



Government of **Western Australia**
Department of **Health**
Office of the **Director General**

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ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER

Thank you for the invitation to provide feedback on *A Path Forward* – Developing the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy Discussion Paper.

The response from the WA health system is provided at Attachment 1.

Yours sincerely

Dr D J Russell-Weisz
DIRECTOR GENERAL

19 February 2020

Att. WA Health system feedback

WA HEALTH SYSTEM
RESPONSE TO A PATH FORWARD – DEVELOPING THE WA GOVERNMENT’S
ABORIGINAL EMPOWERMENT STRATEGY DISCUSSION PAPER

- 1. Are the main ideas right? Do you agree with the description of the overall goal, principles, strategic elements and framework? Would you change or add anything?**

Department of Health

The Department of Health supports each of the key principles and strategic elements of the proposed Strategy.

The Strategy aligns well with the *WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015-2020* and the two documents share an understanding of culture at the centre of Aboriginal empowerment.

The proposed Strategy takes a strengths-based approach and prioritises prevention, in alignment with the *Final Report of Sustainable Health Review*.

With respect to Strategic Element 2 - when discussing “Bringing decisions closer to communities”, it is very easy to raise expectations that may not be met. It is not only improved processes and structures that will permit more localised decision making. Giving communities direct decision making about funding is the only way to ensure that decision making is really in Aboriginal hands. If this is not anticipated, caution should be used.

The Department of Health supports the consideration of the length of contracts. 3-4 year contracts to address significant wellbeing issues are ineffective, damaging to workforce stability and disempowering to both service providers and Aboriginal communities.

With respect to Strategic Element 3 – DPC may wish to consider the addition of a third point:

- iii. Encourage transition of service delivery to ACCOs as preferred service providers.

The key ideas could also have a point such as:

- Review current service delivery with a view to prioritising ACCO delivery where possible.

Strategic Element 4 – Consider that strong and effective investment in prevention will require the development of clear outcomes measures.

WA health has recently prepared an Outcomes Based Framework

Strategic Element 5 – In the key ideas on the supply of workforce, it would be desirable to explicitly refer to school completion and gaining qualifications.

WA Country Health Service

WACHS supports the overall goal of Aboriginal people, families and communities being empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation. The principles are consistent with WACHS policies and frameworks, including the *WACHS Aboriginal Health Strategy 2019-2024*, which also recognises the importance of culture to people's health and wellbeing, and the impact of intergenerational trauma resulting from past policies and practices.

Direction 5 of the *WACHS Aboriginal Health Strategy 2019-2024* commits WACHS to develop a strong, skilled and growing Aboriginal health workforce across all levels, including clinical, non-clinical and leadership roles to ensure a culturally respectful and safe workplace culture and environment. The Strategy also acknowledges that it is critical that WACHS continues to work in close partnership with non-government health organisations, particularly with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector to provide comprehensive health services.

Recognition of the critical role that the ACCHSs sector plays in the delivery of primary health and related services to Aboriginal people and their communities, is demonstrated through the continued funding and implementation of the Aboriginal Health Program (AHP) and the Aboriginal Comprehensive Primary Health Care Program (ACPHCP). Approximately 50% of services provided under the AHP are provided by ACCHSs, and 100% of the services provided under the ACPHCP are provided by ACCHSs. In line with the State Government Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy 2018, Aboriginal community controlled organisations will be preferred service providers in future procurements under the AHP and ACPHCP.

The *Empowerment: Foundations and Futures* illustration on page 4 would benefit from adding 'and wellbeing' to 'health' to better reflect the Aboriginal concept of health that extends beyond the physical wellbeing of an individual to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

South Metropolitan Health Service

Broadly, the main ideas presented within the document are correct, working towards empowering Aboriginal people to lead fulfilling lives through various initiatives covering existing health and economic constraints by putting culture front and centre.

- 2. Are we using the right words? You might broadly agree with the main ideas, but want to see them expressed using different language. We welcome your recommendations. In particular, we are interested in whether the term 'Aboriginal people' should be used or whether other terms such as 'First Nations' would be more appropriate.**

Department of Health

There is a preference within Health for the use of "Aboriginal people" as opposed to "First Nations"

WA Country Health Service

Within WA, the term 'Aboriginal' is used in preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of WA. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is referred to in the national context and Indigenous is referred to in the international context. This is a requirement under Operational Directive 0435/13.

South Metropolitan Health Service

Words and themes run in line with language used in the community. A concern however is that there are elements missing or that require re-structuring.

The document does not acknowledge the use of the term "Aboriginal" in lieu of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Empowerment: Foundations and Futures (Page 9):

- The use of terminology for "home and housing" to be adapted to "home and housing security", acknowledging that it is not only important to have housing but also the security of long term housing to build a stable home environment and support early childhood development by reducing the impacts of moving homes and schools regularly.

Principles, Empowerment and self-determination (Page 10):

- We have a concern in the context of the following sentence "The governments' primary role is to support Aboriginal people, families and Communities to solve their own problems".
- This sentence implies that the onus in solving the problem is put back on Aboriginal people without any support structure.
- A recommendation for the sentence restructure can be as follows "The government's primary role is to empower Aboriginal People, families and communities to better navigate through complex issues and provide autonomy over decision making."

3. What else should we be thinking about? You may have a view on how the strategy should be implemented in a particular region or subject area, or examples of current good practice.

Department of Health

Nil response

WA Country Health Service

Establishment of regional Cultural Governance Groups with responsibility for driving the development of regional action plans is recommended. Currently, Regional Aboriginal Health Planning Forums operate in each WACHS region. The forums

comprise membership from all health service providers in a region, and are responsible for developing Regional Aboriginal Health Plans.

In regard to Section 4, investing more in preventative and early intervention initiatives could usefully include reference to traditional medicines, which include the treatment of Aboriginal people's spiritual, emotional, social and cultural needs.

In the Implementation section on page 26, add 'licit drugs' to 'reduce youth reoffending and illicit drug use' to capture volatile substance misuse and misuse of prescription medications.

South Metropolitan Health Service

Following a thorough review of the document, the SMHS recommends the following as additions to the document:

- Detail the economic and social injustices experienced by Aboriginal people.
- Add case studies demonstrating the systemic racism, over representation in prisons and overcrowded homes.
- The addition of statistics and data to support the purpose.
- Make reference to current initiatives already in action.