

1.3 SOME PROGRAM BASED CRITIQUES: WHAT WORKS AND WHAT DOESN'T WORK

The above section covered government wide general criteria on what works, this next section includes extracts from specific reports on particular program evaluations and critiques of these. These relevant extracts often illustrate the details of what makes programs work or not and how they function. Most have been extracted from recent and current documents from primarily Commonwealth agencies that evaluate commonwealth program delivery, including AIHW, the Australian National Audit Office, and the Ombudsman, but also include some recent NSW Government reports on its programs to show the universality of the process problems.

Some initial extracts come from summary documents/resource sheets put together by the staff of the AIHW Clearinghouse on Closing the Gap, which meta-analyse categories of deposited reports. Despite these summaries being collated and distributed to inform and be used by program specific areas to reform their processes, they seem not to influence processes as they should. The basis for our selecting extracts is to show the repeated similarities of examples, both good and bad, of 'what works' and 'what doesn't work' in many different policy contexts, and relate to a wide range of specific programs areas. The one below is a general set of principles.

A. 2013 AIHW Strategies and Practices for Promoting the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.¹⁴

This document offers a useful set of general cultural recommendations that deal with wide ranging cultural differences that are not adequately acknowledged in the processes of planning and delivering services. It emphasises how Indigenous cultures take a holistic view of life and health; therefore, cultural, spiritual and social wellbeing are integral to the health of Indigenous people and list the issues that need to be considered:

- The impact of colonisation, relocation of people to missions and reserves and the forced removal of children resulted in the dispossession and dislocation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from land and family. This has disrupted cultural beliefs and practices, and has adversely affected the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people.
- In 2008, nearly one-third (32%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 and over reported high or very high levels of psychological distress, which was more than twice the proportion for non-Indigenous adults.
- International studies and Australian data indicate that Indigenous people

¹⁴<http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgc-rs19.pdf>

who are conversant in their own languages have better resilience and mental health. There are few well-conducted evaluations of Indigenous-specific programs whose purpose is to promote social and emotional wellbeing.

- A number of mainstream (non-Indigenous-specific) programs have been evaluated and shown to be effective in promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous people.
- Good practice principles highlight that programs are unlikely to be effective when:
 - They are not culturally competent and do not have a high level of Indigenous ownership and community supportThey operate in isolation from, or do not address the legacy of, past trauma, past and current racism and issues such as poverty and homelessness.

From the AIHW Clearinghouse:¹⁵

These come from summary sheets based on multiple reports on categories of services that affect Indigenous families and communities and that would benefit from procedural changes, below.

What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key findings

Early childhood services

Early childhood services are a major funding area which is widely recognised as crucial to changing the often poor outcomes of children in later schooling. The current goals include an early increase in children attending such services. However, there is not much attention being given in many of the programs, including those covered by the Early Years Learning Framework, to processes of establishing and running such services in ways that engage and involve communities and parents. The implementation of more effective ways of working with parents and communities would not only increase enrolments but attendance and effective learning.

What works

- High-quality, holistic, early and family involved intervention and education.
- Teacher training.
- Cultural competence and cultural safety.
- Local involvement in program development.

¹⁵Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (AIHW, AIFS) 2012. What works to overcome Indigenous disadvantage: key learnings and gaps in the evidence 2010-11. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

What doesn't work

- Limited and lack of engagement with families.
- Services that do not fully engage the Indigenous community.
- Programs that are not adapted to the local cultural context.

Healthy homes

The following principles and practices are linked with good housing outcomes:

What works

- Design and construction of Indigenous housing.
 - Culturally appropriate design.
 - Prioritisation of safety and health.
 - Local capacity building.

What doesn't work

- Short-term or piecemeal programs.
- Design and construction: A centralised approach that doesn't contextualise particular local, cultural, social and environmental circumstances.
- Relocation of households during urban renewal.
- Inappropriate maintenance programs.
- Top-down interventions and disingenuous consultation processes.
- Failure to employ Indigenous staff.

Governance and leadership

The following principles and practices are again linked with the way things are done rather than the content:

What works

- Culturally appropriate and culturally 'safe' services.
- Culturally competent service delivery
- Suitably qualified and experienced field staff
- A flexible approach to designing and funding initiatives.
- A community development approach to ensure shared and relevant programs.
 - Specifically, this includes applying a strengths-based approach.
 - A commitment to empower the community.
 - Supporting Indigenous staff.
 - Investing time and resources into ongoing community consultations.

What Works and What Doesn't Work in Indigenous Service Development

- Leadership development that incorporates core facets of Indigenous leadership styles.

What doesn't work

- Power inequalities.
- Inflexible funding and program requirements.