
5 Evaluation strategy for CfC sites with Indigenous Communities

Although the evaluation is designed to address the whole of the SFCS, the methodology will need to be adapted to ensure cultural appropriateness for Indigenous populations within CfC sites. The practical issues associated with doing so are outlined below, including the need to negotiate the evaluation *process* and *access* to community members. In addition, although the *instruments* proposed by the national evaluators cover issues of relevance to Indigenous populations, these may need to be adapted to ensure local appropriateness. The data collection and analysis will also need to take into account issues of remoteness, isolation and access to services, which are likely to impact on costs, service capability and outcomes in some CfC sites.

5.1 Evaluation process: negotiation of protocols

The evaluation process will be conducted in line with principles set out by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies for research, including ongoing consultation and negotiation, and respect for Indigenous knowledge systems and processes (AIATSIS, 2000).

The National Evaluation will harness the expertise of local evaluators and staff in each FP organisation in areas where there are significant numbers of Indigenous families. Their local expertise will help identify appropriate individuals and organisations to consult in each community, so as to explain and obtain permission to carry out the evaluation, and to ensure protocols and tools are culturally appropriate. Prior to the piloting process, expert advisers will be invited to give feedback on the design of evaluation instruments including the questions in the Family Study, the Service User Study, the service co-ordination study and the indicators in the Outcome indicators framework. National Evaluators will work in collaboration with Local Evaluators, Facilitating Partners and local Indigenous representatives through the evaluation process to ensure cultural appropriateness. Given the need for careful negotiations and the need to phase the research according to community as well as research priorities, the time frames for the evaluation may need to differ in those communities.

5.2 Issues for Indigenous Children and Families

Outcome Evaluation

The Productivity Commission's 'Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2005' report (SCRGSP, 2005) lists a series of indicators designed to assist in assessing the extent to which policy interventions are improving outcomes for Indigenous people. The following table (Table 5.1) shows the extent to which those Productivity Commission indicators that are directly relevant to CfC are covered in the instruments proposed for the National Evaluation. The table also outlines why, in some cases, it is not possible to include the recommended measures relating to Indigenous children.

Table 5.1 Coverage of Productivity Commission Indicators by SFCS evaluation

Productivity Commission Indicator relevant to children and families	Coverage by National Evaluation of Communities for Children
Life expectancy at birth	Not covered. Estimates are available by the ABS at the state level
Years 10 and 12 retention and attainment	OIF proposes to monitor age-specific participation rates in education for 15-, 16- and 17-year-olds
Labour force participation and unemployment	OIF CP FS
Household income	FS CP
Home ownership	FS CP
Suicide and self-harm	Not covered – Indigenous communities are too small to track at a community level.
Substantiated child protection notifications	OIF
Victim rates for crime	OIF (some states only)
Imprisonment and juvenile detention rates	No, but FS asks about problems with police and court appearances in last year.
Hospital admission for infectious diseases	OIF
Infant mortality	Numbers for Indigenous communities are too small to track at a community level.
Birth weight	OIF
Hearing impairment	FS – also included as prompt within open ended disability question
Preschool attendance	OIF
Year 3 literacy and numeracy	We will negotiate including this measure
Primary school children with dental caries	OIF (for children aged 5)
Alcohol and tobacco consumption	FS
Child’s access to the nearest health professional	FS – questions is framed as access to services which would include health
Participation in organised sport, arts or community group activities	FS
Overcrowding in housing	FS
Access to clean water and functional sewerage	This can be covered in the service profiling component of the community profile

Key:

OIF- Outcomes Indicators Framework

CP- Community Profile

FS- Family Study

Table 5.1 shows how the components of the National Evaluation cover most of the national issues relevant to children identified in this Productivity Commission Report. To ensure local appropriateness, for Indigenous communities and families, Local Evaluators, Facilitating Partners and Indigenous community representatives will be invited to comment on the list of proposed indicators. Following these consultations, the National Evaluators will seek to adapt the evaluation, including the Service User Study, to improve coverage of issues deemed relevant to the local area.

Where sample sizes are large enough, the indicators from the Outcomes Indicators Framework and Family Study will be disaggregated to show trends for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Data from the Family Study can also be analysed for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in each community, although numbers in any single community are likely to be small.

The methodology for the Family Study and the Service Users Study will also need to be adapted to be applied Indigenous communities, particularly in remote areas. This is because:

- The methodology requires a random or stratified sample of the community, and we need to interview at least 100 families in each sampled community. We estimate that we need a population of at least 500, 1 and 2 year olds to achieve this, and this is not possible in remote communities.
- The fieldwork may have to be undertaken at different times due to the necessity of negotiating access to the community and the families, and also because of practical issues relating to contacting the families etc.
- Interviews are conducted face-to-face on a one-to-one basis, but Indigenous families may prefer to respond in groups.
- Many of the CfC initiatives in remote Indigenous areas are not direct service providers but are much more focused on capacity-building.

It is recognised that this component of the evaluation may take longer than the rest of the study. This will be done in collaboration with Local Evaluators who are already engaged with Facilitating Partners.

Process evaluation

As well as adapting the outcome evaluation, the National Evaluation will also adapt the process evaluation, where appropriate, to be applied in Indigenous communities. For example, depending on advice from Local Evaluators and Facilitating Partners, Operational and Strategic Level Snapshots may need to be reviewed to reflect the service reality in some remote communities, where there may, for example, be a limited number of agencies active in the area.

Cost-effectiveness evaluation

In analysing the data collected from isolated Indigenous sites, the National Evaluation will recognise the impact of remoteness. For example, services are likely to be costlier to provide in remote areas, which will show up in the cost-effectiveness study. Further, the evaluation will also need to recognise that the strategies adopted by Facilitating Partners may be limited by the costs of travel and access to professional resources, constraining efficiency and effectiveness.