

## **PART ONE**

### **WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T WORK IN INDIGENOUS SERVICE DEVELOPMENT – AN ANNOTATED COMPILATION OF EVIDENCE**

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(With contributions from Terry Priest and May Rowe-Spencer)

Who knows and cares most about Aboriginal health? We do. So give us the funding and the knowledge and partner with us to enable us to be responsible for our own health and wellbeing.

-- Associate Professor Ted Wilkes Indigenous health researcher<sup>2</sup>

It is said that 'the greatest tragedy of failure is failing to learn from it'. But that seems to be the predominant history of Indigenous policies and programs. Until recently, evidence and evaluation have played only limited roles in Indigenous policy in Australia. The focus has tended to be on intuitive notions of doing good or avoiding harms — on the ends, rather than detailed analysis and review of alternative means.

-- Gary Banks, then Chairman of the Productivity Commission<sup>3</sup>

These quotes are indicators of the long term existence of unaddressed problems in the funding and designing of programs targeting Indigenous individuals and communities. They came after the Rudd 2008 apology to the Stolen Generation, which seems now to mark the high point of expectations of reform to policy processes even though it did not mark any significant change of approach to official Indigenous policies and funding. The Gillard government failed to make any significant changes to broad policy directions, adopting a bipartisan approach by following and extending many Howard initiatives such as the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER). Despite establishing

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<sup>2</sup><http://nacchocommunique.com/2013/08/02/naccho-health-news-fiona-stanley-the-secret-to-improving-aboriginal-healthcare/>

<sup>3</sup><http://www.pc.gov.au/research/conference-proceedings/better-indigenous-policies/media-release>

and funding the National Congress of Australia's First People,<sup>4</sup> there were no significant changes in how these policies were made.

The verbiage from the incoming government in 2013 has included claims by Prime Minister Tony Abbott that he will be the first to lead serious change in Indigenous affairs.<sup>5</sup> However, over a year later, the signs are that he has neither seriously addressed many of the procedural and other issues that inhibit effective programs, nor has he increased the funding and resources the programs need. The current funding round (2014) for the Indigenous Advancement Strategy shows similar problems to those identified in this publication and its implementation has been delayed.

This issue of the Journal of Indigenous Policy contains two separate but complementary annotated compilations of extracts from documents that offer evidence of what is wrong and what needs to be addressed. These are intended as resources for those seeking evidence for what works in different policy areas.

The first section is part of a longer term project on evidence based policy making, following up the Journal of Indigenous Policy (Issue 13) which showed that income management was not an effective program. This earlier volume documented procedural flaws in the establishment of the program which seriously diminished its potential to succeed or be helpful. This current volume follows up the wider issues of process that have been increasingly identified by the Federal Government's own main data collector on effectiveness, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). This organisation houses the Clearinghouse collection of data/reports on the COAG Closing the Gap programs and initiatives, and collates and comments on its collection. On the basis of this data, in 2011 AIHW released its criteria for what worked and did not work in program delivery processes for Indigenous people and communities.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore this first section is a compilation of resources, and is intended to be used as a reference document, rather than a single article. We hope that a range of people, active in the process of advocating and deciding policy, will find it

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<sup>4</sup><http://nationalcongress.com.au/>

<sup>5</sup><http://www.theaustralian.com.au/national-affairs/policy/tony-abbotts-indigenous-vision-takes-shape/story-fn9hm1pm-1226694578569?nk=40c806701703ac2542d99528b9c21151>

<sup>6</sup><http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/>

useful. We have, therefore, provided a general introduction, followed by a collation of extracts from a range of reports to illustrate what works and what doesn't, and to provide easy access to proof of what has succeeded and failed across all important areas. This is so that readers can find the extracts more relevant to their areas of policy. Therefore: it is not designed to be read through as a single piece.

The second article in this journal also offers extracts and may be used in a similar way. It is a brief analysis and overview of the 2014 budget's specific Indigenous related and broader policies that are likely to disproportionately affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As there is still limited clarity on whether some of the proposed changes will go through the senate and how some administrative re-organisation may alter the way things are done, we have focused on whether there is any evidence that the new government has made effective use of the 'what works' criteria their own advisers have identified.

As Gary Banks suggests above, failure to use evidence that is available is tragic and we hope that this volume will encourage the use of good evidence to improve outcomes, particularly by those who control both the money and power.

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