Support Systems

FOR INDIGENOUS PRIMARY HEALTHCARE SERVICES

Onemda
VicHealth Koori Health Unit

Project Update / December 09

BACKGROUND

The Support Systems for Indigenous Primary Health Care Services Project (the Support Systems project) aims to develop knowledge about how to support the corporate functions of Aboriginal community controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) and therefore to contribute to improving the viability and sustainability of ACCHOs across Australia. By corporate functions we mean the non-clinical aspects of a service - things like governance, management support, human resources, finances and legal services.

This project was identified as a priority project by the Board of the Cooperative Research Centre in Aboriginal Health (CRCAH) after consultation with ACCHOs and the sector. It is part of the CRCAH's Comprehensive Primary Health Care, Health Systems and Workforce Program.

The project has a reference group including representatives from the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory, the Victorian Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Aboriginal and Medical Council of NSW, the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia, the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Plan Health and the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. The project is being led by Professor Ian Anderson from the University of Melbourne and conducted by Kate Silburn (from La Trobe University) and Alister Thorpe (from University of Melbourne).

KEY QUESTIONS

What are the corporate support needs of ACCHOs, taking into account their different organisational capacity and contexts? What are the issues that need to be considered when considering corporate support?

How do ACCHOs access the corporate support they require (again taking into account the differences between ACCHOs)? What are the facilitators and barriers to accessing this support?
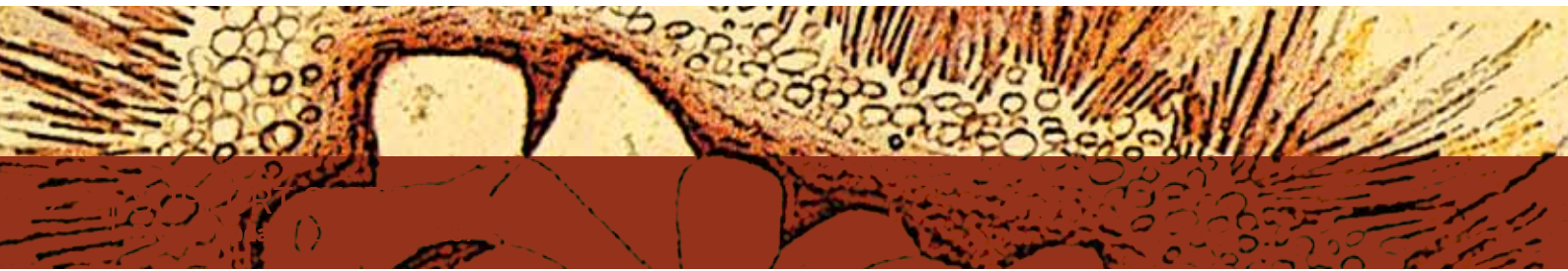
What organised support structures are required for the provision of adequate corporate support for organisations with different organisational capacity operating in different contexts?

ARTWORK
by Djye Morgan

NEWSLETTER DESIGN
by Inprint Design

WHY IS THIS PROJECT IMPORTANT?

ACCHO's are often the main (and sometimes the only) providers of heath care services to their local communities and in many cases are also significant providers of care to the wider community in which they are located. They are therefore an important part of the health system, particularly in providing and/or facilitating the delivery of culturally accessible and responsive services. ACCHOs are largely Board run, and vary considerably in scope, organisational composition and geographic location – ranging from large complex multifunctional services, employing doctors and other clinicians, in urban and regional settings to small remote clinics which may have some resident clinical staff and/ or rely on fly-in fly-out clinical support. They can have a very complex range of relationships with various stakeholders, including government, funders, local community, other service providers and politicians.

Achieving good corporate functioning can be difficult for ACCHO's in the environments in which they currently operate. Examples of the challenges faced by ACCHOs include:

- A complicated and constantly shifting political environment

- Managing high and sometimes competing demands from governments and communities

- Having many relatively small organisations providing a wide range of services with multiple funding sources (and an associated high administrative load)

- Resourcing that doesn't match demand for services nor provide appropriate funds for corporate functions

- Clients with complex needs

- Achieving effective community governance in such complex environments

- High demands from funders to participate in consultation.

- Tensions between mainstream public administration and government requirements and Aboriginal culture and values

- Recruiting, training & retaining workforce

- The challenges of service provision in geographically isolated locations (particularly in rural and remote areas)

ACCHOs are also constantly facing change as various initiatives are introduced. Some of these currently relevant to ACCHOs include:

- **The Council of Australian Government's (COAG) agenda to 'Close the gap'**

- **The recommendations of the Health and Hospitals Reform Commission**

- **Quality improvement & accreditation work**

- **A range of state and territory initiatives to improve service delivery systems and promote good practice healthcare across the prevention – treatment continuum. This includes regionalisation in some jurisdictions and establishment of partnership approaches in others.**

These, and other agendas, have meant that many ACCHOs experience (or are likely to experience in the future) a range of types of transitions. These might include:

- Moving from operating as individual organisations to regionalised structures

- Expanding rapidly from being a small service to becoming a large service

- Working in organised partnerships with other organisations

- Taking over control of service provision from government run services operating in Aboriginal communities.

Organising for these kinds of changes can put many pressures on already overburdened organisations, including on the corporate area. Often this area can be overlooked as the focus tends to be on expansion and improvement of direct services and not on the behind the scenes work required to maintain the service itself.

This project is important as it is looking at the types of corporate support required by ACCHOs, the ways this support is currently provided and also considering how such support might be made more widely available in the future. This work is not about identifying a "one-size fits all approach", but rather is about describing and learning from a range of approaches used in different contexts and by different types of services.

WHAT WE ARE DOING NOW

The project is being conducted in two phases. In the first phase which was completed in 2008 we:

- Did a limited national consultation focusing on support needs, factors influencing support needs and the kinds of support services have access to. The consultation was with staff of some affiliates, CEOs of a small number of ACCHOs, government officers (including from OATSIH) and a researcher.

- Looked at the literature and on the web for existing information about building capacity in Indigenous services, issues of doing this for a range of corporate functions, what types of corporate support are currently provided and how this is done.

- These findings were presented in a discussion paper and a national roundtable was held to review them and discuss the key questions and approach for phase two of the project.

- Established the reference group

In the second phase of the project, which we are currently working on, we are doing case studies of five different models ACCHOs use or have developed for getting corporate support. Participants at the national roundtable and the project Steering Group identified several ACCHOs or groups of services with corporate support systems in place. These services were invited to be included as one of the case studies as part of our project.

The intent of the case studies is to identify existing good practice in the provision of corporate support, to identify the issues experienced when establishing and implementing such support as well as to seek information about what else could be done to enhance provision of such support. Some of the key areas focused on in the case studies include history and development of the model, its governance, organisation of the support structure, relationships between organisations getting support and those providing support, funding required and the support provided.

When the case studies are finalised they will be included in a draft summary report that also provides an analysis of key themes and learnings derived from all of the case studies. This report will be discussed at a second national roundtable where recommendations for the future development of corporate support will also be discussed.
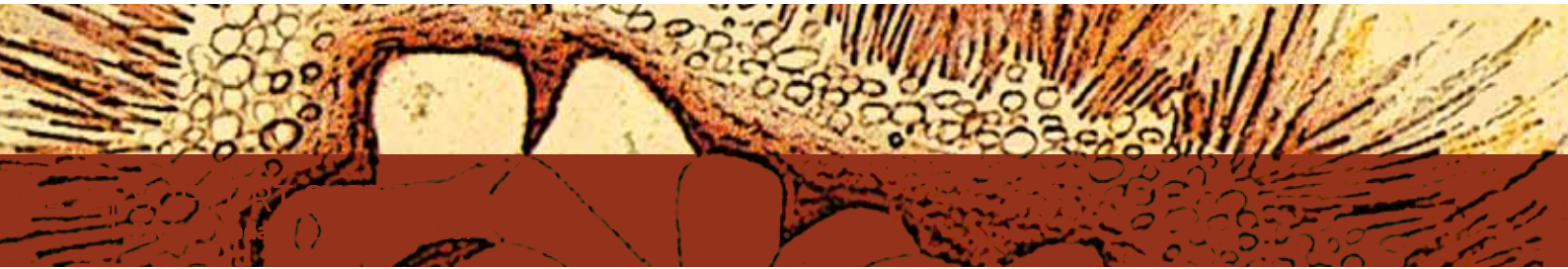
WHAT WE HAVE FOUND SO FAR

Key areas of corporate support

There are a range of key areas where organisations might need corporate support – and different organisations will need different mixes of support. These include in:

- Governance

- Human resource management

- Financial management

- Management and service development

- Planning (including regional, strategic, operational, risk management)

- Administration and internal systems development

- Legal (including contracts and industrial relations)

- Information technology, Information management and telecommunications

- Community engagement

- Staff and community capacity development

- Public affairs, media and marketing

- Research (and building capacity to direct and/or get the most out of research)

- Broader sector development.

Clearly, within each of these areas, there will be elements where advice and services can be obtained from external providers, and also elements that need to be undertaken by the ACCHO. For example, in the human resource management function of recruitment, an external provider with relevant expertise may be able to assist with position descriptions, recruitment processes and advertising, but the final recruitment decisions are likely to need to be made by the organisation. Similarly in finance, an accountant may need to do the high level technical aspects of the work and may also support a finance worker within an ACCHO who collects and collates financial information.

Factors influencing the support required

There are many factors that influence the type of corporate support that services may need and how this support is provided. These are also determining factors for services if they want to identify opportunities for partnerships around support or implement a different way receiving or providing support. These factors can be grouped into four main areas:

1.   The broader environment in which services operate

Factors include: the reform processes being implemented, specific jurisdictional issues, the way the sector is funded and associated administrative complexity, sector and organisational growth and the other services that exist within a region (both other ACCHOs and mainstream organisations).

2.   Organisational factors

Obviously there are a range of organisational factors that will influence both the support required and the ways this support might be obtained. These include: organisational type, size and complexity; location and whether there are multiple sites; capacity within the organisation and organisational approach to capacity building; the particular reporting, compliance and accountabilities of each organisation (including legal, corporate, community and cultural); the organisation's relationship with government and other funders; the uniqueness of systems in some organisations; and whether the organisation is also a support provider to others.

3.   Workforce

Workforce availability and the capacity of organisations to attract and retain staff is clearly a factor that will determine the support the organisation might need to obtain from external sources. Corporate memory is often lost in organisations with high staff turnover, potentially creating a need for ongoing support.

4.   Community

Community capacity to participate and community expectations about local services are critical aspects of community controlled services. Communities might need support to enable them to participate actively in decision making.
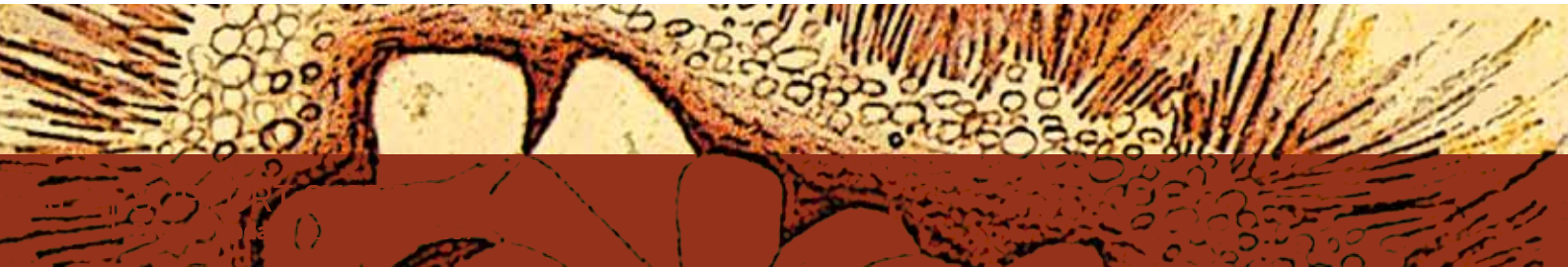
CORPORATE SUPPORT MODELS

HOW DO ACCHOS CURRENTLY OBTAIN CORPORATE SUPPORT

There are a range of models being used by services to get corporate support, with some services already developing models to get the best out of their resources and services. These are represented in the following diagrams. Many organisations will access more than one of these kinds of support.
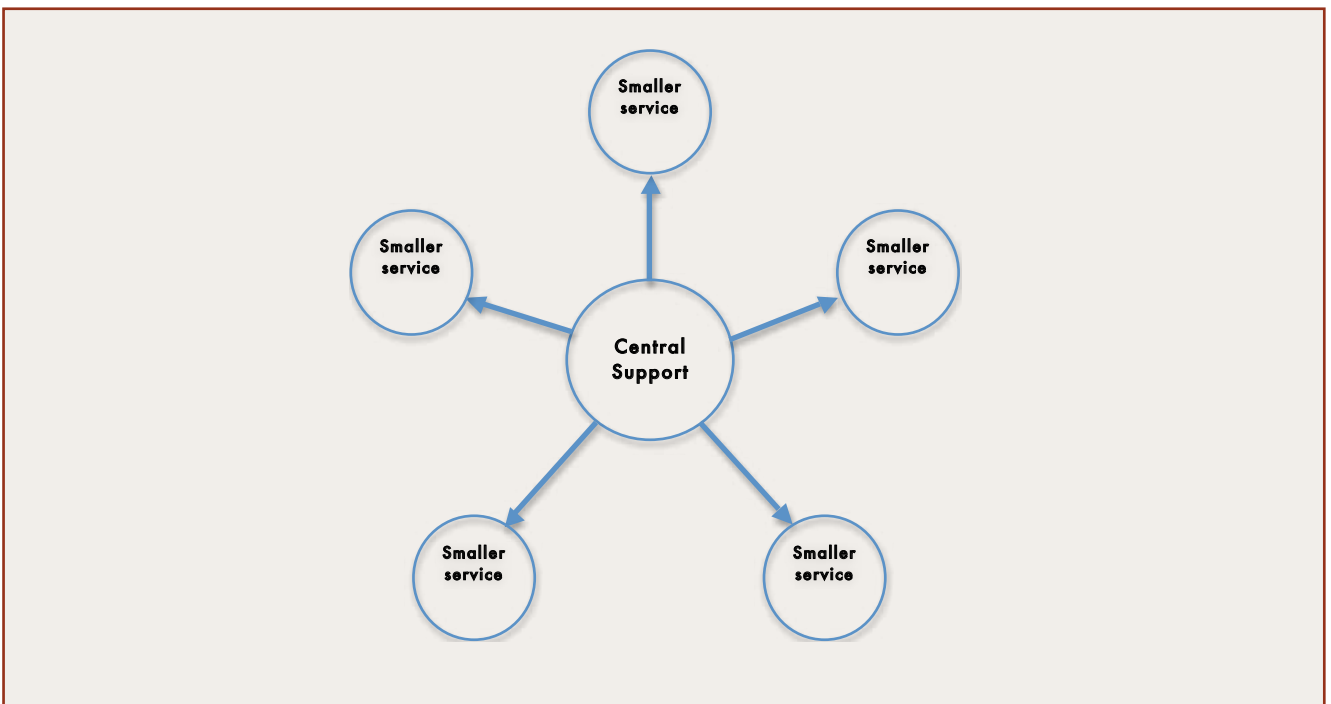
Peer support network - A group of organisations providing support to each other
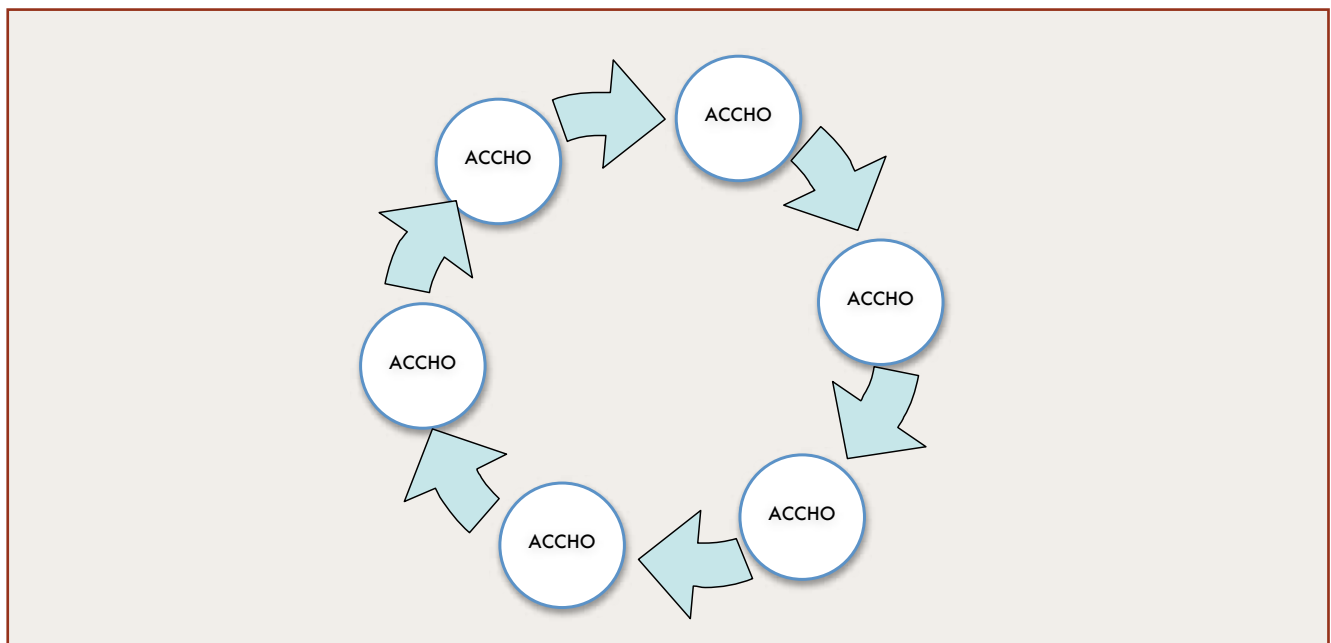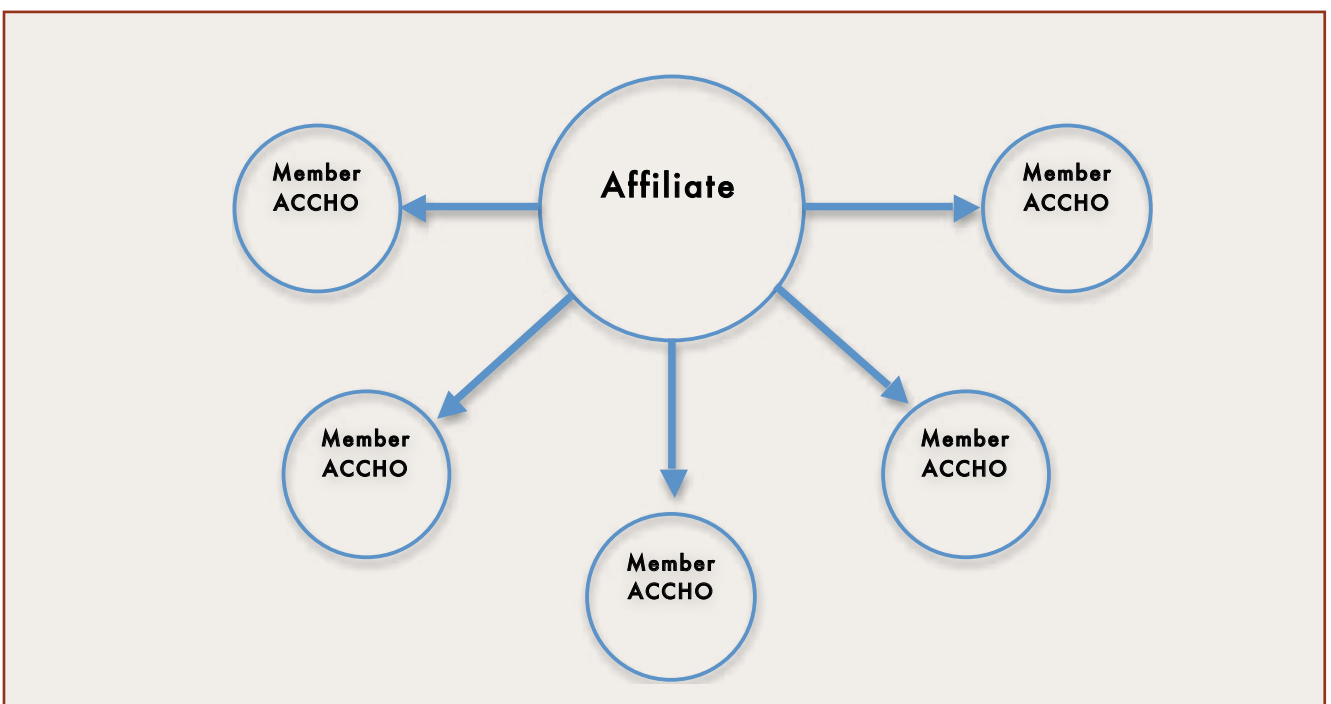

Affiliate Brokerage - Affiliate brokers support between their members and private provider
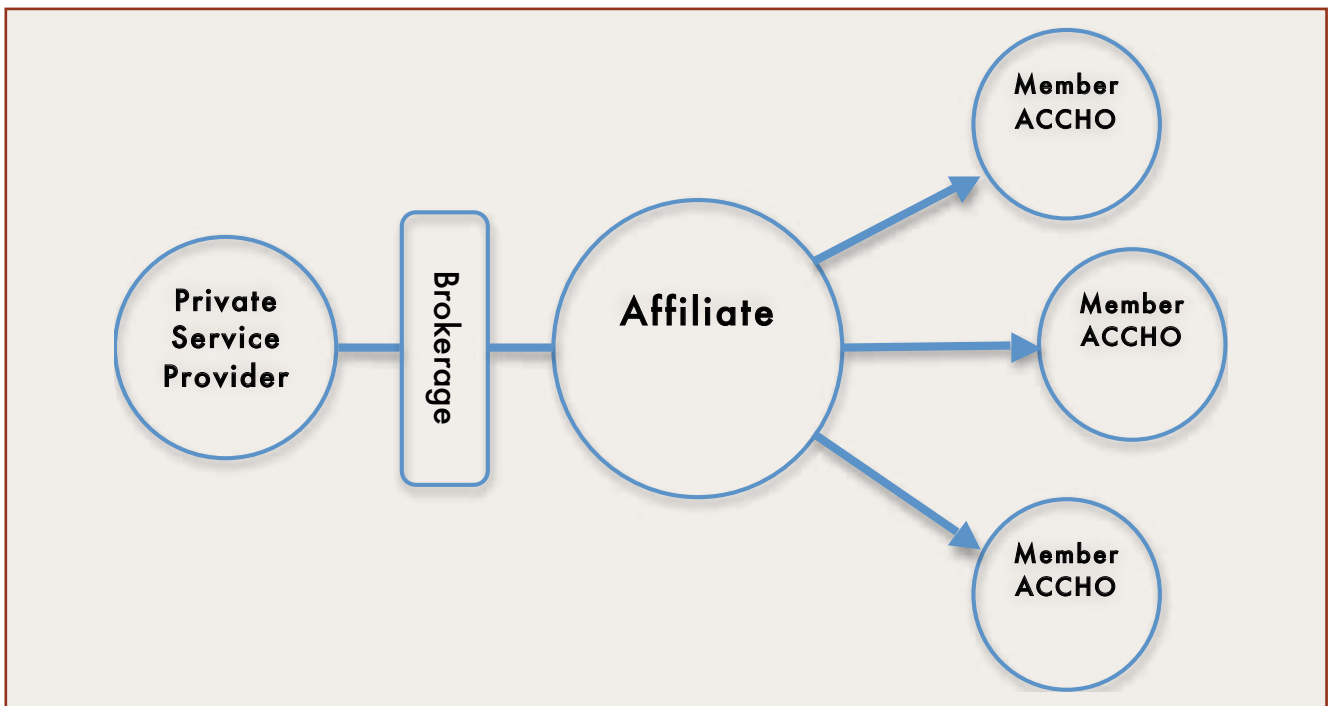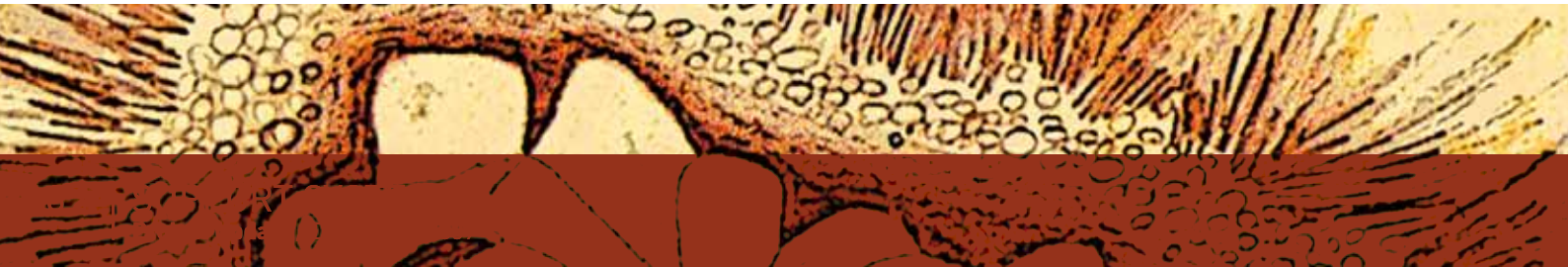
Centralised support - Support provided centrally/regionally - there is many variations of this type of model
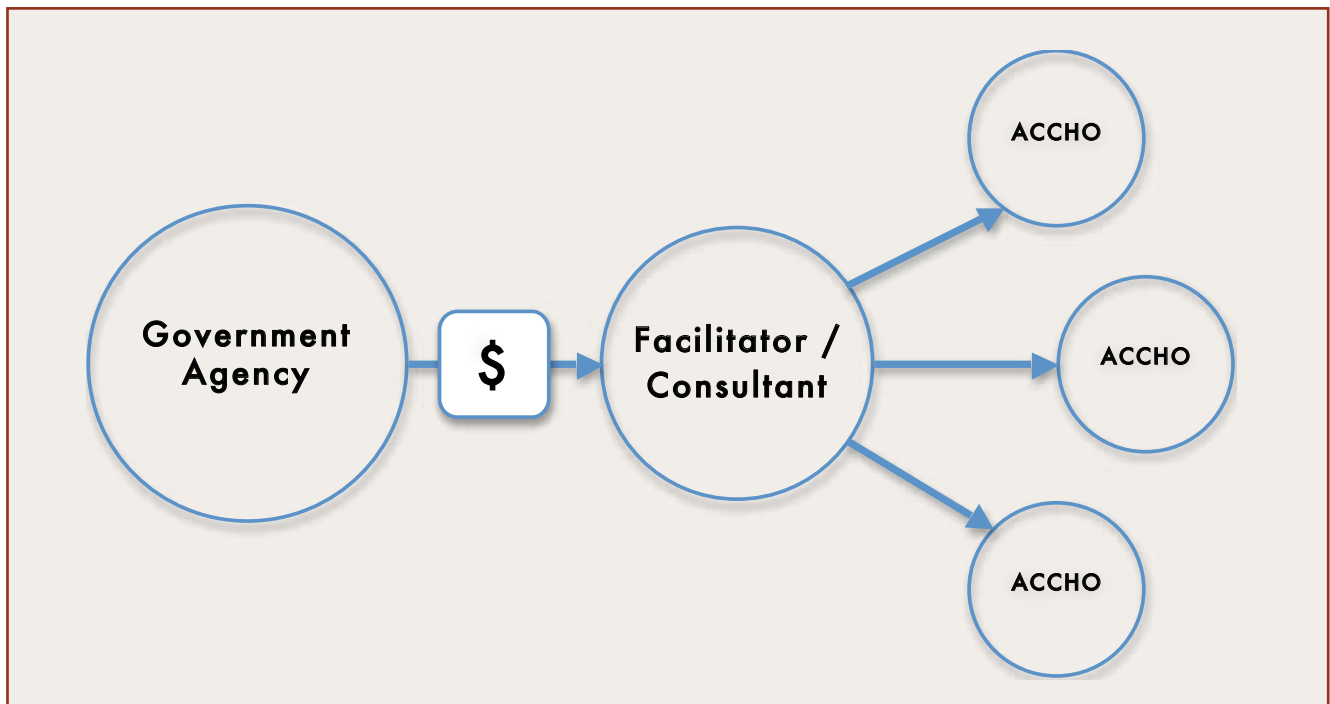

Affiliate Support - Affiliate provides direct support to its members

Our case studies are looking at example models of **Organisation-owned Shared Service Unit, Centralised Support, Affiliate Support, Peer Support Network and Direct Support.**
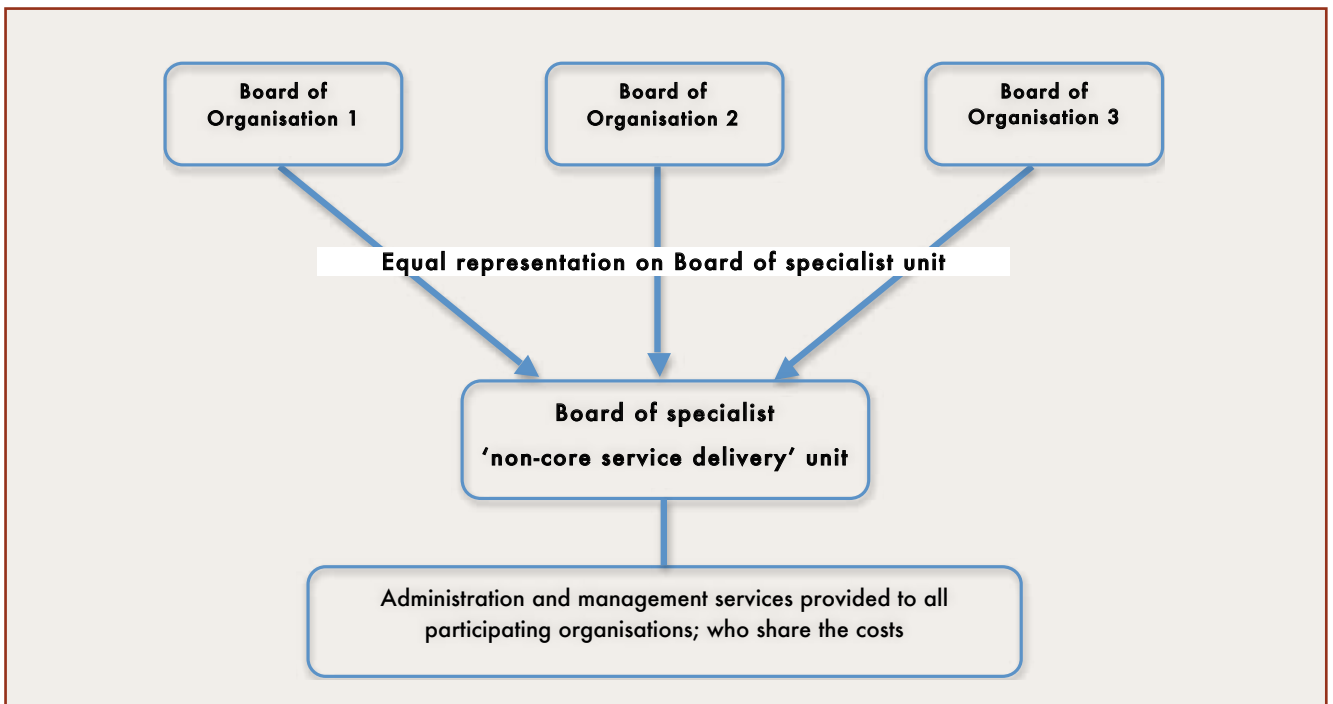
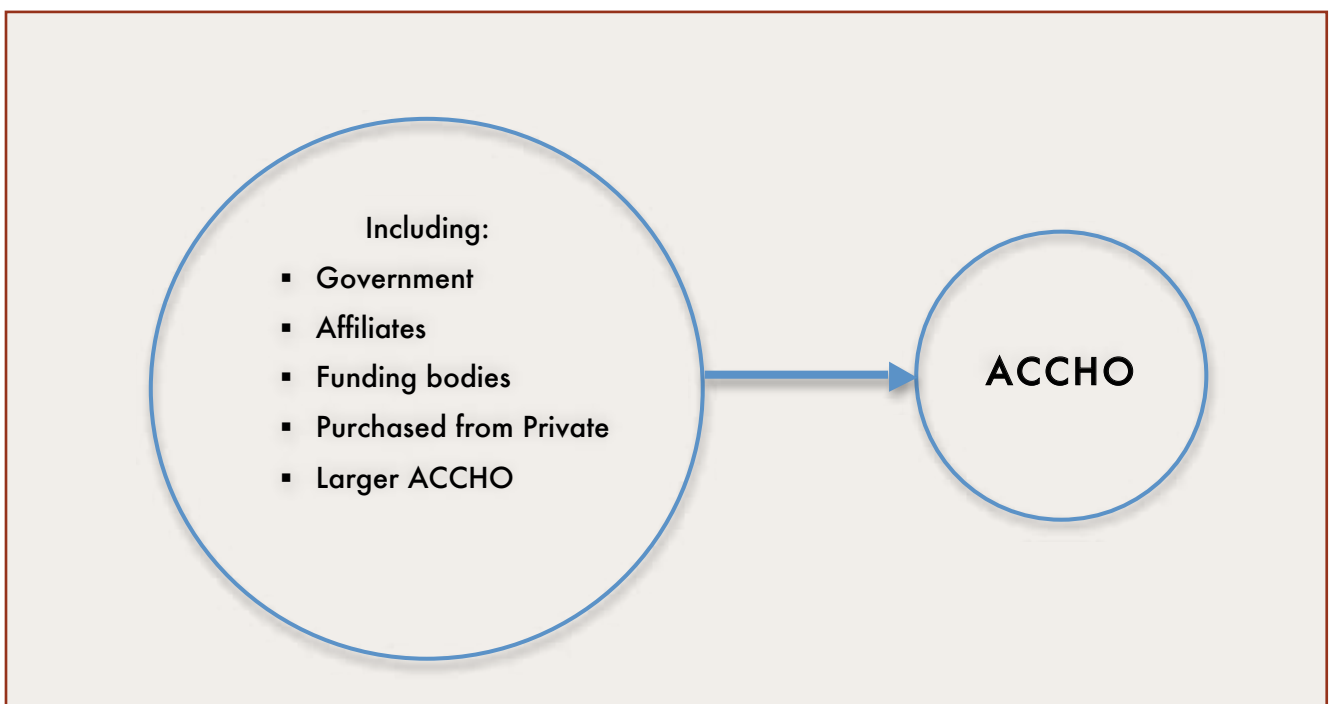Government funded facilitator/consultant - Government funds a facilitator to provide support

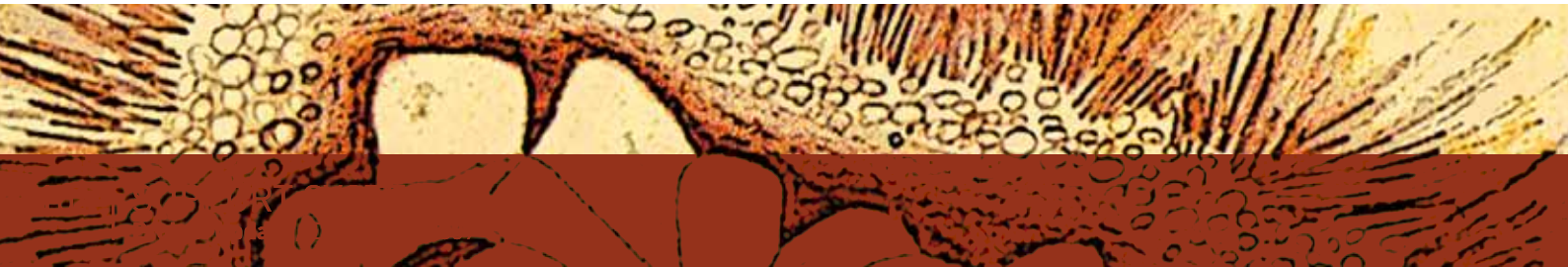Joint outsourcing to the private sector
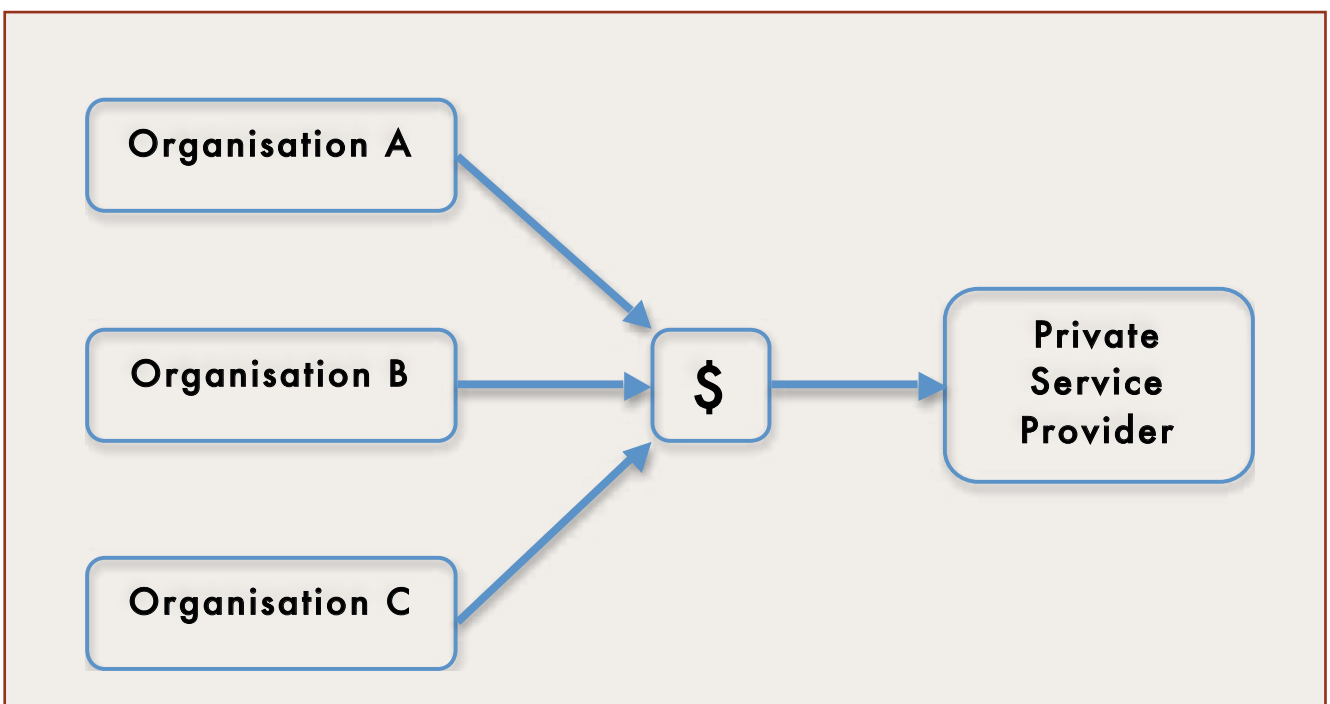
Organisation-owned Shared service unit - A group of organisations have equal representation on the Board of a Specialist Corporate Support Unit

```
┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐      ┌──────────────┐
│  Board of    │      │  Board of    │      │  Board of    │
│Organisation 1│      │Organisation 2│      │Organisation 3│
└──────────────┘      └──────────────┘      └──────────────┘
        ╲                    │                    ╱
         ╲     Equal representation on Board of specialist unit
          ╲                  │                  ╱
           ↘                 ↓                ↙
              ┌──────────────────────────────┐
              │     Board of specialist      │
              │ 'non-core service delivery' unit │
              └──────────────────────────────┘
                             │
                             ↓
              ┌──────────────────────────────┐
              │ Administration and management services provided to all │
              │  participating organisations; who share the costs     │
              └──────────────────────────────┘
```

Direct Support

```
      ╭────────────────────────╮
     ╱   Including:             ╲
    │   ▪ Government             │              ╭──────────╮
    │   ▪ Affiliates            │──────────▶  │  ACCHO   │
    │   ▪ Funding bodies         │              ╰──────────╯
    │   ▪ Purchased from Private │
     ╲  ▪ Larger ACCHO          ╱
      ╰────────────────────────╯
```
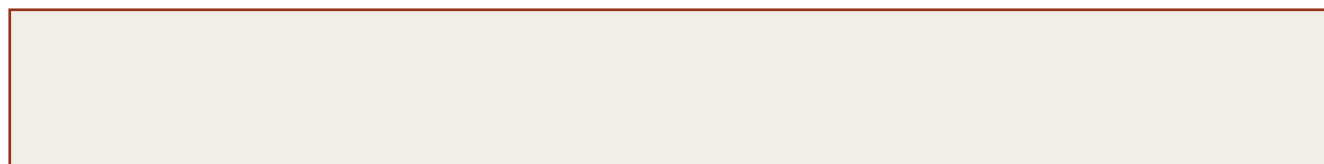
WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGES OF WORKING IN JOINT MODELS?

A range of reasons for, and advantages of developing shared corporate services or models have been identified. These include: achieving economies of scale; reducing duplication of effort; building capacity to increase revenue generation; providing support for small and/or emerging organisations; facilitating enhanced business practices and improved effectiveness across organisations; enabling identification of, and responses to, issues common to a number of services; potential for coordination of workforce (and workforce strategies); enabling the ACCHO to focus on providing comprehensive primary healthcare; and facilitation of access to high quality specialist advice.

A range of risk factors of developing shared corporate services or models have also been identified. These include: potential for loss of local community ownership and disempowerment of communities in decision making; making decisions about who holds the funds, how boundaries are determined and how equity is maintained – particularly when different organisations will have different levels of capacity and need; fear that making savings will provide funders with opportunities to reduce funding; marginalisation of organisations who are not members of the shared support model; and that members may opt out.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE POTENTIAL RISKS OF WORKING IN JOINT MODELS.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

We are currently completing the case studies. A second national roundtable will be held on the 18 and 19th of March 2010 in Melbourne to discuss the findings and begin developing recommendations. If you or your organisation are interested in attending this roundtable could you please contact Alister Thorpe (contact details below).

Meaning of artwork – Djye Morgan

The Rainbow Serpent is one of the Dreamtime creators. The Rainbow Serpent is one of the few Dreamtime stories told in many languages across Australia.

In the Dreaming the world was flat and empty. The rainbow Serpent lay sleeping under the ground. When it was time, she pushed herself up, with all the animals in her belly waiting to be born. Calling to the animals to come from their sleep she threw the land out, making mountains and hills and spilled water over the land, making rivers and lakes. She made the fire and the sun and all the colours. The serpent or snake plays an important role in every culture, sometimes as the Creators or Source of everything other times as the giver of knowledge, sexual energy, spiritual awakener or source of evil. Not only does it connect Aboriginal tribes, it also unites people of all different cultures and walks of life throughout the world.

(http:rainbowserpent.net/background/philosophy/)

Contact Information

Ms Kate Silburn on (03) 9479 3514 or email k.silburn@latrobe.edu.au

Mr Alister Thorpe on (03) 8344 0640 or email ahthorpe@unimelb.edu.au

LA TROBE UNIVERSITY

Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR PRIMARY CARE