

28 July 2020

Attention: Australian Government Productivity Commission

To Whom it May Concern:

**RE: Letter of Support for the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (proposed)**

Beyond Blue supports the draft proposed Indigenous Evaluation Strategy (“the Strategy”) and provides the following feedback for consideration.

The inclusion of an Indigenous-led evaluation champion to oversee the Strategy and Indigenous-led Evaluation Council to govern the Strategy is a major strength.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are around three times as likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress and twice as likely to die by suicide. The social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been impacted by the impact of colonisation and intergenerational trauma; loss of culture and identity; discrimination and racism; poverty and/or low socio-economic circumstances. Without good mental health, it is harder for children to learn, or for young people and adults to get meaningful jobs and contribute to their communities, broader society and the economy. People with poor mental health die significantly earlier than average; ten to 25 years earlier for people who live with severe mental health conditions.

Improving social and emotional wellbeing is deeply connected to the social determinants of health and is critical to achieving the Closing the Gap targets and other important Australian Government policy commitments, including implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023.

Regarding government-wide evaluation priorities outlined in the draft Strategy (page 22), Beyond Blue emphasises the importance of ensuring mental health, social and emotional wellbeing is included in:

- **Priority 2:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enjoy long and healthy lives, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong
- **Cross System Priority:** Addressing racism, discrimination and social inclusion, healing and trauma, and the promotion of culture and language for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

An important reference missing from the draft strategy is the Final Report of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project [Solutions that work: What the evidence and our people tell us](#) which was delivered to the Australian Government in June 2016. This comprehensive project found:

*A common success factor in community-based interventions or responses to Indigenous suicide is their development and implementation through Indigenous leadership and in partnership with Indigenous communities. This is not only because responses need to address cultural and ‘lived*

*experience' elements, but also because of the right of Indigenous people to be involved in service design and delivery as mental health consumers. In addition, the empowerment of communities is a beneficial outcome in itself, with a potential for multiple flow-on benefits. With community ownership and investment, such responses are also likely to be sustained over time.*

The ATSIPEP project generated the following tools and resources for use by Indigenous communities, stakeholders, governments and funding agencies such as Primary Health Networks, to support Indigenous suicide prevention activity and I urge the Productivity Commission to consider the application of these in the final Strategy:

- An Evaluation Framework for Indigenous suicide prevention activity for use by communities, government and Primary Health Networks
- An Evaluation Tool for evaluating proposals for Indigenous suicide prevention activity
- A Community Tool to support the development of Indigenous suicide prevention activity
- Interactive maps showing Indigenous suicide numbers and rates by postcode
- Factsheets and discussion papers

Any evaluations for government programs should be principles-focussed with a guarantee that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, priorities, perspectives and voices are central in all components: evaluation prioritisation setting, design, implementation, data management and sovereignty, data analysis, and knowledge translation activities. Long-term investment is also needed to deliver quality Indigenous-led or co-designed evaluations.

The Indigenous Evaluation Strategy sets a path for future evaluations to shape better policies and programs, and ultimately, better lives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples so individuals and communities can achieve their best possible mental health, social and emotional wellbeing.

Yours sincerely

**Georgie Harman**  
Chief Executive Officer