



# HealingFoundation

Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

**OUR MEN OUR HEALING**

*Designing For Change*

November 2012 – November 2013

## Table of contents

---

Tables and figures .....	3
Acknowledgements .....	3
Executive Summary .....	4
Healing Foundation .....	5
Our men: our past and present .....	6
Our men: our healing and future .....	6
Our men's roles and goals .....	7
Our Men Our Healing locations .....	7
Our men's evidence for healing .....	7
Our Men Our Healing: a strong way .....	13
Evidence for quality healing programs .....	13
Closing the gap between evidence and practice .....	15
Our Men Our Healing: program leaders and champions .....	16
Knowledge circle and program champions .....	16
Program support : partners, leaders and agencies .....	17
Our Men Our Healing: identifiable phases .....	18
Phase one: exploration and adoption .....	18
Phase two : program installation .....	20
Phase three : initial implementation .....	20
Phase four onwards : full operation, innovation and sustainability .....	22
Our Men Our Healing : purposeful, active, integrated strategies .....	23
Targets and strategies for key results .....	24
Our Men Our Healing : a journey begins .....	27
References .....	28

## Tables and figures

Table 1: Goals and outcomes for <i>Our Men Our Healing</i> .....	7
Table 2: <i>Our Men Our Healing</i> , a program driving quality healing .....	14
Figure 1: Our Men building strong spirits, strong families, strong culture, strong community and a strong place .....	9
Figure 2: Our Men Our Healing Knowledge Circle members .....	16
Figure 3: Our Men Our Healing program leaders and champions .....	17
Figure 4: Identifiable actions in the phasing of <i>Our Men Our Healing</i> .....	18

## Acknowledgements

This report is from an independent desk review commissioned by the Healing Foundation in October 2013. It covers a program of three men's healing projects to be implemented between January 2014 and December 2015 in remote Northern Territory. While the Healing Foundation has funded a number of men's healing projects, *Our Men Our Healing* is the first major program dedicated to Aboriginal men living in remote communities.

The Healing Foundation acknowledges the hard work and dedication of the men involved in *Our Men Our Healing*. We also recognise our women and kids and everyone supporting this healing program.

The Healing Foundation gratefully acknowledges the financial support and partnership of the Office of Children and Families in the Northern Territory. We thank the Northern Territory Government and its agencies, and all the agencies, partners and collaborating organisations that are working to meet the objectives of *Our Men Our Healing*.

This report was prepared by Megan Gilmour, an external consultant, in collaboration with the Healing Foundation.

Canberra, Australia. May 2014.

## Executive Summary

---

This report covers the commencement of a men's healing program called *Our Men Our Healing*. The program is being implemented from in the remote Northern Territory communities of Maningrida, Ngukurr and Wurrumiyanga. It is the first Healing Foundation program dedicated to Aboriginal men living in remote localities, and is made possible through a \$600,000 contribution from the Northern Territory Office of Children and Families and in-kind support from our partners and engaged local service providers.

The Healing Foundation's work shows a link between colonisation, past government practices, and the breakdown of cultural knowledge systems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This has caused trauma and pain that remains unresolved for our men. Contemporary social pressures and domestic overcrowding are fuelling this, weakening their spirits, harming their choices and opportunities, and hurting their families and communities.

In remote areas the consequences are widespread. Opportunities for more positive cycles are frustrated by group trauma and intergenerational suffering, geographical isolation, and fewer and fluctuating support services. Men are stuck in uncertainty about their role and disengaged from their cultural identity and mainstream life. This is evident in poor social, spiritual, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing; disempowerment and low self-esteem; unemployment and poverty; substance misuse; child and family abuse, neglect and breakdown; domestic, lateral and sexual, and community violence; incarceration and recidivism; and self-harm and suicide.

Through culturally sound methodologies and approaches *Our Men Our Healing* is focussing on rebuilding holistic wellbeing in safe ways. It intends to reconnect our men to their culturally significant place as nurturers, teachers and protectors in their homes and communities.

*Our Men Our Healing* is guided by the commonly shared principles of international Indigenous healing programs. Through a process of collaborative co-design with our men, the program identifies eight themes to strengthen and keep safe our men's spirits, families, culture, communities and roles. For our men this means:

**Education:** taking their place as strong learners and teachers

**Employment:** taking their place as strong providers

**Health:** taking their place as strong men

**Identity:** being stronger in themselves and their place as leaders

**Law:** taking their place as positive role models

**Relationships:** taking their place as nurturers

**Resources:** empowered in their various roles

**Safety:** taking their place as protectors.

Our approach offers a sound theory of change and robust evaluation leading to a systematically developed understanding of what works in healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. This will also guide thoughtful and flexible program development. Elements include cultivating program leaders and champions in communities, working through a serialised process with identifiable phases, and including purposeful, active and integrated strategies for a minimum of two years as we move from knowing the challenges to practising the solutions. *Our Men Our Healing* is:

**Exploring and adopting** — mapping the needs of our men, exploring possible interventions, building an understanding of the local context, and assessing the extent to which local support for the program can be mobilised

**Installing** — securing essential resources for the program and establishing safe referral mechanisms, setting up reporting and evaluation frameworks, and expectations for outcomes

**Implementing** — commencing program service delivery and managing the complexities of start-up, anticipating challenges and risks, developing risk mitigation, and embedding evaluation

**Operating** — developing implementation plans with sites, strengthening and supporting men’s aspirations, inlaying activities for success in skills training and effective mentoring and development, and tying these in with other supporting agencies (i.e. employment services)

**Innovating** — flexibly adjusting activity plans with our men to enhance existing features of the program and/or include new features

**Sustaining** — ensuring program and project activities remain consistent with government policy and priorities and positioning them to achieve ongoing support.

The experienced Aboriginal men in the *Our Men Our Healing* Knowledge Circle will help us reach our ambitious program goals. This culturally endorsed method for building and sharing knowledge also develops equal responsibility for outcomes. The Knowledge Circle will tie in with the program champions at each project site, along with local partners and agencies who have formally committed to supporting our men on their healing journey. Our dedicated Healing Foundation Project Officer and staff will underpin these arrangements by communicating effectively, providing ongoing support and finding solutions, simplifying reporting, quickly resolving any disputes, and meeting all of our obligations<sup>1</sup>.

*Our Men Our Healing* is founded on healing as a journey, rather than a destination. It signifies greater recognition of the need for healing in our men, and marks the beginning of what is hoped to spread nationally — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men’s healing, enabled and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

## Healing Foundation

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation is an independent Indigenous organisation with a focus on healing our community. Established in 2009 on the first anniversary of the Apology to the Stolen Generations, the Healing Foundation:

- **supports the development of culturally strong, locally developed and run programs**
- **develops the story of healing and builds evidence for healing**
- **builds capacity and enables leadership within communities**
- **funds community based training and education projects**
- **researches and applies best practice in culturally strong healing programs.**

The Healing Foundation’s vision is strong spirit, strong culture, strong people. Our healing initiatives are achieving this vision through action and outcomes.

<sup>1</sup> This is in line with the Commonwealth Ombudsman’s (2010) recommended principles for administering funding agreements with regional and remote Indigenous organisations.

## Our men: our past and present

---

The Healing Foundation's work shows a link between colonisation and the breakdown of cultural knowledge systems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Past government policies and practices, such as forcefully removing children from their families, have resulted in trauma and led to many negative outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Our men's unresolved pain and hurt from this is being fuelled by contemporary social pressures and domestic overcrowding and is weakening their spirits, and harming their choices and opportunities. This is also hurting their families and communities.

The issues affecting men are complex and varied. The need for healing is manifesting differently for men in urban and regional settings than for men in remote areas. For example, in remote communities, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are more geographically tight, trauma in our men is particularly widespread and its consequences are compounding. While strong cultural connection is evident in the use of traditional language, other cultural practice has been diluted. Group trauma is intensifying men's pain and perpetuating intergenerational suffering. This works to diminish opportunities for developing more positive cycles of interaction. Geographical isolation means fewer resources are available and there is greater fluctuation in the availability of supporting services.

Men in remote communities are becoming more uncertain about their cultural role and identity, disengaging from their cultural practices and mainstream services, and experiencing institutionalised racial prejudice. As many men in remote communities struggle to bridge the gap between old ways and modern society, they are displaying their frustration and distress in ways that increase their shame and despair. The consequences show in:

- **poor social, spiritual, physical, mental and emotional wellbeing**
- **disempowerment and low self-esteem**
- **unemployment and poverty**
- **substance misuse**
- **child and family abuse, neglect and breakdown**
- **lateral, sexual and community violence**
- **incarceration and recidivism**
- **self-harm and suicide**

## Our men: our healing and future

---

Strong, healthy men are a cornerstone of our communities. Together with our men, the Healing Foundation is co-designing *Our Men Our Healing*, a pilot healing initiative to run in three remote Northern Territory locations.

Men's healing work necessarily embodies their relationships with each other, and the women, children and communities in their lives. *Our Men Our Healing* offers a process by which our men can lead the way in their healing to restore their dignity and pride, and effect positive change for themselves, their families and communities, now and for future generations.

## Our men’s roles and goals

*Our Men Our Healing* will confidently address cultural, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing for reconnecting men to their culturally significant place within their families and communities. The program’s focus on men’s roles rests on three pillars:

- Nurturing** and growing our children strong and healthy
- Teaching** and caretaking of our cultural knowledge for its survival
- Protecting** and caring for our families and community safety

Goals	Summary Outcomes
<p><b>Goal One:</b> strong men positively engaged with their families and communities</p> <p><b>NURTURING</b></p>	<p>Our men have stronger relationships with their families and our families are safer</p> <p>Our men have stronger employment opportunities</p>
<p><b>Goal Two:</b> strong men participating in more cultural activities</p> <p><b>TEACHING</b></p>	<p>Our men are living and practising their culture</p> <p>Our men are proud leaders in passing on cultural knowledge</p>
<p><b>Goal Three:</b> strong personal, interpersonal, community functioning and safety</p> <p><b>PROTECTING</b></p>	<p>Our men are safer, happier, healthier and stronger in all ways and support each other</p> <p>Our communities are safer, happier, healthier and stronger</p>

**Table 1: Goals and outcomes for *Our Men Our Healing***

## Our Men Our Healing locations

*Our Men Our Healing* will run pilot projects for men aged 16 to 60 plus<sup>2</sup> in the following remote Northern Territory communities:

- **Maningrida community in partnership with Malabam Health Service Aboriginal Corporation**
- **Ngukurr community in partnership with Sunrise Health Service**
- **Wurrumiyanga community in partnership with Catholic Care Northern Territory.**

The overall program is operating in partnership with the Office of Children and Families.

## Our men’s evidence for healing

The challenges and needs documented by men from the three project sites were consistent with each other. The initial responses relate to the following questions:

- **What weakens us from taking our role as nurturers, teachers, protectors and providers?**
- **What healing will strengthen us to positively reclaim our role?**

<sup>2</sup> it may extend to men of all ages depending on the activity.

## What weakens our role as nurturers, teachers, protectors and providers ?

Absence of appropriate men's places/spaces and other resources

Housing insecurity, lack of adequate housing and overcrowding

Alcohol and other drug misuse

Boredom and crime rates among young men

Family and domestic relationship disharmony, jealousy and violence

Few counsellors, mentors and wellbeing programs

Few men's cultural healing and therapeutic programs

Few opportunities for meaningful education, training and employment

Grief, sorrow and loss

High unemployment rates

Sexual violence, lateral violence and community conflict

Limited transfer of cultural knowledge from Elders to young men

Need for cultural activities and involvement in language

Need for recognising family or kinship connection in community

Need for respect for family, Elders, self and community

Need for knowledge and practise of culture and tribal lore

Negative interaction with the legal/justice system

Poor mental health and social and emotional pain

Poor parenting

Poor physical health

Self-harm, suicide ideation and suicide



**What healing will strengthen us?**

From a growing body of Australian and international research and lived experience we know that cultural and traditional practice is a critical pathway to healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Improved social and emotional wellbeing appears to be an outcome of the renewal of cultural practices that builds cultural and community strength and personal identity. Our men have identified the following eight healing themes to strengthen and keep safe their spirits, families, culture, communities and roles.



**Figure 1: Our Men building strong spirits, strong families, strong culture, strong community and a strong place**

Men want to strengthen their education and employment opportunities, have healthier relationships, experience better health, renew their cultural identity and connection, build a better relationship with contemporary law and customary lore, access and use the resources they need, and live in safety.

The men, working with the Healing Foundation, set these themes in a logical program approach, providing skills and tools for co-creating renewable healing opportunities that will work into the future.



## Education. Taking our place as strong learners and teachers.

---

- Strong spirit: building a sense of value through participating in meaningful education and training opportunities; developing basic literacy, numeracy and other skills; and educating in culture, land, lore, kinship and ceremony.
- Strong family: learning parenting and relationship skills and how to manage work life and family life; teaching our kids the 'right way'; and being able to identify family connections through culture and kinship.
- Strong culture: transferring cultural assets and knowledge to keep alive the ancient pathways; re-educating in language and culture from Elders through to young men; rebuilding knowledge of tribal lore; creating present and future mentors; and educating for bringing about generational change.
- Strong community: reaffirming knowledge circles for sharing and preserving cultural knowledge and as a platform for creating an ongoing support network.

## Employment. Taking our place as strong providers.

---

- Strong spirit: engaging and being motivated and productive as important; enhancing support for participating in services that provide pathways to meaningful employment; empowered and seeking help for job readiness; reducing unemployment; and securing place and identity as provider in the family and community.
- Strong family: understanding the importance of food, shelter and love and the actions that lead to responsibility in our homes; building resources for safer housing and space to deal with stressors and the pressures of overcrowding to assist family harmony and wellbeing.
- Strong culture: finding balance in our lives and opportunities to value employment in cultural traditions; building on our cultural strengths for equity.
- Strong community: creating a safe place in which *our men* can work or transition to work; and being respected in the community for contributing to a balanced family and working life.

## Health. Taking our place as strong men.

---

- Strong spirit: developing physical and mental wellbeing and strong spirit; increasing positive outlook; participating in health check-ups and increasing referrals and uptake for support services; transforming into stronger men by taking responsibility for self-care, health and wellbeing.
- Strong family: enhancing emotional wellbeing and learning a balance between feeling and behaviour.
- Strong culture: growing a healthy and abiding relationship to following cultural ways and norms; and connecting to country and culture for recharge, vitality, identity, place and healing.
- Strong community: building a healthy social status as a good family man and leader; and building positive and supportive social relationships.

## Identity. Being stronger in ourselves and our place as leaders.

---

- Strong spirit: seeing the truth about our hurt and trauma; addressing grief and despair (without shame) and making peace with our selves; overcoming feelings of inferiority; developing pride and respect in ourselves and resilience by reconnecting to who we are through our ancestry and culture; and making our spirits, minds and bodies healthy and valuable.
- Strong family: re-establishing kinship and family lines and reaffirming family identity; transforming our roles to being positive in our family, culture and community; and living the healing process to resolve conflict and violence.
- Strong culture: recognising the shared pain in our history; connecting to country and cultural identity, and lore; knowing our heritage and using our language; participating in ceremony and cultural healing to strengthen cultural identity and unity; showing respect to the cultural roles and identity of Elders and young men; and transferring cultural identity to next generations.
- Strong community: respecting our community as an extension of our identity; finding a place of belonging and knowing where we fit in; giving and being given respect in the community; engaging positively in the community; and leading the way for young men to find strength in building their spiritual, familial, cultural and social identities.

## Law. Taking our place as positive role models.

---

- Strong spirit: learning self-discipline, the role of rites of passage (initiation, ceremony and men's business); rehabilitating ourselves; learning and understanding the rules of engagement for contemporary law and customary lore; learning to take responsibility for our actions; becoming better citizens; establishing a more positive racial identity within the legal system; and understanding alternatives to jail.
- Strong family: stepping up to being positive role models in our families and for our kids; respecting family and marriage law/lore; and removing violence from our families and homes.
- Strong culture: having opportunities to reduce boredom and increase engagement in positive activities; going back to bush to learn culture, respect, and ceremony; learning cultural and tribal or customary lore and creating peace and harmony.
- Strong community: decreasing the numbers of our men interacting with the legal system; respecting authority, Elders and culture; reconciling with and giving back to community; having more community talk about issues; knowing legal rights and responsibilities; reducing violence in our communities; and building more effective relationships within law and justice.

## Relationships. Taking our place as nurturers.

---

- Strong spirit: owning our mistakes without shame; developing a stronger relationship with ourselves for better participating in relationships with others.
- Strong family: looking after our children and families; improving our skills to cope with stressors in our family relationships; seeking support for nurturing functional family relationships; knowing our customary lore and legal responsibilities in relation to our family members; communicating with, caring and staying true to our families.
- Strong culture: respecting our relationship with our culture; knowing our cultural responsibilities and obligations; being able to participate in and grow healthy cultural relationships with Elders, each other and our young people.
- Strong community: finding acceptance within our community; participating in and doing things for our community; knowing our customary lore and legal responsibilities and obligations towards each other; building our own support networks and mentoring; and improving our relationships with people and agencies within and outside our communities.

## Resources. Empowered to be strong in our various roles.

---

- Strong spirit: owning our problems and taking opportunities and action; accessing male-friendly counselling, therapeutic support (for drug and alcohol misuse), and mental, social-emotional and physical health services; and having opportunities for cultural healing activities that strengthen our spirit.
- Strong family: finding opportunities for building capability in financial matters; ways to increase capability in parenting and relationships (including support for issues of family and domestic violence); accessing opportunities for family healing services; accessing resources for safer housing and having safe places to get space and deal with stressors and the pressures of overcrowding.
- Strong culture: using our language; having prioritised the importance of connecting to culture in healing services; building opportunities and action for participating in culturally appropriate healing activities.
- Strong community: bringing back men's places, groups and activities for collaborating and supporting each other; accessing sporting and diversionary activities; using knowledge circles for seeking support and discussion; seeking out men's programs from around Australia and sharing the positive stories.

## Safety. Taking our place as protectors.

---

- Strong spirit: kicking addiction by understanding that alcohol and other drugs are harmful ways of self-medicating pain, trauma and anxiety that weaken our spirit; improving our mental health and social and emotional wellbeing; being able to find options other than suicide, or harming ourselves and others; becoming secure in our individual sexual identity.
- Strong family: overcoming jealousy with self-esteem and by building confidence in our identity and trust; adopting safe behaviours in our homes and with our partners and children; and by overturning harm and violence as normal ways of behaving.
- Strong culture: understanding and applying the cultural meaning of 'right way' relationships; keeping our culture safe by living safely; and protecting our spirit, relationships, Elders and young people.
- Strong community: building confidence and wellbeing into our culture so our communities become safer and free from the negative outcomes of alcohol and substance misuse, and intra-racial jealousy and violence; and accessing resources, services, cooling-off places and support from other men.

This emerging healing evidence and theory, hand in hand with a co-design approach and strong evaluation framework, will continue to guide programming. The Healing Foundation recognises that while *Our Men Our Healing* is a pilot it can also be a change driver. The program will deepen our understanding of what healing means for Aboriginal men and how this unfolds in a context led by them. *Our Men Our Healing* will create new opportunities for the Healing Foundation to partner with Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations throughout Australia to mobilise a broader healing agenda. The Northern Territory will have a strong voice in sharing lessons from the *Our Men Our Healing* pilot to support men and programs in other regions.

## Our men our healing: a strong way

State and Federal governments are recognising the need for Indigenous healing services that are informed by Indigenous concepts of wellbeing. These speak to the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and cultural needs of our communities, and acknowledge the impact of our collective historical experience (Caruana, 2010).

### Evidence for quality healing programs

To guide its work the Healing Foundation has reviewed international literature on Indigenous healing<sup>3</sup> which finds consistent elements and drivers for quality programs that work (McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe and Bennett, 2013).

These tell us:

- **healing takes time**
- **cultural approaches should be blended with other healing traditions**
- **there is a central spiritual component to healing**
- **programs are better delivered by people of the same cultural group**
- **program staff need to be supported in overcoming vicarious emotional strain**
- **there is substantial diversity among people needing healing, and**
- **healing programs must first do no harm.**

Our men must lead the way in their own healing. Projects supporting Indigenous men have typically taken mainstream approaches and overlaid them with Indigenous content. The evidence tells us that such approaches meet with limited success. The design of *Our Men Our Healing* is driven with Aboriginal cultural authority. Importantly, the men in the program will themselves be the program's influencers and change agents. This provides men with opportunities to safely address painful subjects and to implement strategies that bring to life enduring change.

<sup>3</sup> The literature places the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs in the context of Indigenous healing programs from the United States, Canada and New Zealand using both formal and informal literature sources.

Elements of quality healing programs	Drivers of quality healing programs
Developed to address issues in the local community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• responding to needs identified by local community and enjoying its support</li> <li>• acknowledging diversity, offering flexibility</li> </ul>
Driven by local leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involving elders</li> <li>• growing from local culture and values</li> </ul>
Have a developed theory and evidence base	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• arising from an evidence or theory base</li> <li>• aiming for researching ourselves back to life</li> </ul>
Combine Western methodologies and Indigenous healing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• safe place for healing to occur</li> <li>• incorporating spirituality</li> <li>• providing networks within and external to community</li> </ul>
Understand the impact of colonisation and trans-generational trauma and grief	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• recognising the impacts of colonisation and trans-generational trauma</li> </ul>
Build individual, family and community capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building individual, family and community skills</li> <li>• providing community empowerment and sufficient long term resources</li> </ul>
Proactive rather than reactive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• principles of social justice and human rights</li> <li>• providing training, peer support and mentoring</li> </ul>
Incorporate strong evaluation frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ongoing reflective evaluation from beginning</li> <li>• embedding sustainability</li> </ul>

**Table 2: *Our Men Our Healing*, a program driving quality healing**

Support will be provided by men who are experienced or working in men’s healing programs. The program is framed in cultural authority, local knowledge and context, and with a view to strengthening capacity.

### Local knowledge and local context

Past government policies, including the forced removal of children, varied across Australia and so the experiences of colonisation and its impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are very different. In designing programs it is essential to understand the way trauma is felt in different communities and to explore the specific needs of individual communities for planning responsive healing programs.

*Our Men Our Healing* pilot projects, while operating within an overall program model of good practice, will meet the specific needs of men in the context of their local communities. The men are valued as experts in this context.

### Cultural frameworks for healing

The program will set up cultural scaffolding and practices to offer safety for men to explore the complex issues of their personal trauma and address broader community experiences together.

*Our Men Our Healing* will use cultural ways to engage men in healing, such as yarning circles, traditional art, and utilising men’s traditional spaces. These cultural activities are intended to help ground men in the strength of their cultural knowledge and identity.

## Recognising our past and growing and strengthening our capacity

Growing a resilient local workforce by supporting men to enhance their leadership and other skills will mean they can respond effectively in their communities and wider society. This is essential to enabling change.

Many of the *Our Men Our Healing* planned activities are designed to support the local workforce to gain a greater insight into their own experience of trauma and ways to manage this, allowing men to experience true value in and from training, skills development and employment opportunities.

## Proactive evaluation and developing our evidence for healing

The Healing Foundation will track and evaluate *Our Men Our Healing* to ensure that intended outcomes are built upon, unintended outcomes are captured, and lessons are learned. Our evaluation approach will assess and galvanise what works in Indigenous men's healing programs.

The evaluation process is designed to provide meaningful contributions to the evidence framework for Aboriginal men's healing programs. It will increase understanding within the wider community; detail the cultural and social worth elements of healing programs; and sustain the longevity of healing programs by attracting ongoing funding.

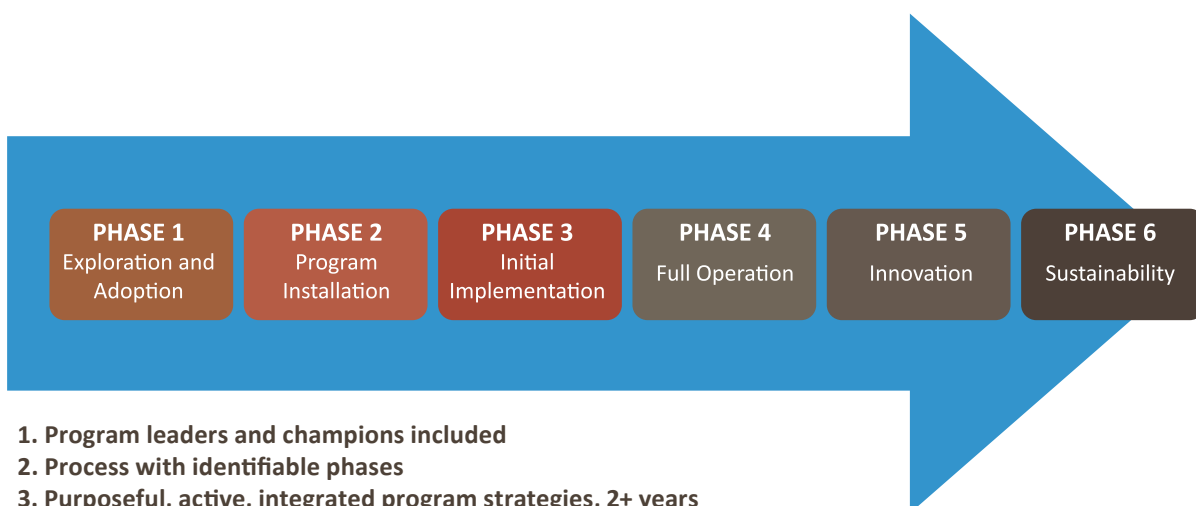
## Closing the gap between evidence and practice

In 2010 the Australian Department of Finance and Deregulation's strategic review of Indigenous expenditure (Australian Government, 2010) acknowledged that the primary challenge in closing the gap between Indigenous and other Australians is not so much in developing policy but in more effectively implementing and delivering reliable services. Approaching implementation<sup>4</sup> in the right way is vital. *Our Men Our Healing* upholds the principals of sound implementation (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman and Wallace, 2005) and has applied these to the program development and planning in the following ways.

**Including program leaders and champions** to provide advice, financial and moral support, technical assistance and a voice for the program (Fixsen, et al, 2005; Fixsen, Blase, Naoom and Wallace, 2009; Mildon and Shlonsky, 2011)

**Working through a serialised process with identifiable phases** rather than viewing implementation as a singular event (Fixsen, et al, 2009)

**Including purposeful, active and integrated program strategies** for a minimum of two years that support the program and help bridge the gap between knowledge and practice (Fixsen et al., 2005, 2009; Mildon and Shlonsky, 2011)



What follows is an outline of the process undertaken by the Healing Foundation for identifying men's evidence (risk and protective factors) to guide healing pathways in *Our Men Our Healing*. This process is the roadmap for ongoing planning and implementation of the program.

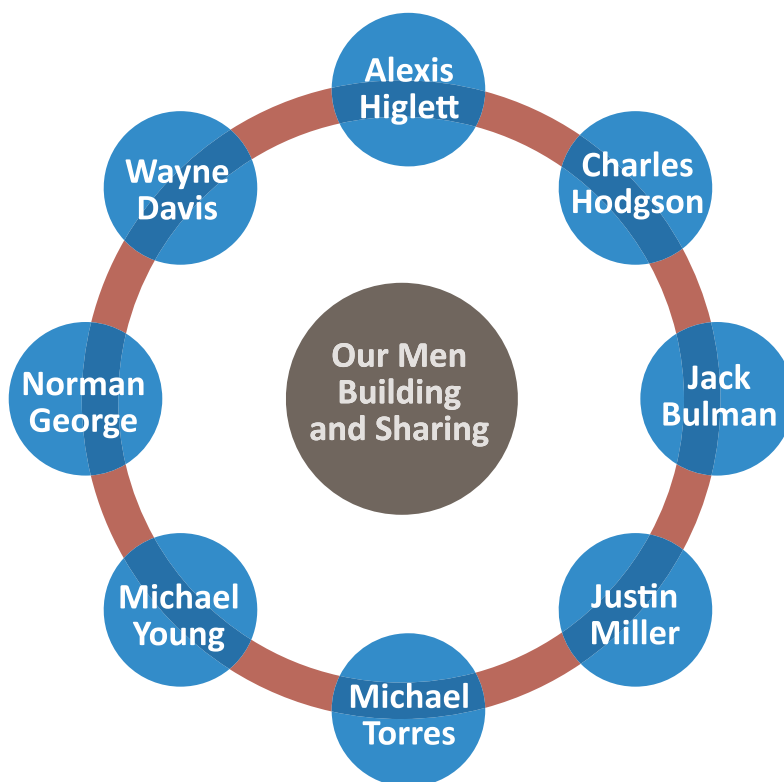
<sup>4</sup> Implementation science refers to the "study of methods to promote the systematic uptake of clinical research findings and other evidence-based practices into routine practice" (Graham, Logan, Harrison, Straus, Tetroe, Caswell and Robinson, 2006).

## Our men our healing: program leaders and champions

### Knowledge circle and program champions

Indigenous communities have used a beneficial framework of story exchange for thousands of years, for sharing and passing on knowledge and wisdom. Our knowledge systems help our community structures to remain strong by imparting understanding, values, principles and laws in our own way.

Fundamental to the knowledge framework is the concept of knowledge circles which offer more equal and collaborative arrangements, the possibility of sharing and respecting how we build our knowledge system together, a means for strengthening understanding, and ensuring equal responsibility for outcomes. Knowledge circles keep alive our cultural wisdom by reinstating and strengthening its supporting systems. *Our Men Our Healing* uses the knowledge circle for engaging respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men to inform the program and how it is implemented. Figure 2 shows the current *Our Men Our Healing* Knowledge Circle.



**Figure 2: *Our Men Our Healing* Knowledge Circle members**

*Our Men Our Healing Knowledge Circle* is assisting with developing and implementing the program and linking with program champions at each site. Together they will be:

1. supporting the goals and direction of *Our Men Our Healing*
2. advising on strategies and mechanisms for increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's participation in and empowerment through the program
3. advising on developing and implementing support in the three remote pilot sites
4. capturing the ongoing context which will integrate with and inform healing efforts in other thematic and geographic areas.

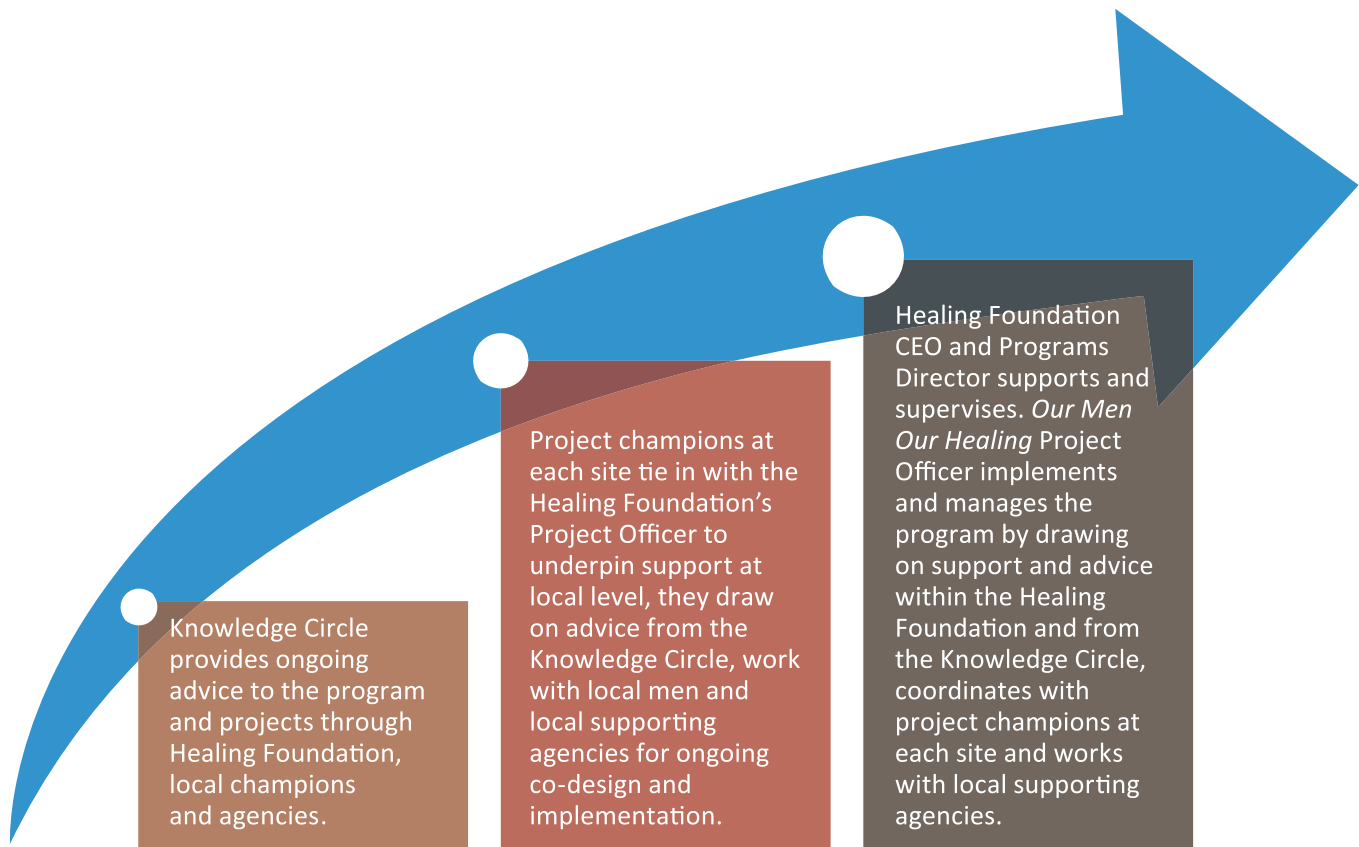
The Knowledge Circle and program champions are anticipated to be in place across the two years of the program. Their work and contribution will be reviewed after the first 12 months.



## Program support : partners, leaders and agencies

Substantial support will be given to *Our Men Our Healing* through the skill of the Knowledge Circle in working directly with Aboriginal men, and through the Healing Foundation's program staff and expertise.

Site program champions will link in with the Knowledge Circle and program staff will bring local program partners together with agencies who can add value.



**Figure 3: *Our Men Our Healing* program leaders and champions**

Governmental grants, such as the grant received for *Our Men Our Healing*, carry a range of complex program management requirements. These requirements often place a heavy burden on Indigenous organisations, especially those dealing with the challenges of regional and remote work. To minimise this burden the Healing Foundation will adhere to the principles and recommendations outlined in the Commonwealth Ombudsman's Report (2010) by communicating effectively with its local partners, providing ongoing support and finding solutions, simplifying reporting, quickly resolving any disputes, and meeting all of our obligations.

## Our men our healing: identifiable phases

The program phasing for *Our Men Our Healing* has been organised to support the most significant gains on the ground for our men.

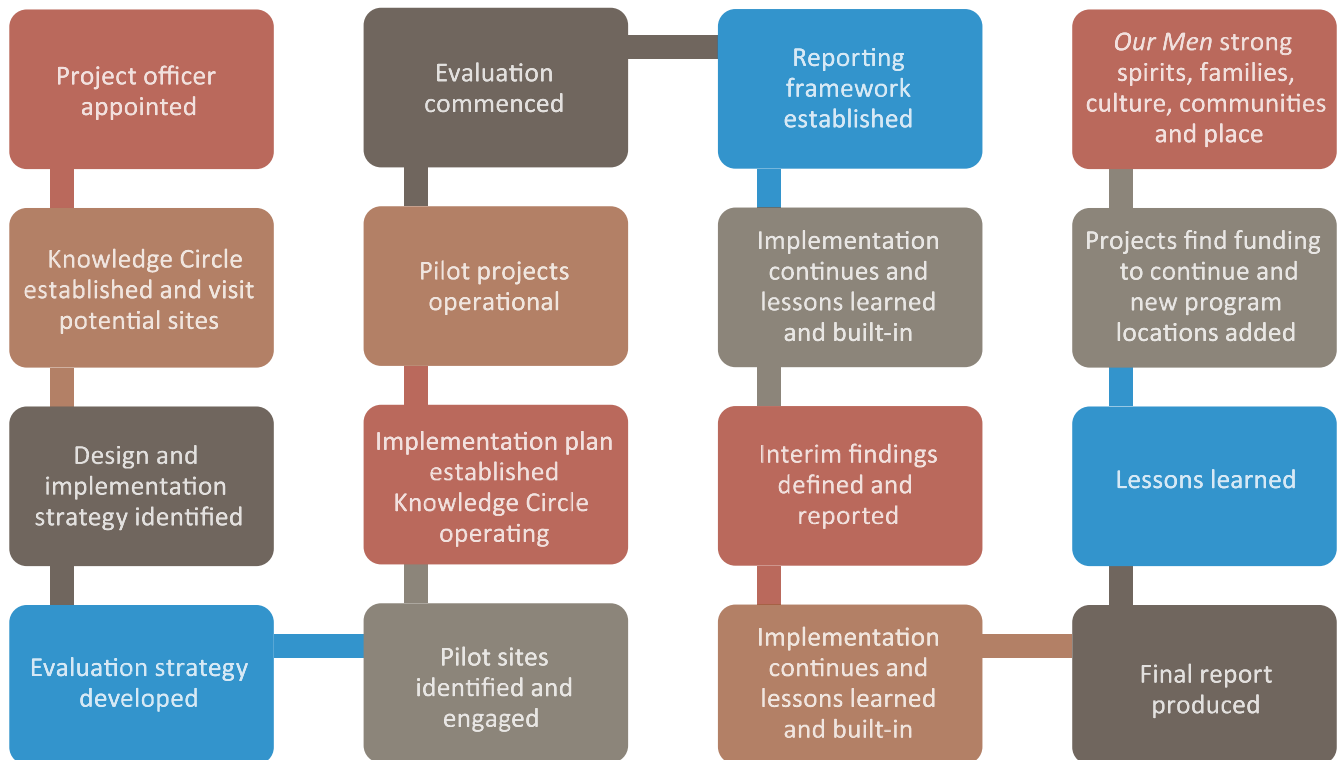
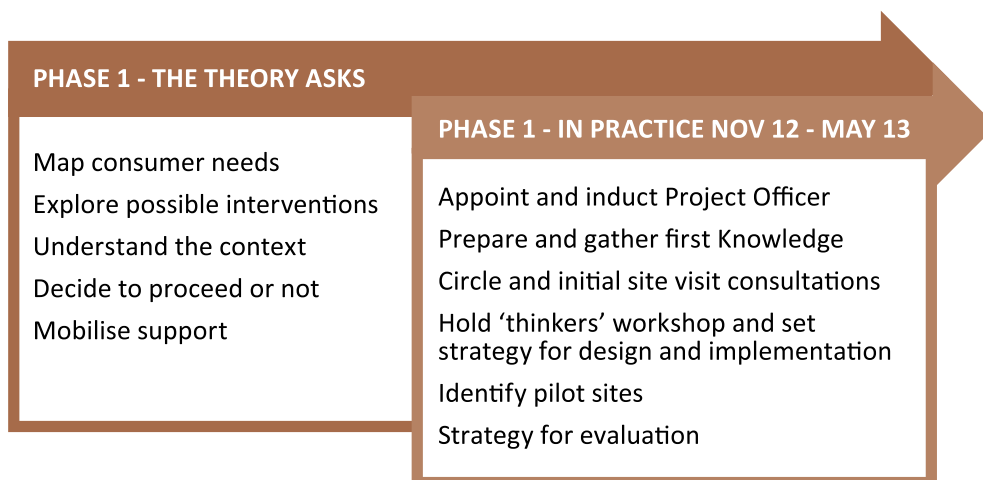


Figure 4: Identifiable actions in the phasing of *Our Men Our Healing*

### Phase one: exploration and adoption

The Healing Foundation mapped the needs of our men, explored possible interventions, built an understanding of the local context, and reviewed whether or not to proceed after assessing the extent to which support for the program could be mobilised. Here is how we put this into practice.



**Appoint and induct Project Officer.** In November 2012 the Healing Foundation appointed a Project Officer with relevant experience in working with Indigenous men. The Senior Project Officer was familiarised with the Healing Foundation and introduced to *Our Men Our Healing* and its stakeholders. Work began on mapping needs, exploring possible interventions, and drafting a design, implementation and evaluation strategy. A working outline was prepared for consulting with men, women and organisations at potential pilot sites to further map needs, explore interventions and mobilise support.

**Prepare and gather Knowledge Circle and visit potential pilot sites for consultation.** The Healing Foundation organised sustainable support for *Our Men Our Healing*. A terms of reference was prepared for the Knowledge Circle and a call for expressions of interest was made. Knowledge Circle participants were appointed and gathered in February 2013. Needs were further mapped, hopes explored and reflections and knowledge shared for understanding our men's context and barriers. The Project Officer visited potential pilot sites to further map needs, explore interventions and mobilise support. He presented a draft program outline for consulting with men, women and organisations. Women were consulted separately through their own representatives, as they will be at various times across the life of the projects.

The mapping exercise highlighted that the focus of and advocacy for men's healing work is not keeping pace with their needs. In *Men's Places* – a literature review from the Menzies Centre for Child Development and Education – Arney and Westby (2012) highlighted the multi-factor interrelationship between trauma, emotional and physical violence and “the need to work with Aboriginal men for their own healing as people that experience violence and for the benefit of family and community where men perpetrate violence.” It acknowledged that extensive community engagement and clear focus in male-centred services are essential. Strategies for engaging our men in healing their spirits were documented during this phase.

**Hold workshop in Darwin and set strategy for design and implementation.** In May 2013 the Healing Foundation facilitated a thinkers' workshop for *Our Men Our Healing* where the results of the earlier mapping exercises and proposed interventions were explored. This workshop brought together the Knowledge Circle and Northern Territory representatives including men from potential pilot sites. The workshop helped men connect the issues they face to their needs. By assessing gaps in existing healing efforts men were able to outline a design for the program. The gathering took into account the Healing Foundation's funding agreement and strategic vision so that the program:

- offers a place and space for our men to find their capacity to be strong, positive role models and champions for their families and communities
- increases opportunities for our men to identify their challenges and lead and develop their own responses to their trauma, grief and loss
- supports our men in three remote pilot sites to begin a committed process of healing and enhance their resilience and wellbeing
- upholds appropriate evaluation principles and practices including sharing findings
- contributes to the knowledge and experience of the Healing Foundation in men's healing.

Using this information, workshop participants developed the intervention logic and designs for each site, documented each project description and performance measures, and planned implementation right down to critical actions. It also worked on ways to promote the program via a communication strategy to engage men and their wider communities in the program. The result is that *Our Men Our Healing* is focussing on our men's need for holistic wellbeing. It does this by recognising the particular social, spiritual and emotional needs of men and anchors the program in cultural healing ways and safe practices.

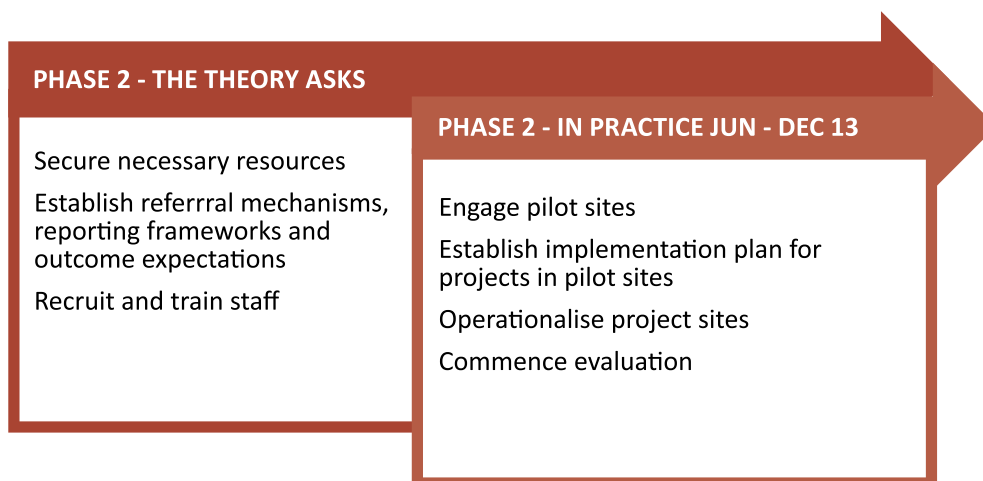
The program includes survivors of abuse and neglect, works at addressing issues of sexual violence, alcohol and drug misuse, violence, incarceration, self-harm and suicide, and enables connection to trauma informed services. *Our Men Our Healing* upholds that Aboriginal men own the issues affecting them so they can positively lead and sustain their own responses.

**Identify pilot sites and consult.** The Healing Foundation completed the mapping exercise in consultation with the Northern Territory and Federal Governments and identified the pilot sites as Maningrida, Ngukurr and Wurrumiyanga. The site selection was based on motivation, existing men's group structures and readiness for engagement in these locations.

**Strategy for evaluation.** The Healing Foundation is committed to building and verifying evidence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing work. To ensure that *Our Men Our Healing* gathers reliable and valid evidence an external evaluator was appointed. Following a review of the design, strategy and plan, an evaluation strategy was documented. The evaluation strategy includes critical measures, appropriate measurement tools and how the evaluation will be built into individual projects and across the program.

## Phase two : program installation

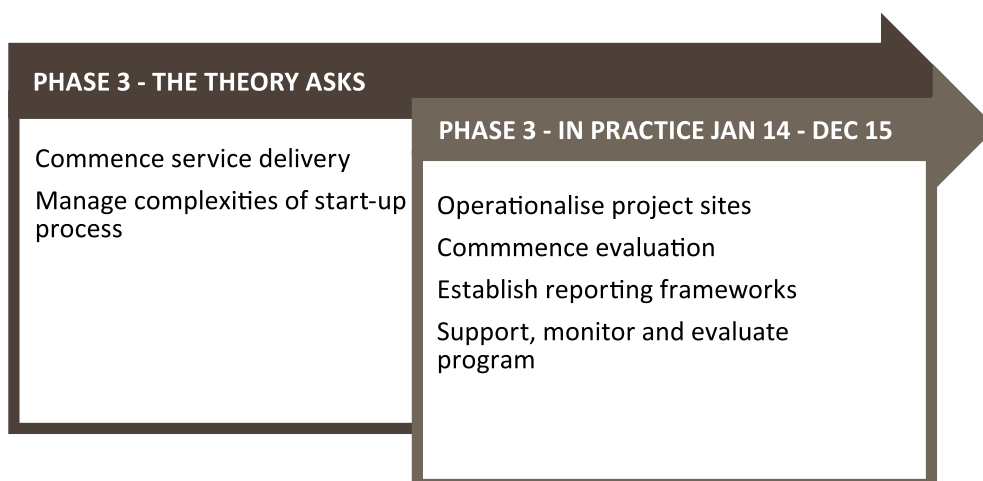
The Healing Foundation secured necessary resources, established referral mechanisms and reporting frameworks and set expectations around outcomes.



**Engage pilot sites and localise implementation plan for each site.** Following the Darwin workshop and confirmation of pilot sites, the Project Officer visited each pilot site for further consultation and to workshop and document individual site project logics and implementation plans. Feedback from the workshop was shared and the program's implementation plan and evaluation strategy were reviewed. An engagement strategy was developed for mobilising support from community and organisations associated with the three program sites including auspicing partners. Another Knowledge Circle meeting was convened and consultation material from each site was reviewed and perspectives and advice shared. This phase culminated in a meeting at Crab Claw Island in August 2013, where men from two of the three sites<sup>5</sup> came together to present and share their community's project logic for *Our Men Our Healing*.

## Phase three : initial implementation

The delivery of the pilot programs will be rolled out to each of the three communities over a two-year timeframe. The Healing Foundation is commencing service delivery and managing the complexities of start-up along with anticipating ongoing challenges and risks and ways to mitigate those.



<sup>5</sup> Men from one site had to cancel their participation due to pressing matters in their community.

**Operationalise project sites.** The Healing Foundation worked with each of the pilot site auspicing organisations to prepare individual funding agreements and service delivery plans for each project. These include project description and objectives, components and activities, and evaluation and reporting measures. They are linked to the program logic developed by each community and confirmed at the combined design workshop at Crab Claw Island. Sound implementation practice suggests that a two to four year investment is needed for successful program implementation and the pilot projects within *Our Men Our Healing* are set to run for a minimum of two years.

**Commence projects and evaluation.** The pilot projects will commence in a staged way from March 2014. In keeping with the evaluation plan, evaluation tools and methodologies are developed and ready for use by the projects, and this will be supported by site visits from the evaluation team.

**Establish reporting frameworks and report interim findings.** The service agreements and project work plans document the project reporting requirements. The reporting will measure for key results, evaluate progress against outcomes, document challenges and successes, and plan strategies for the next 12 months. The Healing Foundation will also monitor inputs to the program and ensure that the program reports speak to the data requirements it is obligated to capture under its own funding arrangements. An interim evaluation report will be completed at the end of the first year of the project's operation to document the findings, success and outcomes of the project and capture lessons learned.

**Support, monitor and evaluate projects and program.** As part of the Healing Foundation's due diligence for the program, we identified and captured the following potential challenges, risks and risk mitigation strategies. In implementing, ongoing attention will be given to these.

#### Identified challenges and risks

- It takes time and effort to build trust and partnerships
- Negotiation can be long and complicated and involve the conflicting needs of funding bodies which may be hard to reconcile
- Developing common purpose and partners from diverse backgrounds and experience is not straight forward and concerns may not be shared
- Reaching a balance between the interests of the evaluation, community and equity in the distribution of resources and benefits
- Using a collaborative research approach does not guarantee that empowering consequences will follow the strategies to address challenges
- Creating long-term commitment and sustaining relationships and ongoing buy-in by key stakeholders when the program is for just two years
- Retaining the right people for the Knowledge Circle
- Retaining a competent and experienced project officer to take the project from inception and throughout implementation.

## Mitigation measures for challenges and risks

- Adhere to collaborative principles that encourage trusting relationships and recognise the value of all partners
- Set up open communication, an understanding of shared history, coherent goals, exchange of ideas, timely resolution of conflicts
- Apply Ombudsman's five principles of good practice in managing programs in remote Indigenous settings, i.e. communicating effectively with local partners, providing ongoing support and finding solutions, simplifying reporting, quickly resolving any disputes, and meeting all obligations
- Maintain flexibility and sound risk management strategies in program support
- Support all project and program staff, and Knowledge Circle in terms of managing vicarious trauma
- Use the strong cultural experience of the Healing Foundation's male Board members to keep the right people involved in the Knowledge Circle and maintain the cultural integrity of the program
- Listen to and understand the views of local communities and local men as a critical approach
- Draw on our national contacts for bringing in knowledge and skills as the program develops and challenges present
- Adhere to a methodology based on our emerging evidence of what works from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.

## Phase four onwards : full operation, innovation and sustainability

---

As *Our Men Our Healing* will be operational in 2014, the Healing Foundation is developing implementation plans with sites to strengthen and support their aspirations and activities for success. Plans include skills training and collaborating with local organisations to provide effective mentoring and development opportunities for the men. The Healing Foundation has invested heavily in establishing community partners and linking in with other agencies that are keen to support our men in the change they desire.

As the projects at each site develop, and monitoring and evaluation feedback flows in, activity plans may be adjusted to enhance existing features of the project, and/or include new features to ensure the program goals are met.

The projects and activities developed and negotiated in *Our Men Our Healing* are in line with government policy and current priorities. They are well placed to attract additional or ongoing operational support. But sustainability is about more than just funding. The strength of co-designing and co-implementing *Our Men Our Healing* is assisting in building sustainable change from the ground up. The approach is itself critical in developing personal agency in our men and therefore addresses how men view themselves as drivers and agents of change. The implementation process has also enabled men to do the work in safe spaces and continue an open discussion about how to support their community to address issues of safety, equality and care for themselves and their families.

The program objectives, and healing more generally, will be furthered as *Our Men Our Healing* builds momentum and our men experience success during the program's implementation.

## Our men our healing : purposeful, active, integrated strategies

### Our Men Our Healing: a summary of strategies

- Address family and domestic violence through Elders, cultural healing activities, counselling and mentoring support
- Address issues of alcohol and other drug misuse through cultural healing activities, counselling and mentoring support
- Address suicide awareness
- Assist and support men to engage in healing activities
- Assist men to seek and connect to social and emotional support and counselling
- Build partnerships between all clan groups
- Build partnerships between health and legal services, Corrections, and Police
- Build relationships with services for education, training, and employment opportunities and pathways
- Build relationships with services for sharing of resources that support men's program activities
- Engage senior lore men to teach cultural lore and discipline and undertake healing and cleansing ceremonies
- Engage cultural Elders to teach culture, language, respect, stories, art, crafts, song lines, dance and ceremony
- Establish protocols for interagency collaboration
- Facilitate health education, social and emotional wellbeing
- Facilitate male clinic health programs and check-ups
- Focus on culture, communication and consistency
- Recruit and train men's healing program workers and cultural educators/mentors
- Refer offenders to healing program as an alternative to jail
- Refer school dropouts to healing program and young men's Bunggul school
- Run cultural camps for men to pass on traditional knowledge, for healing activities and walking on country
- Run Indigenous leadership and governance training workshops
- Run men's place as a centre and take men to outstations
- Sustain support for men being released from prison – cultural family mediation and rehabilitation program

*Our Men Our Healing* is adopting an impressive range of strategies for men's healing which sit well with the guiding principle of co-design and joint implementation.

## Targets and strategies for key results

---

The following key results are targeted and strategies adopted to support the initiation and development of *Our Men Our Healing*.

### Key result: men engaged in the design and development of appropriate models of service delivery

#### STRATEGIES

- Give recognition and acknowledgement to men when seeking their involvement in the project or program and service development
- Involve men in the development of innovative programs and services that target them
- Host an Indigenous men's healing workshop available to local and national participants
- Consult with men in the pilot sites for input and attendance at the workshop

### Key result: culturally appropriate men's healing program and service delivery pilot models developed for each of the sites

#### STRATEGIES

- Engage an Indigenous male facilitator for the workshop
- Include space in the workshop agenda for men's business time
- Separate consultation with women from the pilot sites
- Present findings of women's consultation to Indigenous men's workshop
- Split the workshop into Indigenous men only on day one and day two invitation open to non-Indigenous men and supporters or stakeholder
- Draw on healing knowledge and strengths from Indigenous men in attendance from a contemporary and traditional perspective
- Use knowledge of the local men from the pilot sites for checking and approving the model developed and adapt according to local ways of working

### Key result: appropriate evaluation method implemented

#### STRATEGIES

- Engage appropriate evaluation consultants
- Involve local men in pilot sites for advice in all stages of implementation
- Record situations and impacts on men and families before and after project
- Use appropriate evaluation methodology including participatory action research e.g. art, personal stories, music, video, photos, journey book, activities record and outcomes, men's group discussions, men's group report etc.



**Key result: effective and sustainable men's healing programs operating for men in three remote locations**

### STRATEGIES

- Design and adapt appropriate programs and service delivery
- Identify agencies to auspice and develop projects to be funded
- Involve local men from the pilot sites in the program design and development
- Implement strategy to support quality and effective projects in each site
- Train and employ local men for the program delivery by local agency as a key priority
- Create appropriate and sustainable partnerships between relevant Indigenous organisations, local community councils and non-government organisations
- Target key men or local community champions to assist in development, adaptation and implementation of programs, services and activities
- Operationalise effective healing projects at each site
- Assist each site to develop appropriate healing strategies for their men
- Enhance collaboration and connection between service systems and build into program design

**Key result: strong collaborative partnerships between relevant government, non-government and local Indigenous organisations operating in all three sites**

### STRATEGIES

- Identify and assess appropriate government bodies, non-government organisations and local Indigenous organisations through stakeholder consultation and the men's healing workshop
- Link all entities to the Healing Foundation for partnership proposals
- Introduce and discuss partnerships with the local men's representatives in the pilot sites
- Instil ownership of the partnerships and programs with the local men in pilot sites
- Support the local men in pilot sites to be actively engaged and involved in the program and service delivery or implementation
- Support development of partnership agreements and processes to sustain collaboration

**Key result: effective processes for men's engagement identified and implemented**

### STRATEGIES

- Work closely with or through local men representatives
- Ensure all community and cultural protocols are met
- Develop appropriate protocols where needed

**Key result: increase in men engaged in suitable traditional and contemporary healing programs and services or activities**

### **STRATEGIES**

- Support the development of appropriate traditional and contemporary healing programs under the guidance of local men and men's healing knowledge circle
- Give recognition to those completing activities and program
- Record activities in photo and film or other
- Report activities to local community in newsletters and papers
- Uphold and support key role models as strong men
- Encourage a local name for strong men
- Reward and accredit men for accessing healing supportx
- Involve Elders and women in encouraging men
- Support camps and other cultural or sporting and recreational activities with father and son component

**Key result: establish meaningful, effective healing projects for men in the pilot sites**

### **STRATEGIES**

- Support implementation of projects through ongoing support, training and strategic problem solving
- Ensure men in the local sites have ownership of the project and programs
- Support men in creating safe spaces which give permission for men to deal with trauma related issues and open up to healing which may include immediate access to support during and after activities, e.g. counselling and mentoring, or other
- Assist men to identify appropriate venues or locations, e.g. men's places, men's sheds that could further support healing in their community
- Encourage inclusion of cultural activities that may include traditional healing practices
- Consult with relevant bodies and local men to identify safe spaces or resumption of men's places and men's sheds
- Apply local language to name of spaces
- Local men involved at all levels and stages in design and promotion of suitable spaces

**Key result: increase understanding of trauma and ability to address this within three sites**

### **STRATEGIES**

- Give support to addressing the negative effects of trauma e.g. family violence, suicide, etc.
- Work to ensure projects link men to healing programs and counselling support
- Work to normalise a view of early intervention and prevention – seeking support services early as opposed to crisis support

Key result: men with restored roles as teachers, nurturers and protectors and as strong supporters of their families

### STRATEGIES

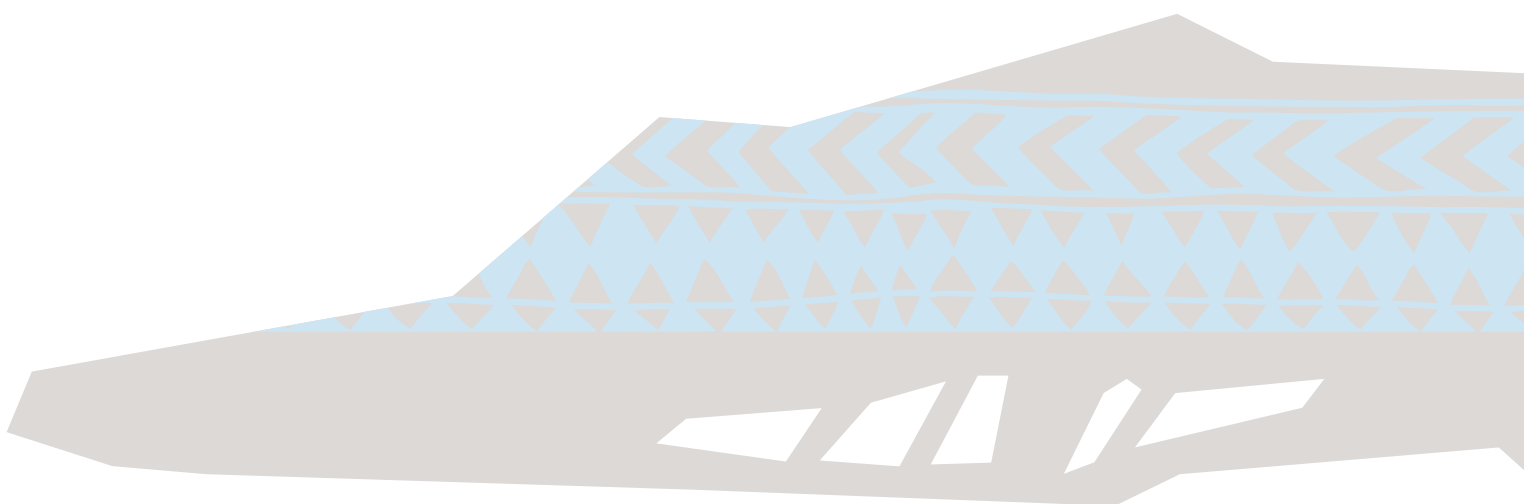
- Ensure that men are engaged in seeking understanding of what teacher, nurturer and protector mean in a traditional and contemporary world
- Assist men to link concepts to how they support their families
- Run action research, workshop concepts and implement participatory evaluation activities
- Promote and support a leadership role of strong men and good role models
- Support men to empower and find their own healing and participate in healing program planning and activities
- Instil a culture of pride and ownership in programs

Ongoing evaluation will measure progress on key results for each project and across the program. The Healing Foundation will reflect evaluation lessons in our ongoing program strategies and activities to ensure the program can support our men's healing by meeting its goals.

## Our Men Our Healing : a journey begins

*Our Men Our Healing* is working with and for our men to meet the healing needs they have identified, with the answers they have designed. While our men realise that there is a long way to go, the program offers hope through a coherent roadmap of healing steps which our men can drive over a longer period of time with other agencies, services and interventions. The perpetual co-design process itself invites healing and the overall program approach offers the best chance for achieving and sustaining ambitious healing outcomes.

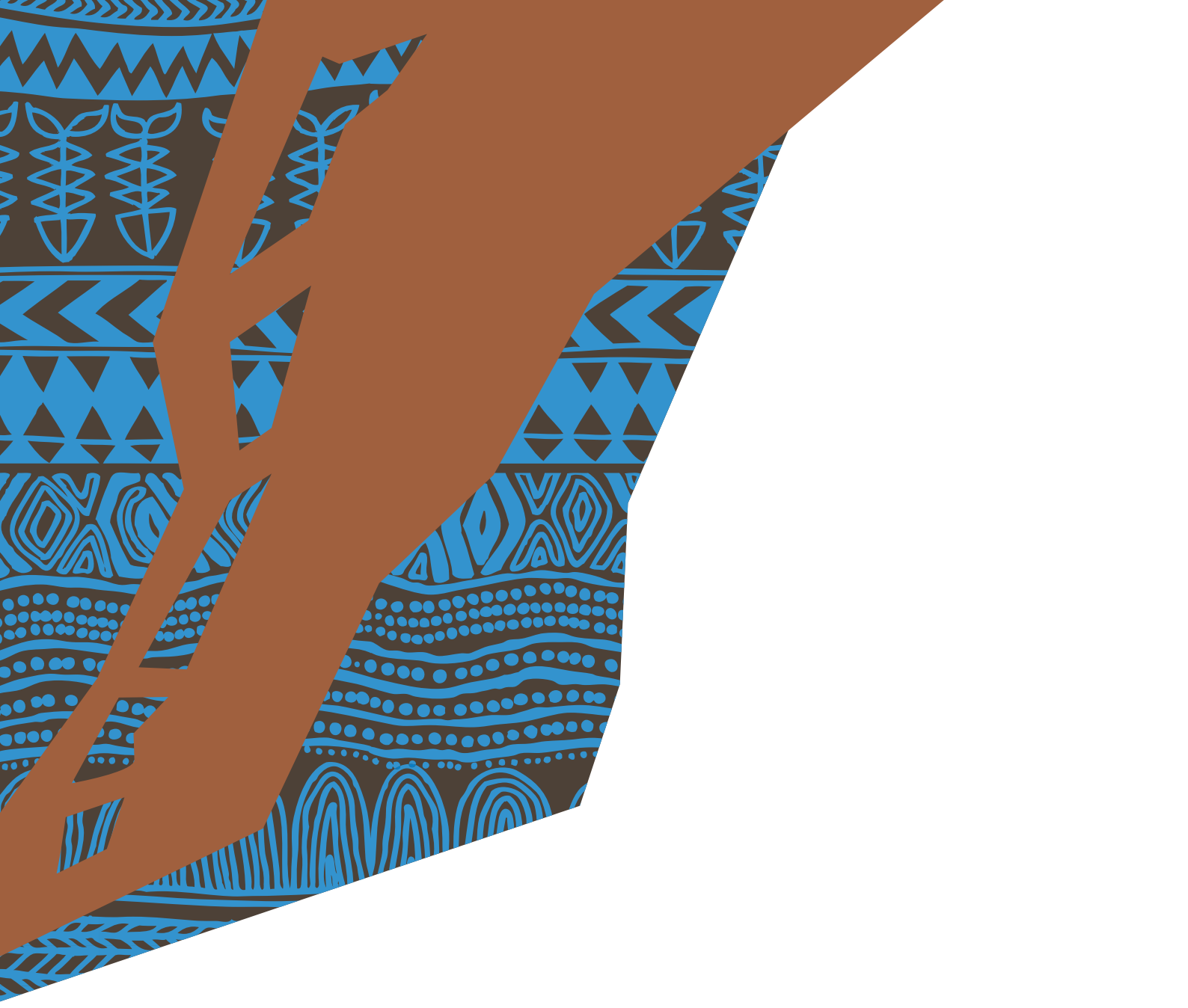
*Our Men Our Healing* aims to restore dignity and pride, and effect positive change for our men in strengthening and empowering them as teachers, providers, leaders, role models, nurturers and protectors.



## References

---

- Arney, F., and Westby, M.A. (2012). Men's Places Literature Review. The Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies School of Health Research, Darwin NT
- Australian Government (2010). *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure: Report to the Australian Government*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Finance and Deregulation
- Caruana, C. (2010). *Healing services for Indigenous people*, Family Relationships Quarterly, vol. 17, pp. 3–9
- Commonwealth Ombudsman (2010). Administration of Funding Agreements with Regional and Remote Indigenous Organisations, Office for the Arts, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Canberra, Report No.16, 2010
- Australian Government (2010). *Strategic Review of Indigenous Expenditure: Report to the Australian Government*. Canberra, ACT: Department of Finance and Deregulation
- Fixsen, D. L., Naoom, S. F., Blase, K. A., Friedman, R. A., and Wallace, F. (2005). *Implementation Research: A Synthesis of the Literature*. Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, Louis de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute, the National Implementation Network
- Fixsen, D. L., Blase, K. A., Naoom, S. F., and Wallace, F. (2009). Core implementation components. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 19(5), 531-540
- Graham, I. D., Logan, J., Harrison, M. B., Straus, S. E., Tetroe, J., Caswell, W., and Robinson, N. (2006). *Lost in translation: Time for a map?* Journal of Continuing Education in the Health Professions, 26, 13-24
- McKendrick, J., Brooks, R., Hudson, J., Thorpe, M., and Bennett, P., (2013). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Programs: A Literature Review*
- Mildon, R., and Shlonsky, A. (2011). *Bridge over troubled waters: Using implementation science to facilitate effective services in child welfare*. *Child Abuse and Neglect*, 35, 753-756



[healingfoundation.org.au](http://healingfoundation.org.au)



[www.facebook.com/healingfoundation](https://www.facebook.com/healingfoundation)



[twitter.com/HealingOurWay](https://twitter.com/HealingOurWay)