Australian Government
Productivity Commission

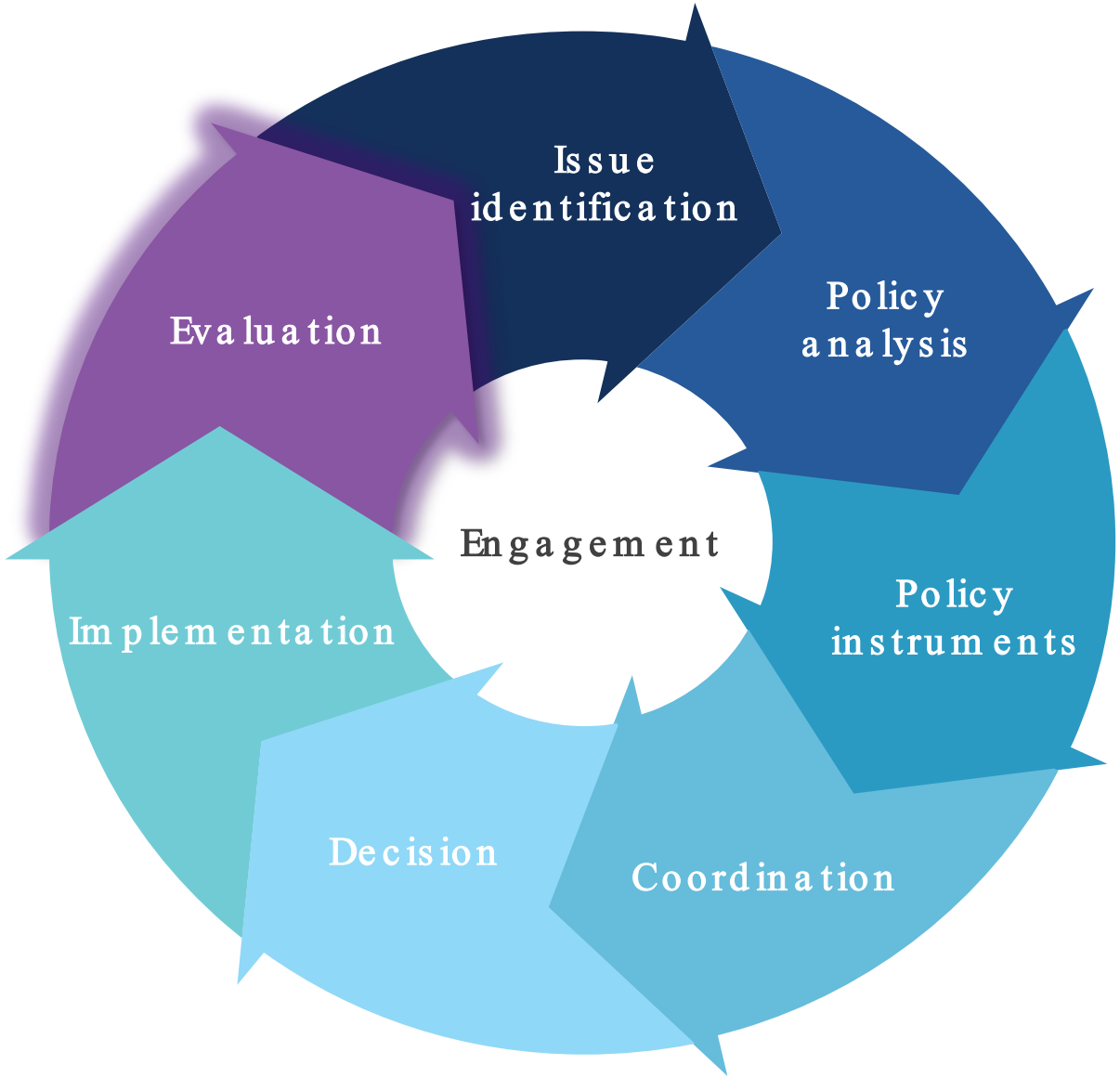
Insight that Delivers: How Good Evaluation Shapes Better Policy and Practice

Commissioner Selwyn Button

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The role of evaluation in public policy

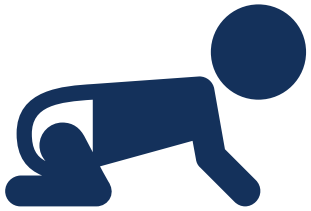


Socio-economic outcome 2: Born healthy and strong

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91%.



How many additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies would need to be born at a healthy birthweight each year for us to reach the target?



The answer is

353 additional babies per year

out of approximately 22,300 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander births each year

Making space to look beyond the numbers

Program and policy evaluations usually ask “Did it work”

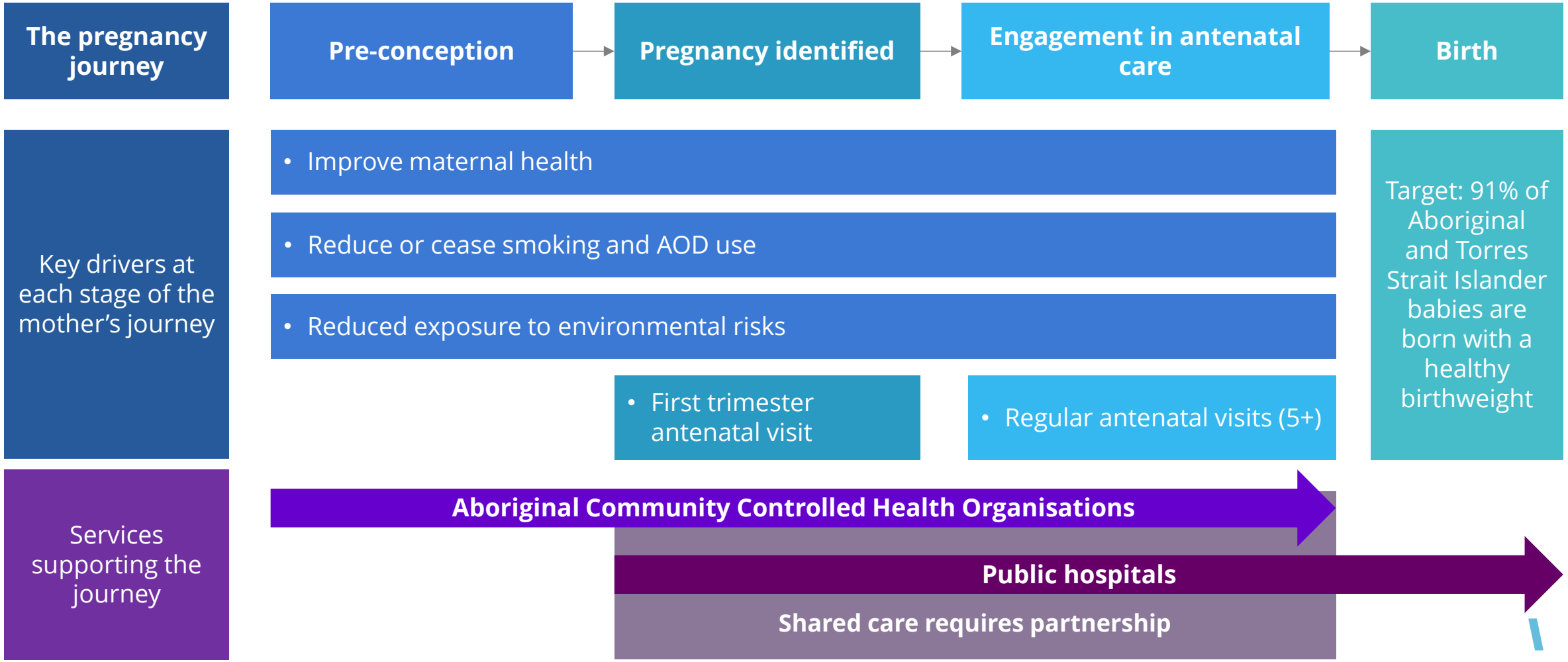


To design responsive policy, we need to understand…

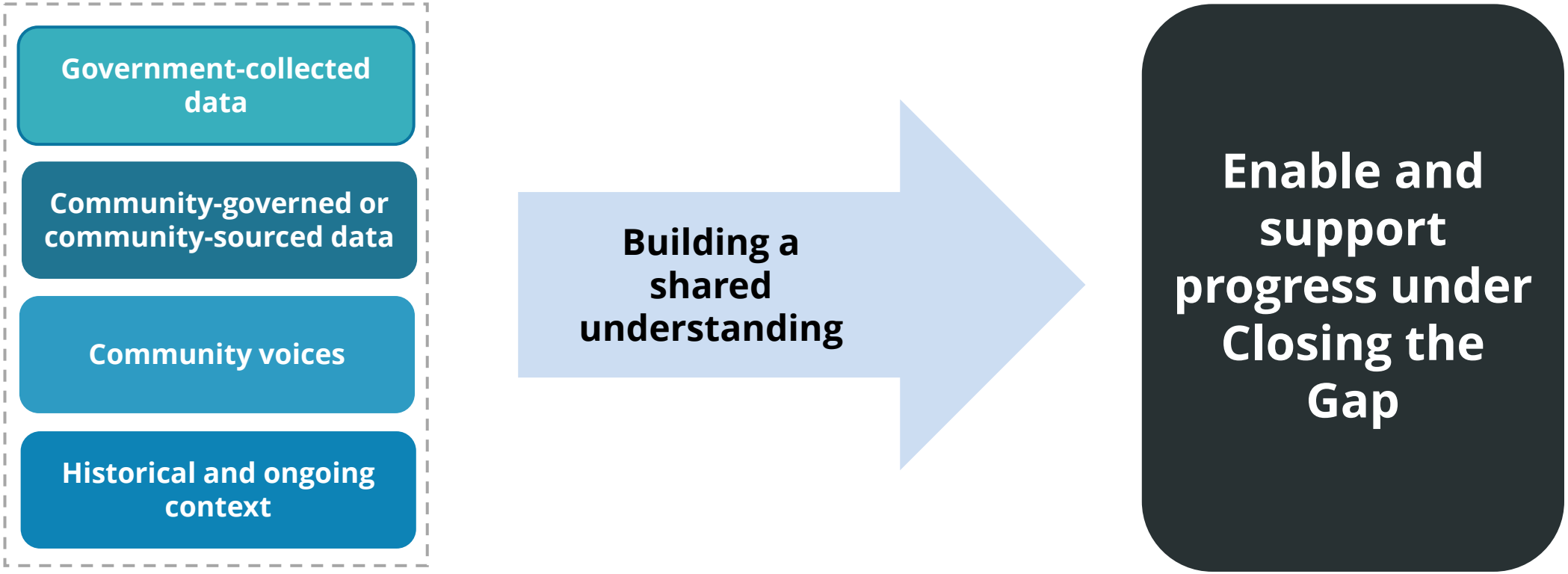
- What happened?
- For whom?
- Where?
- Why?
- Under what conditions?
- What does this tell us about what to do next?

Drivers behind healthy birthweights

Decisions on whether a program or policy is working can't always be made within the lifecycle of a pilot or by a planned evaluation milestone. To track progress, we need to look at the drivers of an outcome.



Data is a critical element to understanding and supporting progress



Broadening the evidence base

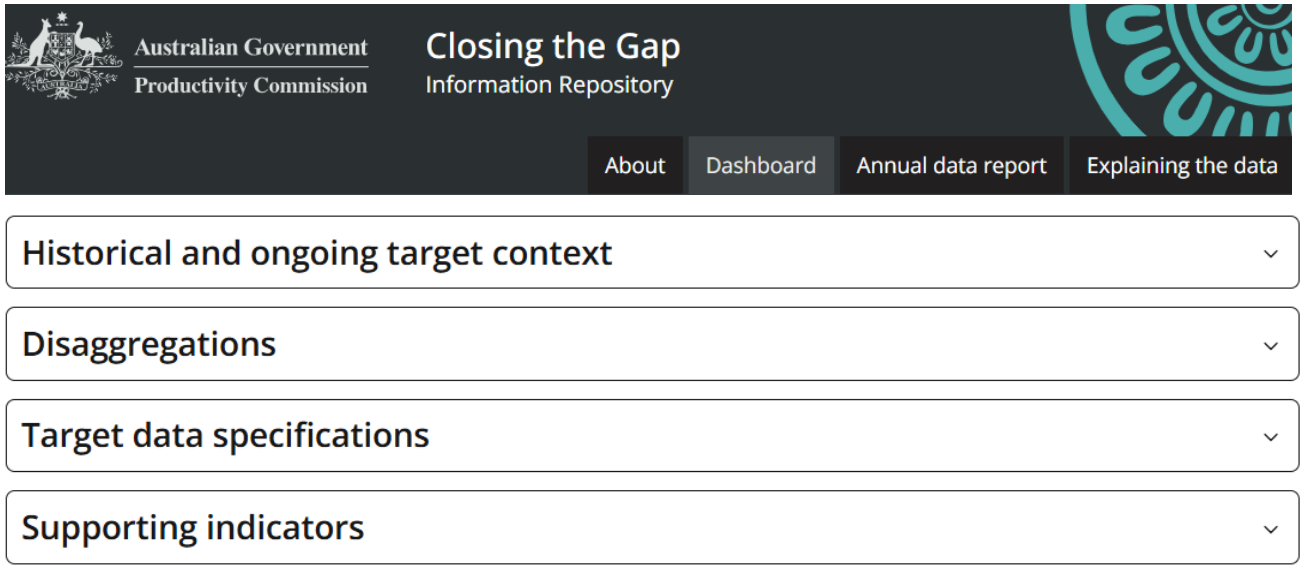
Improving Closing the Gap outcomes requires Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have greater ownership, control and influence across the data lifecycle (PC 2024).

- **Community voices**
- **Community-governed, or community-sourced data**
- **Historical and ongoing context**

Together, these elements complement government-collected data and help build a more complete picture of progress.

Historical and ongoing contexts on the Dashboard

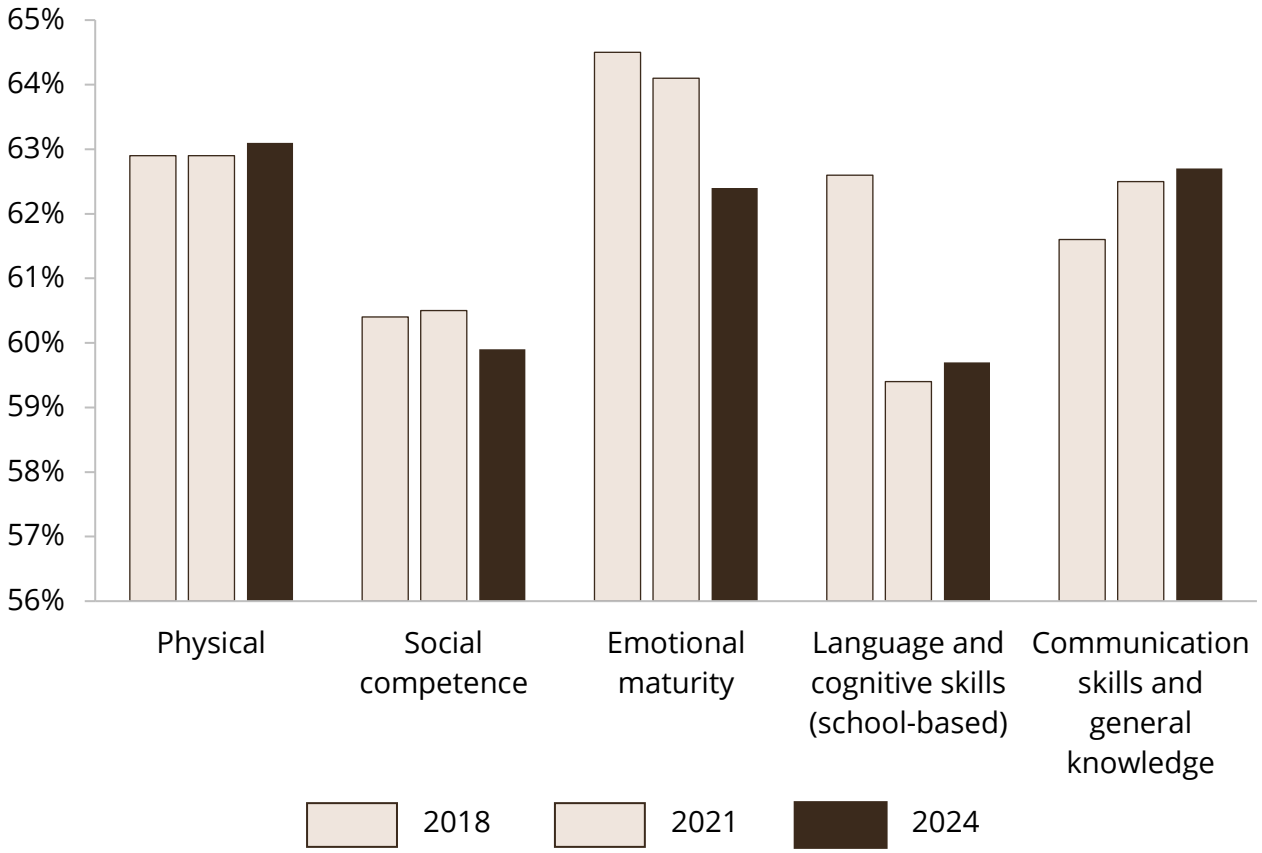
The dashboard now includes historical and ongoing contexts across all socio-economic outcome areas.



What do the supporting indicators show us?

Children thriving (Outcome 4)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children developmentally on track in each domain by year, Australia (Indicators 4c.1 – 4c.5)



Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were assessed as developmentally on track across all five AEDC domains

Since 2018, outcomes across domains have been mixed

Physical health and wellbeing had the highest proportion on track

Communication skills and general knowledge improved since the baseline

Declines were observed on the social competence, emotional maturity, and language and cognitive skills domains

How can evaluators work differently to make engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people meaningful, not transactional?

Whose knowledge counts and how do we work together

To understand what works, for who, when, where, and why, we have to think differently about how to create knowledge in the first place



Don't just show up when you need something. Trust isn't built overnight, so invest in a relationship before, during and after your project

Be transparent about what you can/can't do, don't promise the world, and explain how information will be used

Ensure the questions we ask, evidence we collect and outcomes we measure reflect their priorities and context of the people involved

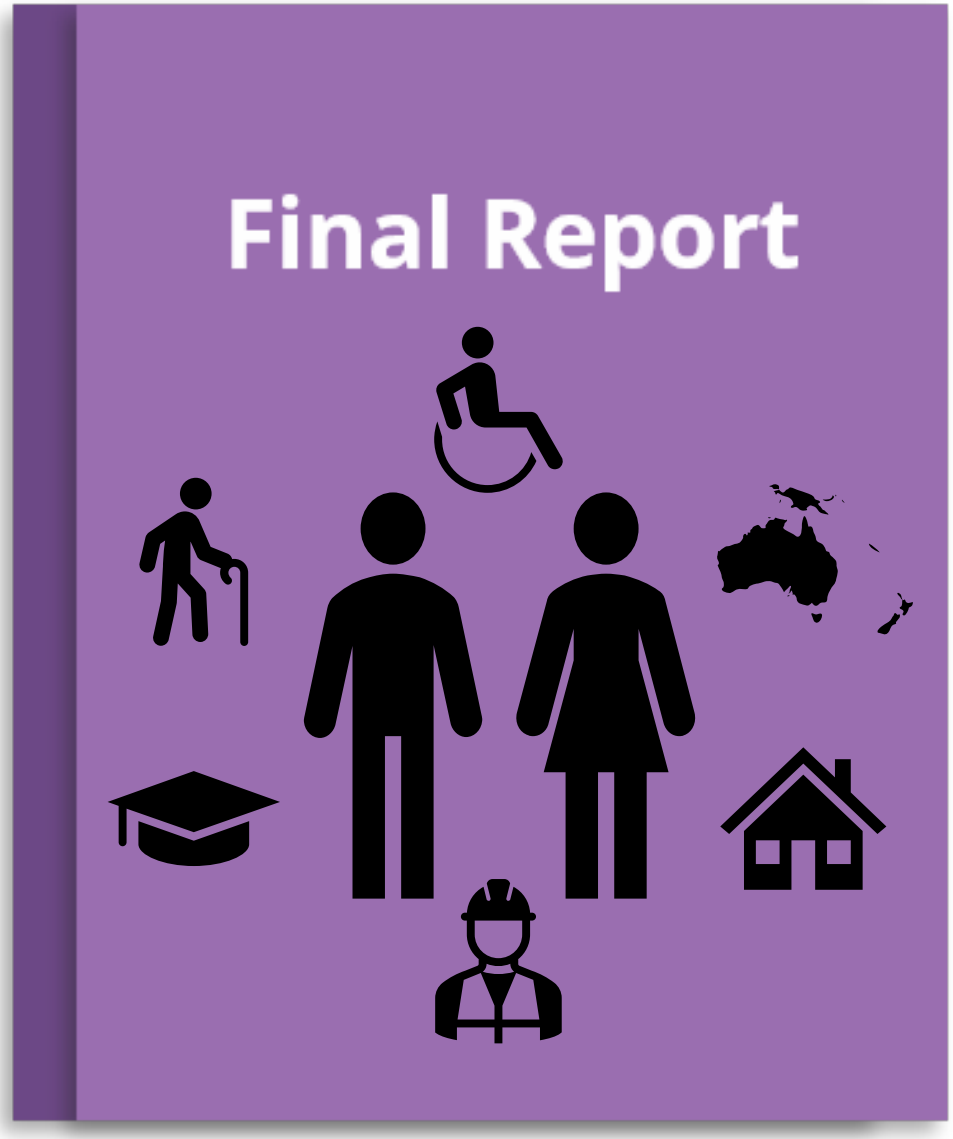
If communities are giving us their knowledge, think about what we giving back

Respect and appropriately value the expertise, experience and authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants

Evidence doesn’t influence decisions by itself



Make space for complexity



Questions?



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