



## **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 and lasting outcomes for Aboriginal people, families and communities.

## **Background and aim**

Self-determination emerged as a central theme of the WA Aboriginal Alcohol and other Drug Workers Forum 2019. Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers, managers, executives and board members identified the central role of self-determination in the provision of culturally responsive services.

To develop this paper, WANADA has listened to forum attendees, Elders, esteemed researchers, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations delivering alcohol and other drug services. These conversations have informed our perspective on self-determination, particularly regarding cultural models of service, partnerships and cultural safety. WANADA has strived to project these voices in this paper.

This paper recommends actions that can be taken by government, organisations, and workers to embed the principle and practice of self-determination within the alcohol and other drug sector. By promoting a systems-based approach to self-determination, this paper aims to contribute to improved health and social wellbeing outcomes.

Self-determination needs to inform meaningful action and change across:

- government policy, planning and procurement;
- alcohol and other drug treatment and support services and workforce; and
- the community.

Embedding the principle and practice of self-determination will lead to a stronger sector, and a stronger voice for Aboriginal communities in responding to 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 action that delivers improved 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 support organisation processes and acknowledge the established relationships that alcohol and other drug 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;
- ensuring service commissioning is driven by local outcomes, not prescribed by funding or particular models;
- enabling flexibility in the service model design and delivery, with the organisation responsible for determining appropriate service delivery models to best 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 applying burdensome administration and contract management practices.

*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. This includes responding to the impacts of colonisation and trans-generational trauma, applying culturally informed treatment approaches, and strengthening the organisation's cultural safety.

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

- acknowledging the importance of developing culturally appropriate therapeutic alliances<sup>5</sup>, in particular the engagement of family and community members in a person's treatment where appropriate;
- committing to, and maintaining, strong and meaningful partnerships with the community that are responsive to local needs and directly inform practice;
- engaging with Elders and embed their expertise into a cultural model of service;
- progressing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), developed and monitored with the local community;
- being an active member in their community, through participation in local cultural and social activities, and supporting local health and wellbeing initiatives;
- ensuring open and regular communication with their communities, to share and acknowledge organisation and community achievements;
- committing to continuous quality improvement, including cultural responsiveness;
- 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 and communicating progress against 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;
- 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)

## Priorities identified by Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers

### Realising self-determination through the organisation's workforce

Forum participants emphasised the importance of Aboriginal alcohol and other drug workers' self-determination being supported and respected within the organisation. Forum participants considered the organisation's Aboriginal workforce as an essential component that drives effective and culturally safe, service delivery and organisation practices. 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;
- supported to include treatment interventions that specifies their cultural support needs, and which recognises the importance of culture equally alongside health, psychosocial and wellbeing needs;
- 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