

Submission

Evaluation of the Aged Care System Navigator Measure

16 September 2019

The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) is the peak body for 23 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) providing primary health services across diverse regional, rural and remote locations in Western Australia. AHCWA exists to support and act on behalf of our 23 Member ACCHSs, and our principal vision is for Aboriginal people in Western Australia to enjoy the same level of health and wellbeing as all Western Australians.

AHCWA acknowledges the intent of the Commonwealth Department of Health to evaluate the Aged Care System Navigator measure, with the aim of determining the best ways to assist older Australians to engage with the aged care system. AHCWA has thoroughly reviewed and considered the various navigator models outlined in the Discussion Paper (the Paper), and has developed feedback based on the needs and interests of elderly Aboriginal people in Western Australia.

AHCWA comments

- AHCWA strongly supports that elderly Aboriginal people are empowered to make informed decisions about their support and care needs, and to have access to services to which they are entitled. However, a key issue of the current aged care system is the lack of culturally secure service and program options for elderly Aboriginal people.
- AHCWA recognises that the paucity of cultural security in aged care is a very broad system issue and beyond the scope of this consultation. However, it is a key issue for the Commonwealth to be aware of within the context of this evaluation as it is challenging to advise on appropriate engagement models for elderly Aboriginal people, when the services they are being linked with are not likely to be culturally secure.
- In principle, AHCWA strongly supports that engagement approaches for elderly Aboriginal people must be culturally secure and informed by Aboriginal people.
- AHCWA recommends that Aboriginal System Navigators be established, resourced and supported to assist elderly Aboriginal people, their families and communities to engage with the aged care system. Employing Aboriginal System Navigators would:
 - Ensure that a holistic approach to working with elderly Aboriginal people is applied;
 - Enable trust to be established more easily between the Navigator, the person, and their family;
 - Ensure information is provided to elderly Aboriginal people in language they understand; and
 - Ensure culturally secure support and advice is provided.



- Introducing a model of Aboriginal Navigators would require a commitment to capacity building in the Aboriginal workforce sector, and would provide the opportunity for Aboriginal Health Workers, Aboriginal Health Practitioners and Aboriginal Liaison Officers from WA ACCHSs to be upskilled in this area. However, it should not be expected that ACCHSs would deliver Aboriginal Navigator services within their existing resources.
- Various elements of each of the models defined may have benefits for elderly Aboriginal people. For example, the expertise of a health professional, as described by the 'Nurse/Professional Navigator Model', would be beneficial for elderly Aboriginal people with chronic conditions or comorbidities. Another example with benefits for Aboriginal elderly people is from the 'Peer Navigator Model' as information sharing and peer support under this model is key to all Aboriginal communities.
- Aged Care System Navigator models must accommodate and value the collectivist approach to decision making used by Aboriginal people and their families. The Paper describes the 'Family Navigator Model' and, while there is limited evidence of this model being used for navigating the aged care system, its focus of engaging with families aligns with the values and priorities of Aboriginal communities.
- Aged Care System Navigators must have a holistic understanding of the determinants of health and wellbeing for elderly Aboriginal people; these determinants include family, community, culture, language, country, physical wellbeing, spiritual wellbeing, and emotional wellbeing. Any disturbance to these elements may have impacts for the health and wellbeing of elderly Aboriginal people. Aged Care System Navigators must be flexible to respond holistically to elderly Aboriginal people and this responsiveness must be within the scope of their role. This is an important consideration given the paper makes various references to the 'importance of delineating clear roles and responsibilities' (p.17) of Navigators.
- Further consideration is required regarding engagement of elderly people living in remote areas. The Paper refers to telephone based and online modes for engagement, however, these options are often inappropriate for elderly Aboriginal people. Face-to-face meetings and discussions involving family and community, particularly when developing trust and making important decisions about care and support, is much more appropriate.
- One option for increasing engagement with elderly Aboriginal people in remote areas would be to establish a model similar to the Remote Community Connector model being used by the NDIS in WA. A number of ACCHS in WA have been provided with funding from the NDIA (WA) to employ Remote Community Connectors, whose specific purpose is to identify Aboriginal people living with a disability and who may be eligible for services under the NDIS. The RCC helps to link these people into the NDIS whilst ensuring culturally security.
- In addition to the RCC model, a number of ACCHS in WA have also received funding from the NDIA (WA) to deliver the Evidence, Access & Coordination of Planning (EACP) Program. This aims to provide practical assistance in a culturally secure manner to Aboriginal people living with a disability, with their applications to the NDIS and to assist with coordinating and developing their support plans.