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*Incorporating the Cooperative Research Centre
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Improving implementation planning: Assessment of Innovation Tool

A draft tool to help assess the applicability and feasibility of new products, programs or innovations, and to consider what is required if these products, programs or innovations are to be effectively implemented in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care

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Assessment of Readiness for Implementation (Products)

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This tool is designed to assist with planning for the widespread and sustainable implementation of innovations in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care. It can be used to: assess how suitable an innovation may be for use; inform planning for implementation; or anticipate potential problems that might arise during implementation. This tool should be used with a companion tool designed to look at the context or setting into which the innovation might be introduced.

What is an innovation?

The World Health Organization has defined an innovation as ‘components of a service, other practices or products that are new or perceived as new’. Typically an innovation consists of a set of interventions, which might include new technology, clinical practice, education and training or community-based initiatives (WHO/ExpandNet 2010).

Evidence base

There is now a lot of evidence from many settings and disciplines about the factors that can influence the likelihood of the successful implementation of an innovation. Common to almost all the evidence about implementation is the identification of at least three dimensions that must be considered:

1. The nature of the innovation and how it is seen by those who might apply it
2. The context or setting for implementation
3. The facilitative processes that support implementation of the innovation

This tool deals with the first of those three dimensions: the nature of the innovation.

The tool

This tool contains two parts. Part A provides a ‘quick and dirty’ assessment of the process and state of development of an innovation, the evidence underpinning it, and its potential to address an identified need. Part A is useful for program managers, NGOs or health service managers to: make an initial assessment about the potential adoption of an innovation; determine the value of investing further time or money; and consider in more detail how it might be implemented into practice.

Part B provides a more extensive list of questions about the innovation which can be used to inform or adapt strategies for implementation, avoid potential pitfalls, and reduce the level of resource wastage and frustration for those involved.

Part A: Initial assessment

The nature of the innovation

Be clear about what the innovation is. It can be helpful to think about it as if it is a 'product' or set of products that make up a package, even if the innovation is primarily know-how, a way of doing something better or an operational system.

There is also evidence that innovations that can be adapted to suit different settings are more likely to achieve successful and widespread implementation.

What need does the innovation address? Will it help someone do their work more efficiently, less dangerously, or to a higher standard of quality? Will it improve health outcomes or address the social determinants of health? Is there a recognised demand for it? Has it been developed in response to priorities identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or other end-users?

What is the evidence base for the innovation? How is it perceived by those who might put it into practice? How credible is it? Is there evidence to support its application in practice? Has it been developed with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or other potential end-users?

How effective is the innovation? How much impact might it make? Will the potential impact outweigh the time and money to implement the innovation?

Rate the nature of the innovation on the scales below (Table 1). There is no clear cut numerical rating that will help you decide whether to proceed with the innovation or not. However if the innovation is low on all three scales it would be wise to question the viability for implementation at this stage, its applicability to the proposed setting, or to consider the work that might be needed to develop the innovation further.

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Table 1: Assessment of key features of the innovation

<p>Need</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Need for the innovation is not widely recognised, or not clearly articulated</p> <p>There is no recognised need for the innovation in the proposed setting</p>	<p>High</p> <p>The function of the innovation is clearly articulated</p> <p>There is a recognised need by implementers in the proposed setting for a solution which this innovation addresses</p>
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>Evidence base about the innovation is limited or of poor quality</p> <p>Expert opinion is split about the merits of the innovation</p> <p>The innovation has not been widely trialled in relevant contexts</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were not involved in the development of the innovation</p>	<p>High</p> <p>Evidence about the innovation is strong and broadly based</p> <p>There is widespread agreement about the merits of the innovation</p> <p>There is evidence of the innovation’s sustainable implementation in relevant contexts</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were involved throughout the development of the innovation</p>
<p>Effectiveness</p>	<p>Low</p> <p>The innovation is likely to make only a small impact (limited impact on health or quality of life for example)</p> <p>The cost and effort of implementing the innovation will be extremely high (for health care providers or patients) compared to limited potential benefit</p>	<p>High</p> <p>The innovation can potentially make significant improvements in health outcomes for many people</p> <p>The potential impact of the innovation far outweighs the potential costs to health care providers or patients</p>

Part B: Detailed assessment

To avoid wasting money and effort, we need to address some key questions that help us to know the strengths, weaknesses and viabilities of an innovation that is being considered for implementation. These questions include:

1. Are there any existing similar products?
2. What are the characteristics of the product or service?
3. Is it technically feasible?
4. Is it viable and sustainable?

This tool takes you through each of these domains with a series of questions to help you assess the viability and sustainability of the product or service under consideration. Not all questions will be relevant to all innovations. The tool is adapted from content within the Australian Institute for Commercialisation's Innovation Toolbox. This is only the third draft of this part of the tool, so detailed feedback will be greatly appreciated.

Domain 1: Are there any existing similar products?

In the commercial terms this would often take the form of a patent search or search of registered intellectual property. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care context, more relevant questions may include:

	Question	Comments
Domain 1: Similar products	Are there any similar products or processes in use in or in development in related areas of work?	Try to avoid re-inventing the wheel if you can. Similar processes, know-how or products may already be in use in the context in which the innovation will be implemented, but may be called different things. Integration of innovations into existing workflow and practice helps them become embedded. (On the other hand, if similar innovations have been introduced in other contexts, you may be able to learn from those experiences.)
	What is the innovation's 'competitive advantage'? Why would you want to use this innovation? Does it meet a need that the organisation has identified as strategically important?	What makes this innovation important/worth implementing? Why would people want to change what they're already doing in order to use this innovation? Reasons might include: the change will bring better health outcomes or quality of life; improved quality of care; greater efficiency; cost less; be less stressful for patients or staff; reduce waiting times etc. If there is already demand to use the innovation, the reasons people give for wanting to use it will help identify the 'competitive advantage'.

Domain 2: Characteristics of the innovation

	Question	Comments
Domain 2: Characteristics of the innovation	What is the innovation?	By this stage, you should be very clear about what the innovation is (or the range of things that it might include). How people speak about the innovation will have a significant influence on its implementation.
	What is the evidence base behind the product/service? How credibly is the innovation viewed? How is it valued and by whom?	You should already have answered this question at least superficially. How people talk about the credibility and evidence base for the innovation is highly influential in how an innovation becomes widely used, so thinking about how to communicate these ideas is important. Evidence might exist in a number of forms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research/testing evidence about the effectiveness of the innovation • Expert opinion • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other end-user involvement in the development and/or trial of the innovation • Evidence about the implementation of the innovation
	Who will make the decision about implementation of the innovation?	The history and ongoing experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities of having policies and programs imposed on them by government authorities makes the issue of agency in deciding to adopt an innovation a critical step in the implementation process. The practicalities of how decision making about adopting an innovation occurs is an important consideration for implementation.
	How might the innovation actually be used by stakeholders, customers, or clients?	This sounds a simple question but is in fact very complex, particularly when innovations are emerging from research projects. An innovation developed through independent research will usually require some transformation before it can be packaged into an innovation that can be applied in the broader context. Questions to be considered include: How will potential users <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out about • Access • Learn skills in • Be supported to implement and use • Refresh their knowledge or supplies of the innovation?
	Is the innovation socially and culturally appropriate to the context for implementation?	Was there Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or other end-user involvement in the development and/or trial of the innovation? Does the innovation fit well with both the external and internal settings into which it is proposed for use? For example, introducing uni-sex toilets in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander health centres would not be at all acceptable in cultural and social terms.

	Question	Comments
	Is the use of the innovation reliant on other products/services?	If dependent on linkages you can't control, this may be a significant weakness. On the other hand, integration with existing systems can be a benefit and make routine use of the innovation easier.
	Is the innovation able to be adapted to suit the needs of clients or changing environments?	<p>In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, adaptability to local contexts can be an important part of an innovation's appeal and success.</p> <p>To enable implementers to make well-informed choices about innovations, it is useful to clarify the evidence-based core or principles of an innovation, and provide advice about those parts of the innovation that can be modified without reducing its effectiveness below acceptable levels.</p>
	Can potential users try out some aspects of the innovation without taking on the whole thing?	Incremental implementation can be both appealing and more sustainable in the long term.

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Domain 3: Technical feasibility

These questions are most relevant for those planning to take an innovation from small scale, research or pilot usage to a broader level of implementation – rather than for those intending to take up the use of the innovation.

	Question	Comments
Domain 3: Technical feasibility	Does the innovation really do what it purports to?	Does it work? Does it work well? Is it difficult to use? Test it out on some potential users of the innovation.
	Are the conditions required for use of the innovation available and feasible? If not, but implementation goes ahead, what needs to be done to enable its use?	For example, technology innovations in remote areas need to be very reliable as maintenance and repairs could be very expensive and difficult to secure. Can the innovation be put into use immediately by users/customers, or do they require additional training, infrastructure, funding, etc. to use it?
	What are the precise steps in the pathway from the current state of the innovation and its widespread implementation?	Draw/map an innovation to implementation pathway with details about each of the steps required and what support will be needed at each. For example, if the innovation includes training, developmental steps needed may include: needs analysis; curriculum development; resource development; accreditation, licensing or registration processes; educational design work; securing distribution networks, etc.
	Do you have the marketing, technical, financial, operational and management competencies required to take the innovation to a state of readiness for implementation?	Draw on specialist skills where needed. Implementation 'on the cheap' will cost you more in the long run.

Domain 4: Viability

The issue of viability is equally or even more important in public good settings as in commercial settings. Implementing an innovation will involve costs, either in time or money. Those costs need to be covered. The costs might be met through additional funding, savings, or by no longer doing something else – but they will need to be met somehow.

	Question	Comments
Domain 4: Viability	What will it cost to implement the innovation and how will these costs be met?	<p>Costs may be incurred in a number of ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation costs might include rolling out a program, facilitative support, training, new tools or resources. • Ongoing costs may include retraining/orientation for new staff; update of equipment or resources; networking to share learning; monitoring and evaluation to measure the effect of the innovation. <p>Finding ways to meet the costs of implementation in public good settings such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health can be a lengthy process and may involve lobbying, changes to policy and programs or even legislation.</p>
	How will the implementation and effectiveness of the innovation be monitored and measured? What will success look like?	Monitoring progress and measuring outcomes are essential to know whether the costs and effort of introducing an innovation have been worthwhile. Measures should be those that reflect what has been intended with the innovation.
	How sustainable is the implementation of the innovation?	While being able to ‘try before you buy’ can be attractive, there is a high level of scepticism in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts about yet another pilot program that is funded once and never again. Finding ways to ensure that innovations can continue to be applied and become part of normal practice is very important in assessing the long term viability of an innovation.