



December 2023

Indigenous Allied Health Australia submission to the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and First Nations Gender Justice Institute

Introduction

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) is committed to ensuring all aspects of research is grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, culture, languages, and experiences. IAHA's research and knowledge strategy is driven by shared values and principles that is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people leadership and one where the impact is derived from the aspirations and priorities of communities. This enables IAHA to undertake research that translates theory into effective policy, planning, and practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, utilising strategies that inform community and stakeholders of research outcomes.

IAHA is committed to ensuring that any work that IAHA engages with is spiritually, socially, culturally, emotionally, and physically safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Framework for Action and First Nations Gender and Justice Institute aligns with IAHA's strategic values through its significant focus on the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, gender justice, equity, and rights-based approaches, as well as its intent to measure change and increase accountability.

We commend the project for taking forward this work and are happy to provide the following comments for consideration about the ways in which the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Framework for Action may ensure the cultural safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to come together, share stories and translate lived experience into evidence, informing policy and decision-making and shifting systems toward cultural responsiveness.

1. Measuring change outcomes

1.1 What change do you want to see for First Nations women and girls, in all their diversity, with their families and communities, to live their lives in the way they want? What would you feel, see, hear, sense, or collectively understand if this change was happening?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are the leaders and matriarchs of Communities. IAHA would like to see a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are strengthened by culture, knowledge and belonging. A future where their stories and experiences are respected and valued within their families and communities. By hearing the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, IAHA would see an ongoing connection to self, spirit and place, and see a transformational change where health and wellbeing is culture-informed and strengths-based. IAHA believe this will be evidenced by increased confidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, in self, culture and in action, and through representation and voice across places and spaces.

While reaffirming what is intrinsically known by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, IAHA believe changes will be seen if the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework demonstrates the importance of culture to wellbeing, across the following areas of which are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls:

- Connection to Country
- Cultural Beliefs and Knowledge
- Language
- Family, Kinship and Community
- Cultural Expression and Continuity
- Self-determination and Leadership

These domains of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing have been identified and validated through the Mayi Kuwayu National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing, and the longitudinal nature of the MK Study should support efforts to understand change over time.

1.2 In your experience, what practices and approaches are most effective in collecting data, measuring, and evaluating change?

IAHA values interdisciplinary practice, including working with partners with diverse cultural, professional, and other knowledges for successful research collaborations. IAHA is committed to decolonising research processes to ensure research is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander standpoints, worldviews and research methodologies are acknowledged and implemented.

Alongside the IAHA Cultural Responsiveness in Action Framework – as a robust framework for cultural governance and accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – this ensures appropriate protocols for collecting, analysing, and translating data occurs. IAHA believes relationships and connection with individuals and communities are a crucial factor in establishing the priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to measure and evaluate change that will be of benefit to communities. Throughout the whole policy and program development lifecycle, from identification, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and continuous quality improvement, these voices and relationships need to remain central.

Some other key factors IAHA recognise are:

- Yarning to collect data and ensuring cultural responsiveness to support participation from diverse voices.
- Use of Indigenous research methodologies.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's leadership in all aspects of the research from design to data collection, analysis, and knowledge translation.
- Affirming Indigenous Cultural Intellectual Property rights.
- Establishment of research agreements that respect Community rights and protocols, including upholding Indigenous Data Sovereignty.
- Clarity and communication about anticipated usage, outcomes, benefits (and risks) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls, and the broader community.

The key research principles IAHA engage with are:

- *Culture is central*: To drive excellence through rigorous research that is culture focused. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership*: Led and driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- *Impact*: To conduct outstanding, multi-disciplinary research in allied health education, health and wellbeing outcomes and health workforce that makes a difference in addressing the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities.
- *Knowledge translation and sharing*: To undertake research that translates theory and research into effective policy and practice. Utilising strategies that inform community and stakeholders of research outcomes

Alignment with these principles, and an ongoing commitment to two-way knowledge sharing, to ensure that the work of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani continues to both be informed by the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and activate and support the advocacy of women girls, will be essential. As such, it is important that a strong narrative focus is retained throughout, centring the strengths, experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, as a counterpoint to the deficit and data driven nature of the Closing the Gap targets.

1.3 How do you want to see local change practices and data collection inform national priorities and achieve systemic outcomes, and how could this relate to the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality?

IAHA's strategic direction is developed with and guided by our membership. Our vision is underpinned by five strategic priority areas: supporting the current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce through providing professional, personal, and cultural supports, mentoring, and giving them a voice.

We can see the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework as an opportunity to collect culture-informed stories and experience from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls with sensitivity that follow individual and collective protocols. IAHA is committed to transformational change and would like to see the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls inform national priorities to ensure systems and local health services are accountable and responsible to needs and aspirations of communities.

The principles of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework should support new ways of working, centring the rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, to achieve better outcomes that centre culture and take an approach consistent with governments responsibilities under the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The existing voices and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, through the 2020 Wiyi Yani U Thangani Report provides a framework, particularly with goals and aspirations in areas such as education and employment.

The Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality could demonstrate a leadership role in the practical application of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the strategic priority areas, in particular priority four on shared access to data and information at a regional level. While independent of government the work should support power and knowledge sharing through the empowerment and leadership development of women and girls, both at the local and regional level and through national priority leadership and transformational, systemic change.

1.4 Do you have any additional thoughts, views or experiences about gender specific data and outcomes that could be included in the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and the First Nations Gender Justice Institute's work?

IAHA have no suggestions about specific data outcomes, except to reinforce the importance of culturally based metrics and priorities, including those which reflect the cultural roles and contributions of women and girls, and that this may also require consideration about the cultural and gender roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys as it relates to gender equity and the experiences of women and girls.

2. Ensuring a strong accountability and evaluation approach

2.1. Should government (and other stakeholders) be accountable to community determined outcomes? How can this be included in the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality?

IAHA firmly believes that to ensure a sustainable and culturally responsive outcome driven impact for individuals, families, and communities, it is a priority for governments and stakeholders to listen to and be accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's aspirations and priorities. Strong accountability should be seen as a positive, achieving better outcomes, building trust, and supporting truth telling.

This can be achieved – in part – through the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality by:

- Understanding the intersectionality of cultural obligations, professional obligations, cultural load, racism, and lateral violence.
- Developing resources that ensure accountability to the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and young girls.
- Implementing wrap around health services including allied health services to support the health and wellbeing of women and girls, as a foundation for individual, family, and community strength.
- Implementing culturally responsive supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to succeed in education, training and to enter the workforce, acknowledging that allied health, health, and education are areas with strong existing participation from women and girls, supporting equity.

2.2. What does the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and First Nations Gender Justice Institute need to do to incorporate diverse lived experiences and to ensure that no one misses out on opportunities to contribute to and hear this work?

The establishment of the First Nations Gender Justice Institute will require the development of a culturally, geographically, professionally diverse governance structure which also features a variety of ages, lived experiences and intersectional attributes. This could be supported by the development of appropriate mechanisms and forums to inform the work of the institute, such as ongoing community engagement and forums, advisory groups, Board sub-committees and other structures.

In doing so, the First Nations Gender Justice Institute would be encouraged to work differently to western systems, centring cultural ways of working, and ensuring that knowledges are appropriately recognised and valued, through reflection in the work and forward direction and how participants are supported, recognised, and remunerated (where appropriate) for their contributions. IAHA consider it

would be a positive outcome if the incorporation of diverse lived experiences and voices also facilitates exchange of ideas across diverse perspectives, for example by creating networks and linkages between young people and Elders and older people.

In recognition of the existence of effective, established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander forums, such as the National Health Leadership Forum, local and placed based initiatives, and cultural and Nation governance structures, IAHA suggests that the relationships with existing governance structures be explored and invested in first and foremost, and that the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are featured within these spaces.

IAHA believes by utilising these governance forums, the co-design of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework can be truly inclusive, collaborative, and informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and priorities, which empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to take a leading role in shaping their own future where they continue caring for children, family, community and Country and are at the forefront of driving economic and social change.

To achieve this, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and western governance structures need to be culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, and particularly those with intersectionality in the form of living with disability, diversity of gender expression or sexual orientation, lived experiences including experiences of trauma, or other forms of intersectionality.

2.3. We recognise that the process to implement change is just as important as achieving outcomes. How would you want to see implementation processes evaluated over time?

IAHA recognises that systemic change is required, as a process and as an outcome, to meet the needs and rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. Co-design in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in strong alignment with the principles behind the Strategic Priorities under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is essential, but there is a requirement for a commitment to action.

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* is an example of an approach that is strengths based, preventative and holistic and acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is fundamental to drive real action and change to achieve its vision, however it is also sadly an example where there has been a lack of commitment and follow through to action and process change.

IAHA believe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children are fundamental to determining whether the implementation process and project outcomes are aligned to their unique needs, aspirations, and priorities, and in alignment with understandings of cultural safety that they are solely placed to do so. Ways in which this could inform the evaluation process include:

- Determine engagement of and implementation of measures for cultural safety in a gender equity context, leveraging existing knowledge and understandings such as IAHA's Cultural Responsiveness in Action Framework.
- Use of Indigenous ways of knowing being and doing - to be embedded into evaluation, quality improvement and feedback processes.
- Evaluation of communication strategies and engagement based on cultural safety and responsiveness.
- Evaluation of engagement with a wide range of stakeholders specific and tailored to the unique needs of individuals and communities.

2.4. Do you have any additional thoughts, views or experiences about accountability practices that could be included in the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and the Institute's work?

IAHA believe reciprocity and responsibility is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. IAHA strongly advocate for research to be negotiated with communities and a research agreement implemented to ensure the sovereignty of individuals and collectives involved in the project as well as the wider community. It is also imperative that cultural responsiveness be core to the research plan and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' ICIP be respected and valued, including through development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce.

3. Protecting and strengthening data sovereignty and governance

3.1. What are your hopes and aspirations for what the First Nations Gender Justice Institute's database on First Nations women's and girl's lived experience and voices could look like? How can we ensure safe and considered access and use of the database?

IAHA are committed to ensuring the lived experiences and sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls is protected and maintained through appropriate cultural and intellectual property protocols. It is important that the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls is collected, validated, and maintained in culturally safe and responsive ways that is led and driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in line with established and emerging understandings of best practice. This includes Indigenous Data Sovereignty, with leadership on these topics available through organisations such as the Lowitja Institute, and the ability for women and girls to withdraw their own data at any point.

IAHA would recommend that supportive but robust processes are in place to facilitate and support access to data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, with dedicated points of contact within the Institute who can build capacity and provide support to community-based applicants. Alongside this, strict controls over data access for researchers should be implemented, acknowledging that research-based exploration of the data and experiences owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls could provide benefits to community, however there are risks associated and that some research is not conducted in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. The experiences of Professor Ray Lovett and the team at the Mayi Kuwayu Study, could be informative for the processes, fees, governance, and other related considerations involved in managing access to data.

IAHA would also encourage early consideration of the long-term view for the database, acknowledging that it may become a unique historical record and demonstrate the leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls in driving broader societal change and our shared future. As an important reflection of context and change over time, it will be beneficial to consider post collection / lifespan management with a generational view, acknowledging the aforementioned data considerations and protections.

3.2. How do we ensure that this living database is used and owned by First Nations women and girls?

To elevate the voices, strengths and knowledges of First Nations women and girls, IAHA stand with Wiyi Yani U Thangani in acknowledging that women in communities hold the solutions to drive transformative positive change. It's important that data sovereignty and Indigenous Cultural

Intellectual Property rights are embedded into the design of the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework. This could be addressed in the way of a research agreement that details the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities and the rights to hold stories and experiences as their own and/or from their ancestors.

3.3. How can the First Nations Gender Justice Institute support First Nations women and girls to access, contribute to and use the database? How can this help women and girls to make decisions about their own local priorities to measure what works on the ground?

IAHA strongly believe in partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to ensure localised aspirations and priorities are respected and valued. IAHA have a strong position on strengthening access to culturally responsive environments that enable voices to be heard, listened to, and implemented in ways that are of genuine benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to access, contribute to and use the Wiyi Yani U Thangani database, IAHA recommends:

- The development of genuine and culturally responsive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls as individuals and as a collective.
- Centring reciprocity and kinship.
- Ensuring accountability and responsibility to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls as well as their communities in recording their stories and experiences.
- Providing leadership opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to support the wider community in sharing their stories and experience.
- Provide mentoring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to access and use the database, including through a potential partnership with the Lowitja Institute or another suitably placed organisation who could link to further development of skills.
- Providing reliable and affordable technology and connectivity to ensure accessible access to digital resources i.e. databases.
- Leveraging relationships with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, such as Indigenous Allied Health Australia to connect with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.
- Developing resources to support translation of knowledge into action in different contexts, such as resources which empower young people as change leaders and advocates within their lives, schools, and communities.
- Demonstrating examples of previous actions to honour the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls who have contributed to the work, and examples of potential future change to support shared understandings.

3.4. Do you have any additional thoughts, views or experiences about strengthening data sovereignty and governance that could be included in the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Framework for Action for First Nations Gender Justice and Equality and First Nations Gender Justice Institute's work?

No further comments.