

RESEARCH PATHWAYS: INFORMATION SHEET SERIES

Evaluation and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI)



This information sheet may be useful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations who are interested in evaluation and CQI, thinking about being involved or have recently become involved in evaluation and CQI.

Program evaluation and continuous quality improvement are related to research and draw on the same range of methods. They each must follow ethical guidelines and respect Indigenous data governance and data sovereignty. They offer different ways to learn about, respond to and share information about the quality, value and impact of programs, projects, policies and services.

What is evaluation?

Evaluation of a program, project, policy or service is a systematic approach to assessing its design, implementation, and outcomes. The aim is to identify and understand the strengths, challenges, and areas for improvement.

There are common steps (below) for designing and conducting an evaluation of a program, project, service or policy:³

The overall intention is that the organisation or group in charge of the program, project, policy or service will act on the learnings and recommendations to build on strengths, address challenges and create improvements³.

1. Description



Describe the initiative in detail, including the goals, objectives and strategies.

2. Intended outcomes



Identify signs that will show the initiative is being run well and making a positive difference—often called indicators.

3. Linkages



Explain or show how the goals, objectives and strategies link to and can result in the intended outcomes.

4. Questions



Develop questions that look for evidence of the signs or indicators.

5. Methods



Decide which methods are the best for gathering data or information that answer the questions.

6. Collection



Put processes and procedures in place that allow the data or information to be collected.

7. Analysis



Apply agreed analysis processes to identify patterns and relationships that make sense of data.

8. Interpretation and recommendations



Identify the important meanings about the strengths and challenges—make recommendations for improvements.

Considerations for ethical and culturally safe evaluation

All the actions required for research to be ethical and culturally safe are equally important for evaluation and should be considered throughout every step of the evaluation process.

All evaluators, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous, need to respect and protect the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations involved. How the evaluation team will do this should be documented in an evaluation plan and agreed to by everyone involved. Co-designing an evaluation does not always require ethics approval. However, ethical approval is often required when conducting an evaluation. For more information, see the [Ethics information sheet](#).

Evaluation is more likely to be a culturally safe experience and create valuable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when it is:

- designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations
- focuses on the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations
- is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- is conducted consistent with the cultural values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.^{1,2}

What is Continuous Quality improvement?

NACCHO describes Continuous Quality Improvement or CQI as:

...part of a range of activities that support and improve quality in health care. CQI drives service improvements through continuous and repeated cycles of changes that are guided by teams, using data to identify areas for action, develop and test strategies, and implement service re-design. It works alongside accreditation, governance, monitoring and evaluation to improve health care and outcomes⁵ (p. 4).

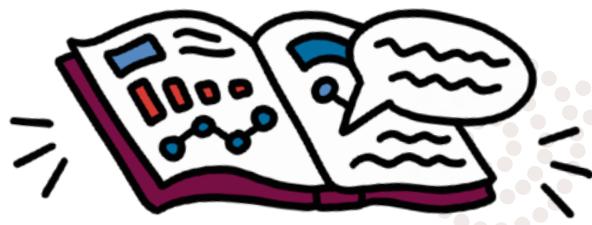
CQI is more likely to be effective when it is viewed as a regular and expected activity – “part of core business” – and done using approaches consistent with research and evaluation. This means that organisations regularly reflect on their own practices to ask and answer questions like:⁵

‘How are we doing?’

‘What problem are we trying to solve?’

‘Can we do it better?’

‘How will we know if it is better?’



Considerations for ethical and culturally safe continuous quality improvement

Although formal ethics approval is not required as a principle when conducting CQI, appropriate ethical frameworks should be followed when conducting CQI with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and Nations.

Like research and program evaluation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities should be actively engaged in CQI. This includes identifying priorities and developing policies and programs that lead to improved access, high quality and cultural safe care, positive experiences, and better health outcomes. Appropriate engagement has been noted as integral to the success of CQI project. Please see [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Participation in Research](#) information sheet for more information.

Want to know more about continuous quality improvement?

- Read the National Framework for Continuous Quality Improvement in Primary Health Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 2018-2023, which is designed to provide practical support for all primary healthcare organisations in their efforts to ensure that the health care they provide is high quality, safe, effective, responsive and culturally safe [here](#).

CQI should follow appropriate Indigenous data governance and data sovereignty principles. In CQI projects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or organisations are appropriately involved in decision making about indicators, data collection and analysis. Data collected in CQI projects should be relevant and meaningful to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and to local priorities and community needs. Please see [Data Governance and Sovereignty information sheet](#) for more information regarding data sovereignty and data governance. The Lowitja Institute [Indigenous Data Sovereignty \(ID-SOV\) Readiness Assessment and Evaluation Toolkit](#).

Want to know more about Evaluation?

- Read the principles of the [Indigenous Evaluation Strategy](#).
- Read the [The Evaluation Framework Users Guide](#) which provides a clear provision of the underlying principles that are needed throughout the program planning, design, implementation, and evaluation cycle. These principles have been identified as centrally important in underpinning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing programs.
- Read the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Evaluating the Outcomes of Programs for Indigenous Families and Communities [here](#).
- Read the Australian Institute of Family Studies' Evaluation and Innovation in Family Support Services [here](#).

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REFERENCES

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3. Muir, S. & Dean, A. 2017, [Evaluating the Outcomes of Programs for Indigenous Families and Communities](#), Australian Institute of Family Studies, Sydney.
4. Productivity Commission 2020, [Indigenous Evaluation Strategy](#), Australian Government, Canberra.
5. National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) 2018, [National Framework for Continuous Quality Improvement in Primary Health Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People 2018–2023](#), NACCHO, Canberra. Available at: [Lowitja Institute](#)
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