grant programs administered by the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, the Department of Industry and Science, and the Department of Social Services. Two of the three audited entities had evaluation plans in place, but only the plan developed by the Department of Industry, Innovation and Science was comprehensive. Agencies completed their evaluations as planned but paid less attention to acting on their findings. The ANAO recommended that entities administering grant funding develop implementation plans to follow through on evaluation recommendations.

Agencies in their responses to the report agreed on actions to improve evaluation — for example, the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development noted the creation of a new evaluation unit, while the Department of Social Services stated its intention to update its Programme Delivery Model to monitor the adoption of evaluation findings.

Sources: Alexander and Thodey (2018); ANAO (2015, 2019a); Gray and Bray (2019).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations

Governments are not the only commissioners, doers and users of evaluation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations also lead evaluations to understand the impacts and benefits of their programs, strategically plan for the future, contribute to the evidence base, and influence the development of government policies and programs. Some organisations are taking a leading role in program evaluation to better track outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, alongside government (box 5), and in areas such as health, trauma and healing, justice, child and family wellbeing, and education.

Box 5 Institute for Urban Indigenous Health: A Case study

The Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) leads the planning and delivery of primary health care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across South East Queensland. It works in partnership with research bodies, academia, government departments, and non-government organisations to improve the health of the urban Indigenous population, and to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

In their 2014 case study, Gajjar et al. detail how IUIH uses evidence to respond to challenges in the Aboriginal community controlled health sector by (1) identifying evidence for change, (2) exploring and reframing this evidence, and (3) applying this evidence at different levels of policy and practice. For example, in 2009, IUIH used findings from a study on Indigenous burden of disease to substantiate urban disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to justify investment in urban, as well as remote, Indigenous health.

Recent evaluations by IUIH include a 2016 evaluation of its Health Coordinated Care and Supplementary Services program, conducted with the Wardliparingga Aboriginal Research Unit, and a joint study examining the effectiveness of a 'Birthing on Country' model of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in an urban setting.

Sources: Gajjar et al. (2014); Hickey et al. (2018).

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy provides an important opportunity to consider how Australian Government agencies can work better with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver better evaluations and to make good use of their findings and recommendations.

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION PRACTICE IN AUSTRALIA

To what extent do Australian Government agencies currently undertake policy and program evaluation? How does this vary across agencies? Approximately what proportion of evaluations are made public?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of current evaluation systems and practices across Australian Government agencies? Can you provide examples of good and bad practice?

What can we learn from evaluation systems and practice at the state and territory level?

In what ways are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations contributing to policy and program evaluation?

How do we better enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead evaluation and strengthen their evaluation capability?

How effectively do government agencies work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations when evaluating policies and programs? What can agencies do better?

Lessons from international experience

In developing an Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, the Commission will consider the merits or otherwise of the evaluation models in place in relevant overseas jurisdictions (for example, the United States, Canada and New Zealand — box 6, section 4). The Canadian Government has a well-established and centralised evaluation system, and the United States has recently passed legislation to bring its evaluation regime more in line with the Canadian model. New Zealand's evaluation arrangements are more fragmented, and in 2018, the government abolished the agency charged with encouraging evaluation through the creation and dissemination of evidence.

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION OVERSEAS

What lessons can we learn from evaluation arrangements in overseas jurisdictions?

Are there any particularly beneficial international models for the evaluation of policies and programs affecting indigenous people? What makes them effective?

Box 6 **Features of overseas evaluation**

Independent institute synthesising evidence for policy making — Washington State Institute for Public Policy (United States)

The Institute is a bipartisan research group, with the State Legislature directing its research agenda. Analysts create a thematic ‘menu’ of options that have evidence to support them. The Institute uses this menu to undertake cost-benefit analyses and ranks the programs. They have an evidence library that is periodically updated.

Local evaluation centres — Indian Health Service Tribal Epidemiology Centres (United States)

The Indian Health Service funds twelve Tribal Epidemiology Centres throughout the United States to provide epidemiology services. The Centres work in consultation with and on the request of Indian tribes, tribal organizations, and urban Indian organizations to conduct evaluations. Many of the Centres have developed their own research guidelines and each publishes research. In collaboration, the Centres published a ‘best practices’ report in 2013.

Whole of government requirements — Policy on Results (Canada)

Canada incorporates indigenous evaluation under its whole of government evaluation arrangements. This system requires that departments have an evaluation division that evaluates programs with more than \$5 million in annual expenditure every five years. Programs are assessed on their relevance, effectiveness and efficiency, and department management is required to respond to recommendations. The Treasury Board Secretariat implements and ensures compliance with the policy. All reports are published on the department’s website and a central repository.

Commissioning model — Whānau Ora (New Zealand)

Whānau Ora (translates to ‘family wellbeing’) is a whānau-centred (family-centred) approach to service delivery that assists whānau to achieve better outcomes for themselves. Three devolved commissioning agencies connect whānau with initiatives to build the capability needed to satisfy whānau needs and aspirations. Under this model, each commissioning agency is in charge of undertaking evaluation of their own commissioning activities, whereas Te Puni Kōkiri — the government department funding the Whānau Ora program — undertakes evaluations of the Whānau Ora program overall.

Whole-of-government support for capability building — Superu (New Zealand)

Superu was a NZ Government agency that focused on increasing the use of evidence in the social sector. They did this through creating and sharing evidence on social issues and what works to solve them. They also provided independent assurance by developing standards of evidence and good practice guidelines and supporting the use of evidence and good evaluation. Guidelines did not appear to be mandatory. Superu was abolished in 2018.

Sources: Akroyd et. al. (2016); Dube and White (2017); Government of Canada (2016); NZ Ministry of Social Development (2018); Tribal Epidemiology Centers (2013, nd).

4 Developing an Indigenous evaluation framework

The Commission has been asked to develop a principles-based framework for the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians. The framework would apply to all Australian Government agencies and forms a central component of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (section 1).

What is a principles-based framework?

An Indigenous evaluation framework will guide the actions of Australian Government agencies in undertaking and commissioning evaluations. It may also inform or have implications for other key evaluation stakeholders, including:

- non-Australian Government evaluators, who undertake evaluation projects (for example, state and territory governments, consulting companies or academics)
- participants, who are surveyed or interviewed during the evaluation project (for example, participants in the program being evaluated)
- other stakeholders, who are the broader group of people affected by the program or evaluation (for example, community organisations in the area where the program runs).

Adopting a principles based approach allows the framework to be adaptable to different kinds of evaluations, including evaluations of Indigenous specific and mainstream programs, as well as strategic or cross cutting evaluations, such as evaluation of the effects of a range of programs in a particular place or region, or thematic evaluations examining common themes across programs conducted across multiple agencies (for example, governance or family programs).

The principles will provide guidance to agencies about what constitutes high quality and ethical evaluation practice. As well as laying out the principles at a broad level, it may be useful for the Commission to enunciate the sorts of actions and considerations that agencies could or should take to support these principles.

Existing evaluation principles

General evaluation principles

Prevailing evaluation principles and frameworks provide useful context and ideas for developing an Indigenous evaluation framework for Australian Government agencies. Indeed, professional bodies for evaluators in western countries, as well as intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations, the World Bank and the OECD, have developed a range of principles to guide evaluation commissioners and practitioners (table 3). These general principles most commonly relate to ethical aspects of evaluation or research (such

as respect and confidentiality) and aspects that affect the quality of the final output (such as competence and usefulness).

Additional considerations for evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Among evaluation practitioners, there is acknowledgement that general evaluation principles such as those outlined in table 3 do not provide enough guidance for working in an ethical and culturally appropriate way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities (for example, Markiewicz 2012; Scougall 2006; Taylor 2003; Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011).

Several frameworks have been developed to specifically address issues that may arise when evaluating policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, or indigenous people more generally (table 4). These incorporate many of the principles espoused in guidelines designed to address historical patterns of poor practice among researchers when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, such as those developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS 2012), research funding bodies (Australian Research Council, National Health and Medical Research Council and Universities Australia 2018; NHMRC 2018), as well as by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations (for example, Kimberley Land Council 2011). They also attempt to address issues that are specific to evaluation, including negotiating the relationships between commissioners, evaluators and evaluation participants.

Table 3 Selected general principles for evaluation

<i>Australasian Evaluation Society</i>	<i>American Evaluation Association</i>	<i>Canadian Evaluation Society</i>	<i>Aotearoa New Zealand Evaluation Association</i>	<i>OECD Development Assistance Committee</i>	<i>United Nations Norms and Standards for Evaluation</i>	<i>World Bank Development Grant Facility</i>
Ethical conduct	Systematic inquiry	Competence	Respectful, meaningful relationships	Free and open processes	Internationally agreed principles, goals and targets	Usefulness
Public interest	Competence	Integrity	Ethic of care	Evaluation ethics	Utility	Independence
Competence	Integrity	Accountability	Responsive methodologies and trustworthy results	Partnership approach	Credibility	Credibility
Quality work	Respect for people		Competence and usefulness	Coordination and alignment	Independence	Transparency
Confidentiality	Common good and equity			Capacity development	Impartiality	
Respect				Quality control	Ethics	
Integrity and truthfulness					Transparency	
Accountability					Human rights and gender equality	
Acknowledgement					National evaluation capacities	
					Professionalism	

Sources: AEA (2018); UN (2016); ANZEA and Superu (2015); AES (2013b, 2013a); OECD (2010); World Bank (2003); CES (nd).

Table 4 Frameworks and principles for evaluation of policies and programs affecting indigenous people

<i>Lowitja Institute Evaluation Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health</i>	<i>DPMC Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework</i>	<i>BetterEvaluation.org Ethical Framework for Indigenous Evaluation^a</i>	<i>Kaupapa Māori evaluation principles^b</i>	<i>American Indian Higher Education Consortium Indigenous Evaluation Framework</i>
Partnerships	Integrated	Empowerment	Importance of meeting with people face to face	Informed and framed by indigenous knowledge
Shared responsibility	Respectful	Diversity	Look and listen to develop understanding from which to speak	Flexible and responsive to local traditions and cultures
Engagement	Evidence based	Inclusion	Collaboration and reciprocity	Responsive practices to fit needs and conditions
Capacity building	Impact focused	Community ownership	Be politically astute and culturally safe	Indigenous ownership
Equity	Transparent	Respect	Don't trample the mana of the people	Respect for self-determination and sovereignty
Accountability	Independent	Interpretation of culture	Be humble in your approach	Opportunity for learning and using information to create strong, viable tribal communities
Evidence based	Ethical	Integrity and authenticity of culture and knowledge		
Holistic concept of health	Timely	Secrecy and confidentiality		
Cultural competence	Fit for purpose	Consent		
Data governance and intellectual property		Equity		
Capitalising on Indigenous strengths		Attribution		
		Strengths-based		
		Strengthening of culture		
		Participation		
		Community transformation		
		Community priorities		
		Strengthen capacity		
		Share results		
		Accountability		

^a The framework includes 6 key domains, fully defined principles for each domain, and protocols for how to apply the principles in practices. The table lists the 'labels' (short description) of the principles. ^b The table presents one interpretation of Kaupapa Māori evaluation principles, based on Cram (2009).

Sources: Kelaheer et al. (2018); DPMC (2018a); Gibb et al. (2019); Cram (2009); LaFrance and Nichols (2009).

What principles might be included in an Indigenous evaluation framework?

This section canvasses a number of principles that might be relevant to include in an Indigenous evaluation framework. They include general principles for ensuring ethical and high quality evaluation, as well as those that provide specific guidance on working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Commission is seeking feedback on the appropriateness of these principles and suggestions for any other principles that should be included in the framework.

QUESTIONS ON RELEVANT PRINCIPLES FOR AN EVALUATION FRAMEWORK

What principles should be included in an Indigenous evaluation framework to be used by Australian Government agencies?

How should an Indigenous evaluation framework differ from a general evaluation framework for government policies and programs?

Planning early for evaluation

At an early stage in the policy development process, agencies should lay the groundwork for the possibility of future evaluations by considering:

- whether evaluation of the policy or program is desirable or feasible
- at what stage in the policy or program rollout evaluation would be most valuable
- what types of resources would need to be devoted to evaluation over the life of the policy or program
- possible evaluation questions and data needs.

Evaluations that are planned from the outset of a policy or program are likely to be easier to implement and generate more robust and useful results for several reasons, including:

- program budgets and timeframes can incorporate additional resources for evaluation
- appropriate baseline data can be collected for pre-implementation outcome measures, and appropriate comparison groups identified
- consideration can be given to tailoring program delivery in a way that facilitates evaluation (for example, randomising rollout across geographical areas; collecting qualitative information from participants or service providers as part of regular reporting procedures that can be used in evaluation)
- the evaluation planning process can prompt policy-makers to consider the objectives and implementation of the program more explicitly from the outset.

However, many evaluations are not planned until programs are well-established (Hudson 2017). This may be due to a lack of awareness about the benefits and role of evaluation, or because policies are developed without sufficient time or effort to incorporate evaluative thinking.

Options to increase the likelihood that evaluation is planned early range from increasing awareness of evaluation practice and its benefits among staff responsible for policy development and program delivery, to requiring evaluation plans as a part of new policy proposals (box 7), to linking evaluation directly to budget processes.

Feeding evaluation results back into policy development and program implementation is also vital if evaluation efforts are to lead to better decision making. Within agencies, it is important that evaluation results are shared in a way that allows findings to feed into policy development. Canvassing existing evidence during policy development can also help identify gaps in the evidence base where further evaluation would be valuable. There is also a need for evaluation evidence to be collated and disseminated across agencies. This issue will be addressed in more detail in section 5.

Box 7 Building evaluation into policy and program design

The Department of Industry, Innovation and Science's *Evaluation Strategy 2017–2021* provides a framework to guide the evaluation of policies and programs in the department. As part of the strategy, the department undertakes various types of evaluation at different stages in the program lifecycle including post-commencement evaluation, monitoring evaluation and impact evaluation. All evaluation activities are guided by six key principles to ensure good evaluation practices are followed, including that evaluations are: integrated, fit-for-purpose, evidence-based, timely, transparent and independent.

An 'Evaluation Ready' process should be conducted for all new policy proposals in the department. The process has three components to ensure programs are adequately prepared for future monitoring and evaluation activities: setting out the program's theory of change; identifying key evaluation questions, indicators and data sources; and selecting appropriate types and timing of future evaluations. The department's Evaluation Unit provides training and guidance to policy and program areas in planning and conducting evaluations, including supporting programs through the Evaluation Ready process.

A review of evaluation from 2015–19 found that the department's overall evaluation maturity had progressed to the second stage of a four-stage process, and also acknowledged that cultural shifts in moving towards evaluative thinking takes time as such more work would be required for the department to achieve its evaluation objectives.

Sources: Department of Industry, Innovation and Science (2017; 2019).

QUESTIONS ON PLANNING FOR EVALUATION EARLY IN THE POLICY CYCLE

To what extent is evaluation planned for during the design and development of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

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

What are the key actions and decisions agencies should take when planning early for evaluation?

Incorporating Indigenous knowledges, perspectives and priorities into evaluation

For evaluation to have maximum benefit, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their knowledges (box 8), perspectives and priorities must be incorporated into evaluation

planning and conduct. As a signatory to the UNDRIP (box 1), the Australian Government has committed to facilitating and enabling greater involvement by Indigenous peoples in setting priorities and making decisions about policies and programs that affect them.

Box 8 UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues' definition of indigenous knowledges

There are various definitions of indigenous knowledges. The term usually refers to the complex bodies and systems of knowledge maintained and developed by indigenous peoples. These knowledge systems are based on values, beliefs and community laws/practices — they are a fundamental element of indigenous peoples' identity. They also include concepts and methods for land and ecosystem management.

Indigenous knowledges tend to be collectively owned and are often transmitted orally through generations. They are contained in indigenous languages, community practices, institutions and relationships. They may take the form of stories, songs, beliefs, customary laws and artwork, as well as more technical knowledge and skills.

Indigenous knowledges provide opportunities for sustainable and collective development, while also reflecting indigenous worldviews. The transmission of traditional knowledge is a practical process of perpetuating and sharing knowledge, as well as a way of preserving indigenous cultures and identities.

Source: UNPFII (2019).

Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, priorities and perspectives during evaluation can take many forms, including:

- evaluations being led and conducted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators
- co-design of evaluation plans between government agencies, evaluators and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (box 9)
- strengthening involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and organisations in data collection and analysis phases of evaluation
- using or privileging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research methodologies
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation on project steering committees
- presenting evaluation results to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders
- oversight by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation committees (box 9).

Meaningful engagement with, and involvement by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in evaluation involves time and costs for evaluators and participants, and these costs should be considered in evaluation planning. Evaluation budgets and timeframes should build in sufficient resources to enable Indigenous knowledges, priorities and perspectives to be incorporated.

Box 9 **Incorporating Indigenous perspectives into evaluation**

In 2017 the Department of Health (DoH) commissioned an independent evaluation of the Australian Government's investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme. The evaluation design was underpinned by a co-design and co-creation approach and incorporated processes for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's values, perspectives and experiences were embedded throughout the design phase through a participatory and collaborative approach, including involvement in the evaluation commissioning organisation (the DoH), local evaluation governance arrangements (such as the Health Sector Co-Design Group), in the evaluation team itself, and through evaluation co-design and co-creation sessions which were either led or co-led by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Indigenous Evaluation Committee provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander oversight to evaluation activities within the Department. The Committee, comprising three Indigenous members and a non-Indigenous member with extensive evaluation experience, is responsible for ensuring the conduct and prioritisation of evaluations of programs and activities under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy are impartial and support transparency and openness in the implementation of the Department's Evaluation Framework. The framework sets out best practice principles which guide evaluations, including that evaluation is appropriate, credit robust and relevant. The Committee also assists in bringing the diverse perspectives of Indigenous Australians into the evaluation process.

Sources: Bailey et. al. (2018); DPMC (2018b).

QUESTIONS ON INCORPORATING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES INTO EVALUATION

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?

What are the barriers to further increasing engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during Australian Government evaluation projects?

How can the costs to government and communities of engaging more meaningfully with Aboriginal and Torres Islander people during evaluation be better integrated into existing and future program and evaluation budgets?

Independence and objectivity

Some degree of independence between evaluators, on the one hand, and policy makers and program delivery areas, on the other, is desirable to ensure that programs are evaluated objectively. There are many models for evaluation governance that potentially meet this requirement, including appointing external (to the agency) evaluators, or having a centralised evaluation unit in the agency to undertake evaluations or provide advice and/or oversight to program areas who undertake evaluations.

There are advantages and disadvantages to each approach. External evaluators can arguably bring a greater level of objectivity to evaluation than evaluators within program areas, although if external evaluators such as consultants or academics are concerned about repeat contracts with a particular agency they may be inclined to tell agencies what they think they want to hear. Using external evaluators also allows agencies to access skills and experience that may not be available in-house. Government procurement arrangements are likely to have implications for how agencies recruit and manage external evaluators.

Using internal evaluators allows agencies to build evaluative capacity and can provide opportunities for staff to learn more immediate lessons from evaluation and incorporate results into programs. Internal evaluators may also have easier access to administrative data to use in evaluation. However, some degree of independence is generally desirable to ensure that evaluations are objective.

QUESTIONS ON THE INDEPENDENCE OF EVALUATIONS AND EVALUATORS

What degree of independence between evaluators and policy makers/program delivery areas is necessary and/or desirable?

What are the advantages and disadvantages of existing Australian Government contracting and procurement arrangements for managing relationships between agencies and external evaluators and ensuring high quality and objective evaluation?

Ethical conduct

Evaluation commissioners and evaluators should behave in an ethical manner. Existing ethical guidelines for evaluation (for example, the Australian Evaluation Society *Guidelines for the Ethical Conduct of Evaluations*) cover a range of ethical issues that may be encountered during the commissioning and conduct of an evaluation, noting that not all these issues will be relevant to every evaluation. These include ensuring that stakeholders are fully informed and give consent to participation; avoiding conflicts of interest; respecting the rights, privacy, confidentiality and dignity of stakeholders; basing evaluation results on sound and complete information; and reporting results in a fair and balanced way.

Ethical guidelines for researchers working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities (e.g. AIATSIS 2012; NHMRC 2018) are also increasingly used to guide ethical conduct in evaluations. For example, evaluations conducted under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy Evaluation Framework are informed by AIATSIS (2012) and most are subject to ethical review by the AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee.

Ethics committees can provide important oversight over the conduct of evaluative research. However, there may be situations where formal review by an ethics committee is not warranted (for example, when evaluations use existing, de-identified data). It may be necessary to build capacity within agencies around ethical review processes, as well as

considering the capacity of existing research ethics committees to deal with an increasing number of requests for ethical review of evaluation projects.

QUESTIONS ON ETHICAL EVALUATION

How do Australian Government agencies currently deal with ethical issues associated with evaluation?

Do existing ethical guidelines for evaluation and research provide sufficient guidance for evaluation commissioners, evaluators and participants in evaluations of programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? To what extent should the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy build in these guidelines?

In what circumstances should evaluation projects be subject to formal ethics review? In what circumstances should evaluation projects be exempt from formal ethics review?

What are the time and cost implications of embedding an ethics review process into Australian Government evaluations?

Cultural capability and respect

Evaluation commissioners and practitioners should demonstrate cultural capability (box 10) and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledges, history and values. Evaluations should recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander viewpoints and circumstances, and use culturally appropriate research methods.

The extent to which cultural capability and respect are addressed in current evaluation practice varies considerably. Kelaher et al. (2018) found that only around half of the Australian Government and state/territory health program evaluation reports commissioned between 2007 and 2017 that they reviewed integrated aspects of ‘cultural respect’, and that this largely consisted of evaluators demonstrating that they had experience undertaking research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Guidelines for Māori research ethics (Hudson et al. 2010) provide one model for assessing the extent to which evaluation projects demonstrate cultural capability and respect. One of the four components of the framework is cultural and social responsibility and respect for persons. Within this domain, the framework recognises three levels of progress towards achieving best practice:

- Minimum standard: cultural sensitivity — awareness of cultural sensitivity; participants are treated with dignity and respect; participants have access to appropriate advice; privacy and confidentiality is respected.
- Good practice: cultural safety — Māori values are used in the research project; Māori protocols are observed; collective/community participation in establishing goals, benefits and implementation.
- Best practice: respectful conduct — recognises spiritual integrity and Māori philosophy; research is guided by elders.

Box 10 What is cultural capability?

Cultural capability has been defined as the ‘skills, knowledge, behaviours and systems that are required to plan, support, improve and deliver services in a culturally respectful and appropriate manner’ (Queensland Health 2010, p. 9). While cultural *competence* suggests reaching a particular standard in knowledge, behaviour or systems, cultural *capability* emphasises improvement and adaptation to ‘varied and changing circumstances and responsibilities’ (Russell-Mundine 2017, p. 44).

The Australian Public Service Cultural Capability Framework (APSC 2015, p. 16) includes description of ‘research’ cultural capabilities to help APS employees undertake research, monitoring or evaluation projects involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in a culturally-appropriate manner, including:

- understanding ethical research principles, and the heritage, cultural and intellectual property rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they relate to research
- applying evidence-based, ethical and culturally acceptable research practices, ensuring equitable benefits for participating communities, following community and cultural protocols and conducting research in ways that are most useful and least disruptive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- committing to meaningful engagement and reciprocity, identifying verbal and non-verbal clues, displaying empathy, showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledge and materials, and engaging and negotiating in good faith.

QUESTION ON CULTURAL CAPABILITY

How can the cultural capability of evaluation commissioners and practitioners and their respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, knowledges, history and values be demonstrated and improved?

Using appropriate approaches, methods and data

Evaluations must use appropriate approaches and methods (section 3) so that the evidence generated is robust and reliable. The Indigenous evaluation framework is unlikely to endorse particular approaches or methods, but may provide guidance to users on the appropriateness of alternative options given the evaluation objectives and the context in which the program operates.

Access to high quality data to inform evaluations is also crucial. As Professor Deborah Cobb-Clark has stated:

... program evaluations always rest on the available data. It is simply not possible to evaluate what we cannot observe. It is not uncommon for data limitations to constrain the evaluation questions, the evaluation method, the quality of the evaluation, and indeed whether an evaluation is even possible. (PC 2013, p. 84)

Evaluations that utilise high quality data are likely to be more complete and, ultimately, more useful than those that do not use high quality data. Existing data sources (such as program monitoring, survey or administrative data) should be used in evaluation where possible to reduce data collection burden for evaluation participants. That said, there will likely be instances where necessary data cannot be obtained through existing sources and data to inform evaluation will need to be collected before, during and/or after program delivery. A better understanding of the range of existing data sources available for evaluation, as well as identifying data gaps, could help evaluators make better use of existing data and inform future government and community-led data collection activity.

Where data are collected as part of an evaluation, agreement should be reached about data collection procedures, data governance, data ownership, data use and storage between evaluators and participants. Broader issues around data governance — including around the protocols for collecting, managing, linking, storing and sharing data — are discussed in section 5.

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION METHODS AND DATA

What types of evaluation approaches and methods are currently used to evaluate Indigenous programs? How could evaluation methods be improved to ensure robust and reliable evidence is produced?

To what extent does a lack of high-quality, accessible data, including data gaps, act as a barrier to undertaking effective evaluation of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

Transparency and accountability

While current practice varies across Australian Government agencies, it is clear that not all evaluation reports are publicly released. For example, a review of program evaluations in Indigenous health comparing publicly-advertised requests for tender for evaluation with published evaluation reports found that only one-third of commissioned evaluation reports were made public between 2007 and 2017 (Kelaher et al. 2018).

There are many arguments as to why evaluation reports should be made public. Publication increases accountability to the public and evaluation participants, and allows others to learn from evaluation findings. This may be particularly valuable where similar programs are delivered by different agencies, levels of government or regions. There may be some instances where publishing evaluation reports is not desirable. For example, where evaluations focus on a single geographic area or service provider, publishing detailed evaluation reports could compromise confidentiality and privacy. In these cases, it may be possible to publish a summary of evaluation findings rather than the full report.

Transparency around evaluation processes (such as by publishing evaluation plans or methodologies, and clearly pointing out evaluation strengths and limitations) helps external

viewers to judge the legitimacy of evaluation findings. Evaluation findings should be presented in a way that is of use to communities and individuals who were involved in the evaluation. In order to increase accountability and the impact of evaluation on decision making processes, agencies may require management to respond to evaluation recommendations or findings, and in some cases management responses are published alongside evaluation reports (box 11).

Requiring managers to formally consider the outcomes of evaluation mitigates the risk that findings from evaluation are placed in the ‘too hard’ basket, or that findings that governments do not find agreeable are ignored.

Box 11 Publishing and responding to evaluation results

The Office of Development Effectiveness (ODE) at the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) monitors the quality and assesses the impact of the Australian aid program. As part of its work, the ODE supports, conducts and reviews program evaluations of Australian aid investments.

To ensure its systems and processes facilitate the use of evaluations, the ODE works to ensure that management responses are provided for all evaluations. The responses outline whether there was agreement with the recommendations in the evaluation report, and how and when recommendations will be implemented. Under the 2016 Aid Evaluation Policy, all management responses to ODE’s strategic evaluations should be finalised within 28 days of completion of the evaluation report, and the completed report, along with the corresponding management response is then published on the DFAT website. The department’s 2019 Annual Aid Evaluation Plan suggests that four strategic evaluations and 44 program evaluations are expected to be published in 2019, with all program evaluations to include a management response.

Sources: DFAT (2017, 2019).

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION TRANSPARENCY

What are the current arrangements and requirements (if any) for publishing Australian Government evaluation reports? How are agencies held accountable for responding to evaluation recommendations or findings?

Should all evaluation reports be published? In what circumstances might it be appropriate to not publish evaluation reports?

What mechanisms currently exist for sharing evaluation results and data with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluation participants? Are these effective? How could they be improved?

5 Ensuring effective evaluation

A key component of the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is the development of evaluation priorities for the Australian Government. This exercise is crucial for ensuring that evaluation effort and resources are directed in the most effective and impactful way. Some of the issues and complexities associated with this task, on which the Commission is seeking feedback, are described below.

An Indigenous evaluation framework (section 4), coupled with a list of policy and program priorities, would represent a significant step towards improving Indigenous evaluation practice across government. However, on their own these developments are not sufficient. A range of supporting processes and features must also be in place to further the objectives and aspirations stakeholders have for the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, namely:

- a strong evaluative culture, capability and capacity within organisations involved in evaluation
- protocols to link, manage and share data to aid evaluation
- processes to identify and translate important knowledge from evaluation
- effective compliance and monitoring arrangements for the Strategy
- a process for reviewing and revising the Strategy over time.

Each of these requirements are discussed in more detail below.

QUESTION ON THE KEY ENABLING MECHANISMS FOR EFFECTIVE EVALUATION

What supporting features and arrangements are important for the successful implementation and operation of a principles-based Indigenous evaluation framework and accompanying list of evaluation priorities?

An appropriate process for determining evaluation priorities

Prioritisation is critical to ensure that the limited resources government agencies have to devote to evaluation are used wisely. As governments have finite resources, it is unreasonable to expect agencies to comprehensively and formally evaluate every facet of their spending on policies and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indeed, not all policies and programs will justify a significant investment in evaluation, and the net benefits of evaluation are likely to vary materially across programs.

In the Commission's view, the first step for developing evaluation priorities involves articulating a principles-based criteria to guide priority-setting. These principles would likely have several dimensions — for one, given the overriding objective of the framework is to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, programs that have (or

potentially have) large impacts on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are likely to be prime candidates for priority evaluation. Other principles that may underpin priority setting include program size, program expenditure, perceived program effectiveness (or lack thereof) and a program's strategic importance. Developing the principles to underpin priority setting will be a key task for the Commission.

Once the principles for determining priorities are established, they must be applied to the raft of policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify the specific policies and programs that should be priorities for evaluation.

This task could be undertaken by the Commission (as part of this project) or by departments themselves, and there are conceivable benefits to both models. For example, having the Commission identify specific policies and programs as evaluation priorities provides a degree of independence between priority setting and service delivery. It could also facilitate a more whole-of-government approach to priority setting and make it easier for priorities to be set on a broader, more strategic basis (such as a priority to evaluate the effects of all programs in a particular region, or to undertake thematic evaluations examining common themes across multiple agencies). That said, departments — as service delivery agencies — have extensive knowledge of the policies and programs they administer, meaning they could potentially apply the principles more accurately.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, perspectives and views will be essential in both developing the principles to inform priority-setting, and in applying these principles to narrow in on particular policies and programs that should be a high priority for evaluation.

The task of setting priorities for evaluation should not be viewed as a one-off exercise. A process is needed whereby priorities are regularly assessed to ensure that they are effective in directing evaluation effort and are revised as new evidence comes to light.

QUESTIONS ON DETERMINING EVALUATION PRIORITIES

What principles should be used to determine evaluation priorities?

What policies and programs affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (or broader policy and program areas) should be the highest priority for evaluation, and why?

How often should evaluation priorities be reviewed? How should the process for reviewing priorities be structured?

Institutional and other requirements for supporting effective evaluation

Strong evaluation culture, capability and capacity within organisations

Effective evaluation involves many parties. These include organisations that undertake evaluation (such as government agencies or commissioned evaluators), as well as

participants in the evaluation process (such as communities or service delivery organisations, who often provide critical information to inform evaluation).

If evaluation is to be done well, each of these groups require:

- An evaluative culture. That is, they recognise the value and importance of evaluation, as opposed to viewing it as a tedious, unimportant, or undesirable exercise, and demonstrate a willingness to use evaluation findings to learn and improve.
- Evaluation capability. That is, they have the tools they need to undertake, or participate in evaluation effectively. For organisations undertaking evaluation, this includes having access to suitably skilled and experienced staff, access to data, and enough funding. It also means they have sufficient cultural competency to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities confidently and in a culturally appropriate way. For participants, it means they have the skills needed to engage helpfully in the evaluation process.
- Evaluation capacity. That is, they have the freedom to undertake, participate in and use evaluation. For organisations undertaking evaluation, this means having the administrative and legislative freedom to undertake evaluations and use findings to improve policy and program delivery. For participants, this means having the freedom, opportunity and resources to meaningfully engage with the evaluation process.

Not all organisations will be starting at the same points. Some will have a more developed evaluative culture, and/or a greater capability and capacity to undertake, or participate in, evaluations than others.

QUESTIONS ON IMPROVING EVALUATIVE CULTURE, CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

How much scope do you consider there is to improve evaluative culture, capability and capacity for both those who undertake evaluations, and those who participate in the evaluation process? And how might improvements be achieved?

What resources are currently available to build and strengthen evaluative capacity among program implementation staff, service delivery organisations and community stakeholders?

What impediments are there to improving evaluative culture, capability and capacity and what can be done to address these?

Protocols to collect, link and share data to aid with evaluation

As discussed in section 4, access to high-quality data is essential if evaluation is to be done well. But there are challenges in collecting and using high-quality data to inform evaluations. Some of these challenges are common to all forms of evaluation — for example, the challenge of balancing data availability with privacy — but other challenges are more

specific to evaluating Indigenous policies and programs, such as issues around the consistent identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (box 12).

Box 12 Indigenous identification in data

Many data sources rely on respondents to self-identify if they are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The decision whether to identify as Indigenous in response to a survey or administrative data request is often complex. As the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) identified:

The decision to disclose one's Indigenous status is a personal one, and potentially complex. In addition to an individual's assessment of the question and data collection context, identification may be influenced by attitudes, beliefs and behaviours that the individual is not consciously aware of. (ABS 2013, p. 6).

The choice for people to self-identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander may vary across time and contexts. As an example, between the 2011 and 2016 Censuses, the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people rose by 18.4 per cent, and about one-fifth of this change cannot be explained by demographic factors such as births, deaths and migration. A changing propensity to self-identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander has been acknowledged as one possible factor that is contributing to the increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population recorded in the Census.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the decision whether to identify their Indigeneity for data collection purposes is — rightly — theirs to make. But it does present challenges for researchers and evaluators when an individual's Indigenous status varies within and across data sets, particularly when tracking outcomes over time, or the effects of a policy intervention.

Sources: ABS (2013, 2018).

How to get the most out of data for the purpose of evaluation will be an important consideration for the Commission when designing an evaluation strategy. This will necessitate considering the effectiveness of the current governance structures around data for Indigenous evaluation, including:

- How (and what) data are collected. This not only includes data collected on policies and programs that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but also the information collected about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities more broadly. Another important consideration is the extent that Indigenous knowledges are represented in data collection.
- How data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are linked. Linking occurs when different datasets containing information about the same individuals are brought together. Linking allows for more substantial data sets to be developed, often facilitating richer or more meaningful insights.
- How data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are shared and stored, including sharing with the people and communities that these data are about. Sharing arrangements also facilitates greater choice in who does evaluation, by ensuring that evaluators have access to the data they need in order to do evaluation well.

In exploring these issues, it will also be critical to examine the extent that current data governance arrangements enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to determine how their data are collected, managed, used and shared.

QUESTION ON DATA FOR EVALUATION

To what extent are current data governance arrangements effective? What can be done to improve arrangements?

Processes to identify and translate important knowledge from evaluation

If it achieves its goals, the Evaluation Strategy should result in a marked increase in the number of high-quality evaluations being undertaken. As more and more evaluation is completed, it is likely that knowledge (such as common findings or lessons) will emerge that has cross-cutting implications for a range of services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A process is needed to identify and translate this knowledge in such a way that it can usefully feed into policy design and implementation decisions. This extends beyond just publishing evaluation reports, but also discerning common findings and lessons across evaluations, and summarising, translating and sharing these.

QUESTIONS ON IDENTIFYING AND TRANSLATING KNOWLEDGE FROM EVALUATION

What can be done to ensure that knowledge generated through evaluation is identified and translated in such a way that it can be used to usefully and meaningfully inform policy design and implementation?

Effective compliance and monitoring arrangements for the strategy

The practice of evaluation within government is inextricably linked to the overarching governance and legislative structures in which agencies operate. Improving the conduct of evaluations will necessarily involve consideration of whether there is scope to improve existing compliance and monitoring arrangements that support evaluation within and across agencies.

Broadly speaking, compliance with the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy can be encouraged by:

- providing rewards to agencies that demonstrate compliance (that is, offering so called ‘carrots’)
- setting rules on the conduct of evaluation, and sanctioning agencies that do not meet these rules (that is, utilising so called ‘sticks’).

There are a range of possible options through which compliance arrangements for the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy could be implemented. These range from highly formal approaches (where, for example, compliance is mandated through legislative and/or administrative arrangements, such as those currently operating through the PGPA Act) to less formal approaches (where, for example, compliance with the strategy is monitored and reported on publicly, but following the strategy is not mandated through law).

Monitoring agencies' compliance with the strategy will be important, not least so that instances of non-compliance can be identified, called out and rectified in a timely manner. The Letter of Direction requests that the Commission 'set out its approach for reviewing agencies' conduct of evaluations against the strategy' indicating that this monitoring function could, at least in part, be fulfilled by the Commission.

QUESTIONS ON EVALUATION MONITORING AND COMPLIANCE MECHANISMS

What approaches and models could be implemented to ensure that Australian Government agencies comply with the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy?

How should agencies' conduct against the Strategy be monitored?

A process for reviewing and revising the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

A key requirement of any evaluation strategy is that it be subject to regular review. If the strategy and its component parts remain static, there is a risk that it will fail to meet the evolving needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments, and ultimately, that it may not meaningfully contribute to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Reviews provide an opportunity to assess the Strategy's effectiveness; to draw upon updated knowledge, experiences and priorities; and to identify and implement improvements to the strategy.

The form that reviews of the Strategy should take is an important consideration for the Commission. This includes determining:

- when the Strategy should be reviewed (recognising that there will need to be time between when the strategy is implemented and when there is sufficient information to make an informed assessment of its performance)
- who should be responsible for reviewing and revising the Strategy
- how reviews should be undertaken.

Regardless of who does the review and the form it takes, it will be critical to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the performance of the strategy and how it can be improved. Ample opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to

participate in reviews is essential, as is a process to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and voices are central to the process.

QUESTION ON REVISING THE INDIGENOUS EVALUATION STRATEGY OVER TIME

How do you think the process for reviewing and revising the Strategy should be structured?

6 How can you contribute?

Stakeholder engagement and input is critical to developing the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy

In developing the strategy the Commission will engage widely, particularly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations, experts in evaluation and all levels of government. The Commission will also consider evaluation experience in Australia and overseas, reviews of evaluation practice and the data requirements associated with effective evaluation.

The Commission sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation, voices and perspectives as essential to developing an effective strategy – cognisant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have not always been adequately engaged or had their views adequately considered in the policy development processes. The Commission will listen to participants conscientiously and seek to reflect the voices, knowledges and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of the strategy.

Engagement will take a range of forms including visits to organisations, communities and individuals, workshop and roundtable discussions, seeking written and oral submissions and online comments (see attachment). The Commission will be flexible and innovative in its approach to engagement and is open to advice on the most effective engagement methods.

Written and oral submissions and brief comments

We are seeking written and oral (by phone) submissions from stakeholders and interested parties. Submissions can include relevant data and evidence, as well as your opinions or ideas about any of the matters raised by the letter of direction or in this issues paper. You do not need to address every issue raised in this paper and you are free to raise any other issues or ideas that are relevant to the letter of direction.

If you do not wish to make a public submission, you can also provide us with a brief comment via our website. If you make a brief comment, you may choose to remain

anonymous. The attachment at the end of this issues paper provides further details on how you can make a submission.

Submissions and brief comments in response to this issues paper are due by 23 August 2019.

We plan to release a draft report in **February 2020**. There will be further opportunity to provide submissions and comments after the draft report is released.

Meetings and discussions

Meetings and discussions are central to our engagement process. These may be in person or via telephone or video conference.

We are seeking input on who we should engaged with (including individuals, groups and organisations) and the preferred means for engaging with those parties. We also welcome your views about places, communities, organisations or individuals we should visit.

QUESTION ON ENGAGEMENT SUGGESTIONS

How and who should we engage to maximise community and expert input to this project?

Appendix A: Letter of Direction

Evaluation of policies and programs impacting on Indigenous Australians

I, Josh Frydenberg, Treasurer, pursuant to Parts 2 and 4 of the *Productivity Commission Act 1998* hereby request the Productivity Commission to develop a whole-of-government evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians. The Commission will also review the performance of agencies against the strategy over time, focusing on potential improvements and on lessons that may have broader application for all governments.

Background

A number of high profile reports have highlighted the need for more evaluation of policies and programs that have an impact on Indigenous Australians. For example, the Commission's *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2016* found that only a relatively small number of programs have been rigorously evaluated.

Improving outcomes for Indigenous Australians depends on agencies with responsibility for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians undertaking meaningful evaluations. The Commission is to develop a strategy to guide that evaluation effort.

Scope

The Commission should develop an evaluation strategy for policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians, to be utilised by all Australian Government agencies. As part of the strategy, the Commission should:

- establish a principles based framework for the evaluation of policies and programs affecting Indigenous Australians
- identify priorities for evaluation
- set out its approach for reviewing agencies' conduct of evaluations against the strategy.

In developing the strategy, the Commission should consider:

- how to engage Indigenous communities and incorporate Indigenous knowledge and perspectives
- ethical approaches to evaluations
- evaluation experience in Australia and overseas
- relevant current or recent reviews commissioned or undertaken by Australian, state, territory or local government agencies
- the availability and use of existing data, and the further development of other required data and information

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- areas in which there may be value in the Productivity Commission undertaking evaluation
 - how to translate evidence into practice and to embed evaluation in policy and program delivery.

Process

The Commission should consult widely on the strategy, in particular with Indigenous people, communities and organisations (such as the Empowered Community regions), and with all levels of government. It should also consult with non-Indigenous organisations, and individuals responsible for administering and delivering relevant policies and programs.

The Commission should adopt a variety of consultation methods including seeking public submissions.

The Commission should provide the evaluation strategy and forward work program to Government within 15 months of commencement.

The Hon Josh Frydenberg MP
Treasurer

[Received 10 April 2019]

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Attachment: How to make a submission

How to prepare a submission

Written submissions may range from a short letter outlining your views on a particular topic to a much more substantial document covering a range of issues. Where possible, you should provide evidence, such as relevant data and documentation, to support your views. Stakeholders are also welcome to make an oral submission by calling the Commission (details below).

Generally

- Each submission, except for any attachment supplied in confidence, will be published on the Commission's website shortly after receipt, and will remain there indefinitely as a public document.
- The Commission reserves the right to not publish material on its website that is offensive, potentially defamatory, or clearly out of scope for the inquiry or study in question.

Copyright

- Copyright in submissions sent to the Commission resides with the author(s), not with the Commission.
- Do not send us material for which you are not the copyright owner — such as newspaper articles — you should just reference or link to this material in your submission.

In confidence material

- This is a public review and all submissions should be provided as public documents that can be placed on the Commission's website for others to read and comment on. However, information which is of a confidential nature or which is submitted in confidence can be treated as such by the Commission, provided the cause for such treatment is shown.
- The Commission may also request a non-confidential summary of the confidential material it is given, or the reasons why a summary cannot be provided.
- Material supplied in confidence should be clearly marked 'IN CONFIDENCE' and be in a separate attachment to non-confidential material.
- You are encouraged to contact the Commission for further information and advice before submitting such material.

Privacy

- For privacy reasons, all **personal** details (e.g. home and email address, signatures, phone, mobile and fax numbers) will be removed before they are published on the website. Please do not provide a these details unless necessary.
- You may wish to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym. Please note that, if you choose to remain anonymous or use a pseudonym, the Commission may place less weight on your submission.

Technical tips

- The Commission prefers to receive submissions as a Microsoft Word (.docx) files. PDF files are acceptable if produced from a Word document or similar text based software. You may wish to research the Internet on how to make your documents more accessible or for the more technical, follow advice from Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0<<http://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG20/>>.
- Do not send password protected files.
- Track changes, editing marks, hidden text and internal links should be removed from submissions.
- To minimise linking problems, type the full web address (for example, <http://www.referred-website.com/folder/file-name.html>).

How to lodge a submission

Written submissions should be lodged using the online form on the Commission's website. Submissions lodged by post should be accompanied by a submission cover sheet.

Online*	www.pc.gov.au/Indigenous-Evaluation
Post*	Indigenous Evaluation Strategy Productivity Commission Locked Bag 2, Collins Street East, Melbourne VIC 8003
Phone	Please contact the Administrative Officer on 03 9653 2356.

* If you do not receive notification of receipt of your submission to the Commission, please contact the Administrative Officer on 03 9653 2356.

Due date for submissions

Please send submissions to the Commission by 23 August 2019.