



## **Self-determination**

Active involvement in the alcohol and other drug service system to support Aboriginal community self-determination

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## Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and recognise their strength in connection to the land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to their elders past and present.

We acknowledge the widespread and intergenerational effects of colonisation. The policy and actions of dispossession established long-lasting barriers between peoples, land and their culture. Furthermore, we acknowledge that this trauma has a systemic presence in Western Australian society, policy and the alcohol and other drug system. We acknowledge the need to address this issue by re-evaluating the systems in place which affect the cultural, social and economic matters of Aboriginal people.

WANADA is committed to advancing conciliation/reconciliation and fostering the valuable contributions that Aboriginal people make in the alcohol and other drug service sector, to deliver meaningful, lasting outcomes for Aboriginal people, families and communities.

## Background and aim

This paper was established as a result of the WA Aboriginal Alcohol and other Drug Workers Forum in August 2019. Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers, managers, executives and board members provided insights into factors that must be considered for the provision of culturally responsive services. Through these conversations, self-determination emerged as an essential element of success.

**\*\*\*\* Please note, this is underway\*\*\*\*** In developing this paper, WANADA has drawn on the outcomes of the Forum, consulted with Elders, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) delivering alcohol and other drug services, and esteemed researchers. These consultations have been instrumental in informing our perspective on self-determination, particularly regarding cultural models of service, partnership and cultural safety.

The purpose of this paper is to project the voice of Aboriginal alcohol and other drug sector workers, managers and Board members to inform the integration of self-determination throughout the service system. The aim is to contribute to the achievement of improved health and social wellbeing outcomes through a systems-based approach.

Self-determination needs to inform meaningful action and change on a government, organisation, and community level. This will lead to a stronger sector, and a stronger voice for Aboriginal communities in developing responses to address alcohol and other drug related harms.

## Joint commitment to self-determination

Self-determination is about peoples having ongoing choice in how their needs are met. Healing the wounds of dispossession has been identified as impossible without self-determination.<sup>1</sup> This is reflected in the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples:

*Aboriginal peoples have the right to be actively involved in developing and determining health, housing and other economic and social programmes affecting them, and, as far as possible, to administer such programmes through their own institutions.*<sup>2</sup>

WANADA recognises the importance of embedding self-determination in the alcohol and other drug service sector to support the delivery of treatment and support services. This goes beyond any single organisation, as what is required is a shared commitment to both the principle and application of self-determination.<sup>3</sup>

For commitment to be translated into meaningful change and better outcomes, the principle of self-determination must be systemically embedded and supported by genuine partnerships and shared accountability.

- **Genuine partnerships** have been identified as a key strategy for engagement with Aboriginal services and communities.<sup>4</sup> Genuine partnerships ensure that policy, procurement and services are driven by the needs of the community.
- **Shared accountability** sees all members of a partnership having specific responsibilities and a clear understanding of their respective roles. This requires all members to be transparent and accountable to the community through monitoring, evaluation and review. Aboriginal people need to be involved in, and lead, accountability processes where possible.

Keywords from consultation with alcohol and other drug workers:

*Shared vision, accountability, genuine partnerships, joint commitment, Aboriginal-led review*

<sup>1</sup> Social Justice and human rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, 2003, via. <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/right-self-determination>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/un-declaration-rights-indigenous-peoples-1>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.content.vic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-09/Self-Determination-Reform-Framework-August-2019.PDF>

<sup>4</sup>

[https://www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/uploadedFiles/Government\\_Procurement/Policies/dcspp.pdf?n=1765](https://www.finance.wa.gov.au/cms/uploadedFiles/Government_Procurement/Policies/dcspp.pdf?n=1765)

## Priorities identified by Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers

### Self-determination supported through government policy, planning and procurement

*Meeting community needs must be the priority.*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker

Commissioning bodies must trust service organisations' processes, and acknowledge established relationships that organisations have developed with the community and local partner services.

Forum participants identified a role for commissioning/purchasing bodies in advancing self-determination. These included:

- establishing a policy and procurement framework that demonstrates the application of self-determination principles;
- collaborating with organisations, service users and the community in the planning and co-design of responses to meet community needs;
- supporting and resourcing organisations to develop partnerships, including partnerships that will enhance community capacity and leadership;
- enabling organisations to engage with the community in order to determine their specific needs and characteristics;
- enabling flexibility in the service model design and delivery, with the organisation responsible for determining appropriate service delivery to meet community needs within its workforce capacity.
- offering long term and consistent sustainable service agreements that support service continuity and development within the community;
- working with service providers to establish clear service purchaser and provider boundaries, responsibilities and recognition of expertise;
- enabling organisations to negotiate key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to the organisation and the community; and
- respecting service provider development and supporting continuous quality improvement processes without micro-managing.

*A place where all voices are heard and allowed opportunities to contribute to more positive outcomes*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker

## Priorities identified by Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers

### Realising self-determination through organisation governance, policies and practices

*Organisations need to 'walk the walk'.*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker

Alcohol and other drug organisations are responsible for incorporating principles of self-determination within their organisation's governance, processes, policies and practices.

Forum participants identified the responsibility of purchased organisations/services in advancing self-determination. These included organisations:

- engaging with Elders and embed their expertise into a cultural model of service;
- progressing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), developed and monitored in partnership with the local community;
- recognising the importance of, and working to achieve and maintain, community acceptance, support and involvement;
- committing to continuous quality improvement, including cultural responsiveness;
- involving and actively contributing to community activities;
- communicating and celebrating achievements with the community;
- providing consistent engagement: keeping to, and following up on, commitments to the community and service users;
- working to embed evidence-informed practice and contributing to the development of cultural and practice-informed evidence base;
- collecting culturally relevant outcomes measures;
- offering service flexibility that supports specific needs of the community and service users, including flexible time limits for service engagement, and adaptable engagement approaches;
- acknowledging the importance of developing a culturally appropriate and trusting therapeutic alliance<sup>5</sup>, including engagement of family and community members where appropriate;
- supporting a local workforce and industry; and
- committing to the development of cultural competence of non-Aboriginal and non-local staff, including a mandatory cultural induction.

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<sup>5</sup> Therapeutic alliance refers to the relationship between service user and therapist. The importance of therapeutic alliance is a consistent predictor of positive outcomes (Meier et al., 2005)

Forum participants identified the importance of Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers' self-determination in being supported and respected within the organisation. Organisations need to:

- pro-actively recruit and retain an Aboriginal workforce;
- recognise and appropriately remunerate Aboriginal workers with regards to the cultural expertise, local knowledge and relationships with the community that they bring to the organisation;
- commit to supporting workers to establish and/or maintain relationships with the community, including worker participation in community and cultural events;
- actively seek Aboriginal worker input into organisation planning and policy (including RAP processes);
- ensure, where relevant, that Aboriginal workers' roles are not limited to working within Aboriginal programs;
- commit to supporting professional development and career pathways of Aboriginal workers through to leadership positions;
- actively support the wellbeing of their Aboriginal workers, including access to cultural advisors and Elders, and cultural supervision including strategies to manage cultural considerations for maintaining professional boundaries and confidentiality;
- acknowledge the demanding and complex nature of working in alcohol and other drug sector specifically for Aboriginal workers in relation to additional community expectations;<sup>6</sup> and
- recognise and support cultural and family obligations.

*Support Aboriginal workers to speak up when things are not ok, when the white people get it wrong.*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker

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<sup>6</sup> Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers communicated a number of additional community expectations which extend beyond time at work. This included likely engagement with service users outside of work, maintaining confidentiality and boundaries within a small community context, and the imperative to be a positive role model.

## Priorities identified by Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers

### Ensuring self-determination of service users – providing a service that better meets their needs

*Recognise that a person is an expert in their own lives and recognise that a community is an expert of their own people.*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker

Forum participants identified approaches that would support improved self-determination of Aboriginal service users. To achieve this, an Aboriginal service user should be:

- provided with choice regarding the type of organisation they wish to engage with (including the choice of receiving support from an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation or a culturally responsive mainstream organisation);
- provided with choice of service worker at an organisation (with consideration given to gender, skills, language and cultural background) in order to maximise the establishment of a trusted therapeutic relationship;
- provided with an opportunity to identify specific cultural support needs that would enhance their health and wellbeing;
- supported by culturally appropriate systems navigation that enable safe and trusted care-coordination;
- offered family and community engagement support to facilitate connectedness that would enhance therapeutic outcomes;
- provided with ongoing support and follow-ups after service engagement, acknowledging the challenges associated with connecting/reconnecting with family culture and community; and
- supported to actively engage where appropriate in organisational planning and development, including informing improvements related to cultural responsiveness.

*Aboriginal service users need to be supported to exercise their right to self-determination within the alcohol and other drug sector.*

- Aboriginal alcohol and other drug service worker