



Evidence check tool: Assessing effectiveness from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives

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Overview

This is a tool designed to assess, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, evidence published in research and program reports about effectiveness.

Rationale

In an evidence check about effectiveness, evidence from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives is essential, or the research and evidence is not valid.

Western science checks for levels of evidence generally have not included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's worldviews, cultural concepts, protocols or rights.

If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspective are not used in evidence checks, risks arise including perpetuation of bias, deficit discourse, inequity and gaps, failure in integrity and principles, and human rights breaches.

Ethics requirements

Human Research Ethics Committees are to assess and approve research according to clear guidelines. These include research on, with, or of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Ethics guidelines extend to research reportage and translation. That is, the publications arising from research, that are in turn used as evidence and in evidence checks.

Ethics guidelines should be explained or discernible in research outputs.

If the required ethics guidelines are not discernible for, about, or by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the results cannot be considered as safe, quality, reliable or valid.

This tool

This tool is specific to assessing evidence about effectiveness – effectiveness of programs, policies, processes and protocols. It is a tool for use when considering the likelihood that selected evidence is effective at conveying Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives. It is a tool to check for ethical conduct, quality reportage and cultural validity as well as other features of effectiveness.

Resources informing the tool are in the appendix.



Themes in evidence to check for and assess

Theme 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' authorship and data sovereignty

Theme 2: Evidence about and for cultural safety

Theme 3: Evidence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Theme 4: Evidence about values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Theme 5: Evidence about multi-level empowerment

Theme 6: Evidence about professional standards.

Each of these themes is scored separately – see below.

Using the tool

This tool is designed for people of any culture to use, not only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is that way because its themes and lists of characteristics are by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Using and meeting these are essential for research to effectively convey meanings from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives.

This is a tool for checking, and is not about interpreting information from a cultural perspective as such.

Discernment is needed when rating; discernment requires honesty supported by a rationale. This is about integrity – a stated principle of and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, researchers and cultures.

Keep field notes about your critically self-reflective thoughts, feelings, instincts, responses and actions, as well as your rationale for rating, and points for discussion with colleagues.

The overall question is: "Is the sub-theme evident, and to what extent?"

Doing the rating

The person doing the rating is tasked with matching the text in the research item/s to the themes and sub-themes (characteristics) in the lists.

For each theme, and sub-theme in the lists, think through:

1. Quality
2. Potential for impact
3. Generalisability for each of the research items.

Quality, impact and generalisability are common research terms.

You might choose to define these from your team, discipline and project's perspective and context.

Some suggestions are:

1. Quality: Does it adhere to ethical guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research?
2. Potential for impact: Are there findings that suggest how to make healthy progress according to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols?

3. Generalisability: To what extent could other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous populations and collaborators use the research to inform their progress?

Choosing a number

For each of the selected research items, give a rating against each of the characteristics in each of the theme lists and sub-themes in the table below.

For each selected item, rate quality, potential for impact and generalisability as follows:

- 0 = none
- 1 = low
- 2 = medium
- 3 = high

Then add the numbers going across to give an overall score for that research item. Then add the scores in the overall column to get a score per theme.

Tool questions

Theme 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' authorship and data sovereignty

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Research was co-designed or led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and/or organisations				
Stakeholder engagement identified				
Employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people				
Governance by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people				
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people analysed data				
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authored the research output				
Approval of research outputs granted by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.				
Score				

Theme 2: Evidence about and for cultural safety

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Definition included, with references and rationale				
Implications for cultural safety identified.				

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Score				

Theme 3: Evidence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Community protocols identifiable				
Concepts of cultures respectfully named and discussed – strengths-based not deficit				
Spiritual concepts named				
Information provided for cultural continuity				
Traditional and contemporary knowledges used				
Priorities, needs and aspirations of Elders and leaders identified.				
Score				

Theme 4: Evidence about values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Reciprocity in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, organisations and communities				
Responsibility taken for implications of the research – not research for research sake				
Integrity between needs for research, benefits and implications.				
Score				

Theme 5: Evidence about multi-level empowerment

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Data interpreted and meanings reported about levels of a sociological model of health reflecting the holistic definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing including about individuals, families, communities, services and systems				

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
History and impacts of colonisation and settler colonialism named				
Action cycles investigated with implementation embedded in research				
Investment requirements identified to achieve equity				
Workforce development implications identified – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforces and mainstream workforces.				
Score				

Theme 6: Evidence about professional standards

	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
Alignment with and implications for standards for health and social services professionals named				
Risks of the research and its implications named				
Information on funding sources named				
Declaration of interests clearly made				
Researcher positionality statement identified e.g. cultural and sector/discipline background, roles in the research, influences and potential biases on research and writing				
Benefits of the research clearly named				
Relevance for legislation and legislative change named				
Accountabilities identified.				
Score				

Scoring

There are four ways evidence can be scored and understood:

Type of scoring	How to
Each individual research item can be scored for how it meets each theme overall	The rating is the number within each cell
Each individual item can be given a quality rating overall	The numbers being added up across
The group of evidence items can be scored per theme	Add the numbers down the column
The group of evidence items can be scored overall.	Add the numbers

Scoring happens by adding numbers allocated for each theme characteristic.

Numbers can be added across each row for a rating on the sub-theme.

The minimum score across is 0, and maximum across is 9.

0 = none

1, 2, 3 = low

4, 5, 6 = medium

7, 8, 9 = high

Numbers can be added down each column for a rating. Each theme has a different number of sub-themes, so the minimum and maximum scores are below, and their interpretation into a final rating score:

Theme 1: Minimum = 0, maximum = 27

0 = none

1-9 inclusive = low

10-18 inclusive = medium

19-27 inclusive = high

Theme 2: Minimum = 0, maximum = 6

0 = none

1-2 = low

3-4 = medium

5-6 = high

Theme 3: Minimum = 0, maximum = 18

0 = none

1-6 = low

7-12 = medium

13-18 = high

Theme 4: Minimum = 0, maximum = 12

0 = none

1-4 = low

4-8 = medium

9-12 = high

Theme 5: Minimum = 0, maximum = 15

0 = none

1-5 = low

6-10 = medium

11-15 = high

Theme 6: Minimum = 0, maximum = 24

0 = none

1-8 = low

9-16 = medium

17-24 = high

Scoring overall

Theme	Quality	Potential for impact	Generalisability	Overall
1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' authorship and data sovereignty				
2: Evidence about and for cultural safety				
3: Evidence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures				
4: Evidence about values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people				
5: Evidence about multi-level empowerment				
6: Evidence about professional standards.				

Contact

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Appendix

Development of the tool

This checklist was developed from a thematic analysis of key documents and resources about rights, principles and protocols of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Indigenous peoples. These represent diverse perspectives, sustained engagement with ethical research practice and practical information to inform assessment of effectiveness.

Resources reviewed were:

- Australian Government Productivity Commission 2020 *Indigenous Evaluation Strategy* <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/indigenous-evaluation/strategy/indigenous-evaluation-strategy.pdf>
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW 2020 *Ethical guidelines: Key principles* <https://www.ahmrc.org.au/publication/ahmrc-guidelines-for-research-into-aboriginal-health-2020/>
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency 2020 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety strategy 2020-25* <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Strategy/health-and-cultural-safety-strategy.aspx>
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2020 *AIATSIS Code of ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research* <https://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research>
- Haswell et al., 2012 program Critical Success Factors https://www.researchgate.net/publication/258022621_The_Social_and_Emotional_Wellbeing_of_Indigenous_Youth_Reviewing_and_Extending_the_Evidence_and_Examining_the_Implications_for_Policy_and_Practice
- Health Sociology Review 2022 *Yuwinbir* Special Issue articles on Indigenous knowledges <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14461242.2022.2091304>
- Jackson Pulver, Williams and Fitzpatrick 2019 model of multi-level empowerment in Oxford social determinants of health text
- Lowitja Institute 2022 *Tools for culturally safe evaluation* <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/tools/evaluation-toolkit>
- Lowitja Institute 2022 *Indigenous data sovereignty readiness assessment and evaluation toolkit 2022* <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/tools/indigenous-data-sovereignty-readiness-assessment-and-evaluation-toolkit>
- Maïam nayri Wingara 2018 *Indigenous data sovereignty principles*
- National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 2018 *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities* <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities>
- NHMRC 2018 *Keeping Research on Track II* <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/keeping-research-track-ii>
- NHMRC 2018 *National Statement on ethical conduct in human research (2007) updated 2018* <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018>
- One Twenty-One Seventy 2010-2016 Continuous Quality Improvement e-learning modules https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Centres_initiatives_and_projects/One21Seventy/

- *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People 2007*
https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf
- Williams (2018) *Ngaa-bi-nya Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program evaluation framework* <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1035719X18760141>

Through a process of coding these documents with keywords arising from their core concepts, a long list of themes was identified. These signified expectations of research from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies' and researchers' perspectives, remembering that all research with and by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Keywords were then condensed into a shorter list of themes representing minimum expectations about which all research on issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families must be based and be reported to then consider effectiveness.

These themes were categorised further into the checklist's core themes

Theme 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' authorship and data sovereignty

Theme 2: Evidence about and for cultural safety

Theme 3: Evidence about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Theme 4: Evidence about values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Theme 5: Evidence about multi-level empowerment

Theme 6: Evidence about professional standards.

Each of these themes is to be assessed for 1) quality, 2) potential for impact and 3) generalisability to other populations. These three are characteristics of other existing evidence checks and governments' evidence reviews.