

Purpose

This policy outlines Healthway's expectations and approach for organisations who wish to undertake projects with Aboriginal people and/or communities.

Background

Healthway is the only State Government agency dedicated to health promotion and primary prevention efforts in Western Australia. Aboriginal people and communities are a priority population for Healthway. Consultation is an important feature of any health promotion activity and Healthway is committed to ensuring funded organisations undertake genuine engagement¹ with the relevant Aboriginal community(ies) in the development of their projects.

Policy approach

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities each have their own established and respected values and protocols, and unique ways of expressing their different values². Health is viewed holistically, and is inclusive of the physical, social, emotional, spiritual, and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities. Awareness of Aboriginal history, culture and values and the relationships within the community (particularly those with Elders), should be considered as part of the consultation process³. Effective engagement provides the opportunity for active participation by Aboriginal people in the development, implementation and evaluation of projects².

As outlined in Healthway guidelines for funding, requests from organisations wishing to undertake projects that engage Aboriginal people and/or communities must demonstrate appropriate engagement and cultural competence⁴.

¹ Engagement is described as any process that involves Aboriginal people in problem solving or decision making and uses their input to make better decisions to improve Aboriginal health.

² Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in guideline development. National Health and Medical Research Council. 2022. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelinesforguidelines/plan/engaging-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-people-guideline-development#>

³ Hunt J 2013. Engaging with Indigenous Australia—exploring the conditions for effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Issues paper no. 5. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

⁴ Cultural competence refers to the ability to understand, communicate and effectively interact across cultures.

Healthway | Policy Position: Projects engaging with Aboriginal people or communities

The following points should be considered by grant applicants in the development and/or implementation of their proposal and will guide Healthway's assessment of requests:

- The organisation demonstrates cultural competency to respond to the historical, cultural and social context of the people they will be working with and the ability to develop relationships that foster mutual trust⁴.
- Consultation with appropriate, existing community organisations or structures, and Aboriginal Elders, and demonstrate that the need for the project has been identified and/or led by the Aboriginal community.
- Participation from Aboriginal community members and/or representatives from the relevant cultural authority during the development of the project.
- Inclusion of relevant Aboriginal cultural authority(ies) on a project steering group, or similar group involved in decision making and development, implementation and evaluation of the project.
- Identification of ways the project outcomes will be provided back to the community and how the community will be supported to implement the outcomes where appropriate.
- Consideration regarding the remuneration of Aboriginal partners in recognition of their contribution to their project, where appropriate.

Relevant cultural authorities may include Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) which are directed by the local community to ensure that services are provided in a culturally appropriate manner.

The assessment of appropriate engagement will be determined on a case-by-case basis and will include the extent to which the proposed project will include Aboriginal people and/or communities.

It is noted that specific criteria for research projects as part of Healthway's Health Promotion Research Program are included in the relevant guidelines available on the Healthway website, www.healthway.wa.gov.au.

More information: healthway@healthway.wa.gov.au

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Review: This policy will be reviewed in January 2026