Using Evidence in the Targeted Earlier Intervention Program

November 2020

The Targeted Earlier Intervention Program (TEI) aims to support service providers to access, use and build evidence to improve client outcomes and service delivery.

This document outlines:

What is evidence in the TEI Program?

Evidence is information that is used to support a claim or belief. The TEI program uses three different types of evidence to inform decision making:

- research evidence and data
- lived experience and client voice
- expertise and local knowledge.

Evidence in the TEI program

Research evidence and data

- Information that is systematically collected through established research methods
- It comes from a range of sources, including: academic journal articles and published literature, analysis of statistics and data, and reports from government and non-government organisations
- It can be qualitative or quantitative

Lived experience and client voice

- The views of children, young people, families and communities
- Day-to-day feedback from people using your service
- This information can be collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups with clients. It may also be information recorded in the Data Exchange.

Expertise and local knowledge

- Clinical and subject matter expertise, insight and skills that are developed over many years.
- Information known about a target group or community that might influence service design and delivery (e.g. knowledge of culture and values).

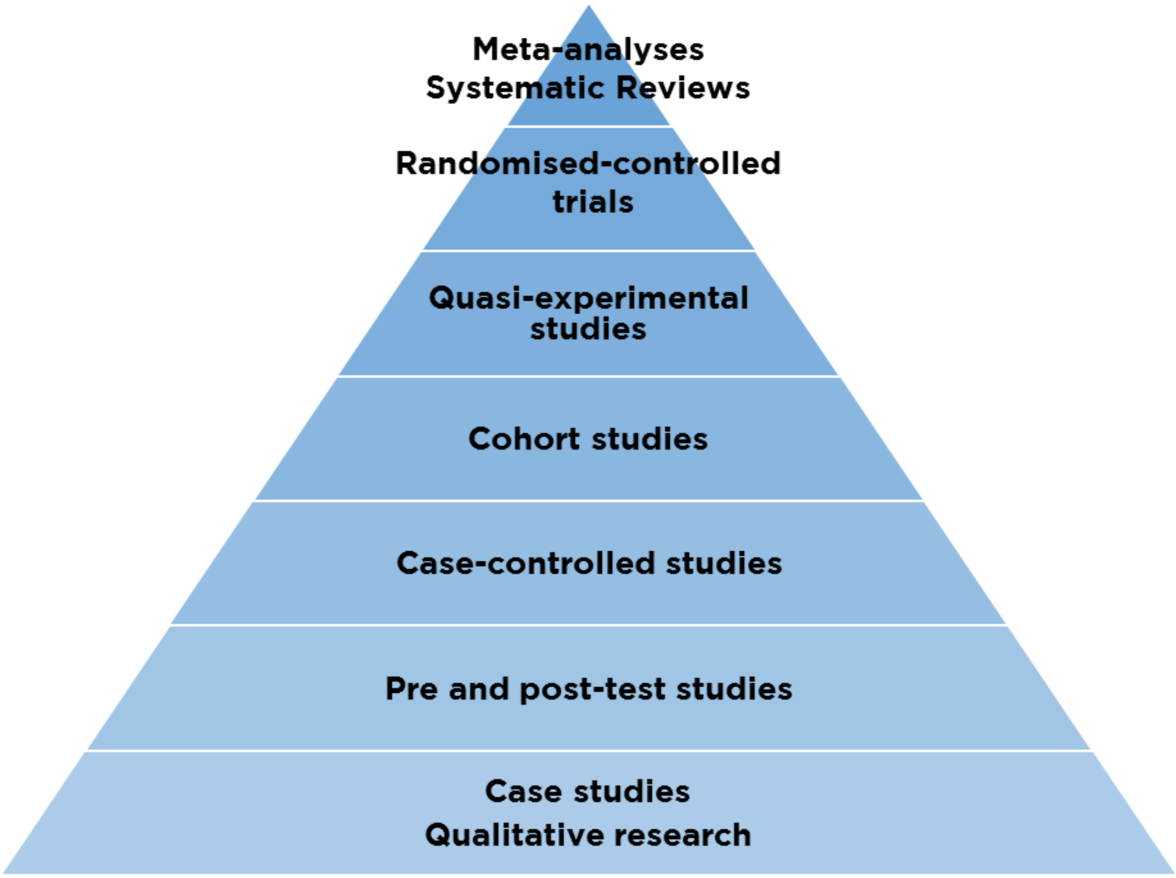
Different types of research evidence

There are many different types of research evidence you can use in your work.

The most reliable types of research evidence are:

1. **meta-analyses** - combine the results of many studies of the same program into a single evaluation
2. **systematic reviews** - summarise and synthesise the findings of multiple studies.
3. **randomised-controlled trials (RCTs)** – compare people receiving a service (treatment group) to people who do not receive a service (control group) to see if there is a significant difference in their outcomes. RCTs randomly assign participants to a treatment group or control group. This means they have greater control over factors that might influence a person's outcomes. This is the best way to understand the impact of a program.
4. **Quasi-experimental studies** – are similar to RCTs. They compare the outcomes of people who have received a service and people who haven't. However, they don't randomly allocate people to a treatment or control group.

Figure 1. Hierarchy of Research Evidence



Current limitations of research evidence

Unfortunately, this high-quality evidence is not always available for the activities our services provide. If you cannot find high-quality evidence, we encourage you to use other types of evidence, such as pre- and post-test studies and qualitative studies. However, it's important to acknowledge the limitations of the research evidence you find.

Pre- and post-test studies

- Pre- and post-test studies collect data from participants before and after a service to monitor changes.
- These studies can help us understand changes in client outcomes when there are no RCTs or quasi-experimental studies.
- As they do not have a control group, they are not as reliable as an RCT. We cannot be sure changes are a direct result of services.
- Changes may be due to other changes in the client's life, natural changes in learning or development, or changes in the larger service system.

Qualitative studies

- Qualitative studies provide valuable information about people's experiences.
- The findings may not represent the entire population you are interested in and they cannot measure effect.

What is evidence-informed practice?

Evidence-informed practice means using evidence to design, implement and improve our programs and interventions. This evidence can be:

- research evidence
- lived experience and client voice
- professional expertise.

We aim to increase evidence-informed practice in TEI services over time.

Why is using evidence important?

Adopting an evidence-informed approach will help us to meet client needs in the best possible way. Using evidence supports us to:

- **Do more of 'what works' -** using evidence helps us provide services that meet the needs of our clients and communities. We can use evidence to inform our decision making help us avoid harmful or ineffective approaches.
- **Explain our work -** evidence helps us explain how we will achieve outcomes, why we have taken a particular approach or why we provide a particular service.
- **Continuously learn and improve together –** using and collating evidence helps us to continuously improve our services. We will learn from our programs, innovative pilots, research evidence and evaluations to improve our work.

How can evidence be used?

In the TEI program, evidence can be used to:

- identify local priorities and understand client needs e.g. local knowledge about client needs, research evidence about particular client cohorts
- identify what works in earlier intervention e.g. research evidence about successful programs
- understand how to improve client outcomes e.g. research evidence that supports your theory of change
- continuously improve program delivery and performance e.g. modifying programs in response to new evidence
- improve client experience and service uptake e.g. client satisfaction surveys, research evidence about programs with strong uptake.

What are evidence-based programs and how do I use them?

What is an evidence-based program?

A program that has been rigorously evaluated in a controlled setting and has demonstrated effectiveness with specific population groups. There are clear links between the program's core components and the expected outcomes.

See What is an evidence-based program? for more information.

How do I select and implement a suitable evidence-based program?

Before you select an evidence-based program, you should conduct a needs assessment. A needs assessment helps you identify and prioritise your client's needs to inform programs, policies and services. Conducting a needs assessment will help you:

- identify your client group and their needs
- define the problem you're trying to solve.

Once you're clear about these things, you can identify the best program to meet your client's needs.

When you select an evidence-based program, you should determine if:

- the program meets your aims
- the program has been developed and evaluated with your target group
- you have the resources needed to implement the program
- the program will achieve the outcomes you're looking for.

The Hexagon Exploration Tool can help you evaluate the suitability of programs in a structured way.

See Selecting an evidence-based program for more information.

You must implement the evidence-based program as is intended. Otherwise you won't know if issues with the program are because it is ineffective or because it hasn't been delivered properly. You must also monitor the program to ensure the core components are adhered to.

See Implementation and adaptation of evidence-based programs for more information.

Do I need to use evidence-based programs to be evidence-informed?

No, you do not have to use evidence-based programs to take an evidence-informed approach to TEI.

An evidence-based program may not fully meet the diverse and complex needs of our clients and communities. You also might not be able to find an evidence-based program for the type of service you provide.

You should use evidence to ensure the right mix of services are provided to address client's needs in the best possible way.

This may mean:

- adapting evidence-based programs for the local population
- analysing the common elements of successful practices and programs to support service design.

Example

Aboriginal Parenting Programs: Review of Case Studies

There is little evidence on parenting education programs developed specifically for Aboriginal families. However, there is research that has identified key elements of effective parenting supports for Aboriginal parents and families.

In 2018, Absec developed case studies from across NSW of effective and innovative Aboriginal-led practice in the provision of parenting supports. See Aboriginal Parenting Programs: Review of Case Studies.

This work identified key elements of successful programs could be used to inform effective design and delivery of parenting programs in Aboriginal communities.

Where can I find evidence-based programs?

To start, you could check out the following resources:

- Communities for Children Facilitating Partners: Evidence-based programmes profile
- Recognising parenting programs that really work
- Which parenting programs work for vulnerable children?
- Review of parenting interventions in Australia

You may also find evidence-based programs when you search for research evidence.

Please note: There is limited evidence and evidence-based programs in the Community Strengthening stream.

When and how do I adapt an evidence-based program?

You may need to adapt an existing evidence-based program to make it more suitable for your local community.

The Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) have identified some key circumstances in which you might need to adapt your program:

- Client engagement and/or retention is low
- Clients have unique/different risk or protective factors
- Outcomes are not achieved

If your program needs to be adapted, you should consider the following:

- what are the important differences between your clients and the original population group the program was developed for?
- what aspects of the program might need to be changed?
- how will you change them?

When you adapt a program, you cannot change the core components of the program that are responsible for its effectiveness.

Can't change	**Can change**
• Core content components – what the program is teaching (e.g. knowledge, attitudes, skills) • Core teaching components – how the program is administered • Core implementation components – resources needed to deliver program	• Location – participants feel comfortable and safe • Accessibility – participants can access the program (e.g. time of sessions) • Staffing – reflect the diversity of your clients • Language and other resources – adapt content so it's relevant • Activities – tailor content to the capacity and culture of your group

Once you have made any necessary changes, test your adapted program with your client group and facilitators. You may need to make more changes to the program. You should document all the changes you make to the program and keep track of what worked and what didn't work. This is so you can replicate the program in the future.

You should also evaluate your program to ensure the changes were successful.

See Implementation and adaptation of evidence-based programs for more guidance.

How do I develop an evidence-informed program?

There may not be an evidence-based program that suits the needs of your target group, even if you adapted it. In that case, you can develop your own program by incorporating components of other evidence-based programs.

An evidence-informed program should have:

- a strong theoretical or research background
- a clear theory of change to explain how it will achieve the intended outcomes
- evidence-based interventions or activities
- a program manual and documentation so it can be replicated
- qualified facilitators to conduct the activities
- a program evaluation to determine if it was successful

See Implementation and adaptation of evidence-based programs for more guidance.

Where can I find and access evidence?

We have collated a number of different sources of evidence. The evidence icons on the right indicate what type of evidence each source provides.

The Data Exchange Self-Service Reports

Client voice and lived experience

The Data Exchange has a number of different reports that:

- collate and analyse the data you have entered about your services and clients
- provide population-level data to help us understand the communities our services are delivered in.

You can access these reports through the Data Exchange at any time. See below for more information about each report:

- Client Outcomes
- Community Profiles
- Organisation Overview
- Resource Planning
- Service Footprint

Data Profiles and Local Priorities

Research evidence and data

Client voice and lived experience

Expertise and local knowledge

In 2019, we developed three resources to support you through the recommissioning process:

- District Data Profiles
- Local Priorities
- Their Futures Matter data pack

These resources will help you understand need in your local area. They are available on the TEI program website.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)

Research evidence and data

The ABS provides data on a wide range of economic, social, population and environmental matters. There are a number of different ABS resources that you might find useful.

- Quickstats: provides a high-level summary of demographic information (e.g. age, education, employment, income, family

composition). This data is available at a number of different levels e.g. nationwide, state, LGA, suburb etc. Use the search box to find the area you're interested in.
- Community Profiles: can be used for researching, planning and analysing geographic areas for different social, economic and demographic characteristics. You can access 'General Community' profiles and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' profiles.

This data is available at a number of different levels e.g. nationwide, state, LGA, suburb etc. Use the search box to find the area you're interested in.

- Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas (SEIFA): ranks areas in Australia according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. You can explore the distribution of advantage and disadvantage in Australia via interactive maps or ABS.Stat.

Australian Early Development Census (AEDC)

Research evidence and data

The AEDC measures the development of children in their first year of school. It can tell us if children are developmentally on track or if they need more support through their school years.

You can access the AEDC Data Explorer for information about children's development at the state, community, and local community level.

HealthStats NSW

Research evidence and data

HealthStats NSW provides data on a number of different topics, including alcohol and substance misuse, mental health, obesity, immunisation and maternal health.

NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR)

Research evidence and data

BOCSAR provides data on crime, victims and offenders in NSW LGAs, suburbs or postcodes. There are a number of different BOCSAR resources that you might find useful:

- Recorded Crime Reports: these are quarterly and annual reports that examine trends in crime
- NSW LGA Excel Tables: these tables provide information on trends and patterns in crime

- Crime Mapping Tools: these interactive maps show the spatial distribution of recorded crimes.

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ)

Research evidence and data

Client voice and lived experience

The DCJ Resource Centre has a number of different resources that provide information about DCJ clients, the services they receive and the outcomes they achieve. These resources include:

- Online Dashboards:
  - Services for children and young people dashboard
  - Domestic and family violence dashboard
- Annual reports and other publications
- FACS Insights, Analysis and Research Publications
- Pathways of Care Longitudinal Study

Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS)

Research evidence and data

AIFS routinely publish reports, factsheets and research summaries on their Publications page. You can filter publications by topic.

Child Family Community Australia (CFCA) produce a series of publications which explore how research applies to policy and practice. Topics range from communities and neighbourhoods to family support programs. You can find these on their Publications page.

Subscribe to CFCA News. This will notify you when new CFCA publications are released.

Parenting Research Centre

Research evidence and data

The Parenting Research Centre routinely publish reports, submissions, academic journal articles and evidence reviews on their Publications page.

These publications are about supporting children and families to thrive by improving parent's skills and knowledge.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

Research evidence and data

The AIHW routinely publish reports and resources related to the health and welfare of Australians. You can access information on population groups, including mothers and babies. Their data collections hold information on a wide range of topics, including child protection, mental health and Aboriginal communities.

The Analysis and Policy Observatory (APO)

Research evidence and data

The APO is a website where you can access public policy research. This research covers a broad range of relevant topics, including communities and neighbourhoods, inclusion, child protection, parenting and families etc.

You can subscribe to the APO Newsletter to keep up to date with the latest policy and practice research.

You can also upload your own publications (e.g. evaluation reports) to the APO website.

Campbell Collaboration

Research evidence and data

The Campbell Collaboration is a research network that produces systematic evidence reviews, plain English summaries and policy briefs. Topics include early education, crime and justice, parenting, families and communities.

You can:

- search for research evidence by topic
- access the Campbell Systematic Reviews open access journal
- browse various evidence portals and databases.

Open-access libraries

Research evidence and data

Search open-access libraries to find academic research evidence:

- CORE
- JSTOR
- Cambridge University Press

How do I find research evidence?

One of the easiest ways to find research evidence is to conduct an internet search. Below are some tips and tricks to help you find the most relevant and up-to-date research.

Step 1. Define your topic and identify keywords

Break down your question or problem into keywords and topics. These will become your search terms.

Write a list of search terms. Include synonyms and alternate spellings of your key words (e.g. neighbour, neighbor; behaviour, behavior).

Step 2. Make the most of your search by using common search tips

- Use quotation marks around a phrase (e.g. "early intervention") to search for the exact phrase, not each of the words separately.
- Put '~' before a word (e.g. ~adolescent). This will tell Google to search for related words.
- Type 'OR' in capital letters between search terms. This will tell Google to look for matches to either term.
    - Example: "neighbourhood centres" OR "community centres"
- Use the 'advanced search' function (in 'settings') to narrow your results.

Step 3. Identify if the information you found is credible

An internet search (e.g. Google) will identify sources that vary in quality and relevance. You need to check if the information you find is reliable and accurate. To do this, you should ask yourself the following questions:

Author	Who wrote or produced the information? Are they an expert or qualified in the field or topic? Are they connected to a reputable institution or organisation?
Purpose	How detailed is the information? Does it meet your needs? What opinions of the author are expressed? Are they ignoring or promoting a particular view? Is it designed to inform, persuade or entertain?
Publisher	Is the information from a reputable source? Is it from a trusted domain (e.g. .gov, .org, .edu) or organisation?
Evidence	Are references and citations available? Do they provide evidence to support their arguments?
Audience	Who is the information aimed at? Is it scholarly enough to use in your work?
Latest	When was it published or last updated? Is there more current information available?

Step 4. Always reference your sources

You should always reference your information.

Your references should include:

- the author
- year of publication
- title of the publication
- who it was published by
- where it was published
- the weblink.

For example: Moore, T McDonald, M, McHugh-Dillon, H & West, S 2016, 'Community Engagement: A key strategy for improving outcomes for Australian Families', CFCA Paper No. 29, Australian Institute of Family Studies, viewed 20 December 2019, https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/publications/community-engagement

You can also include an in-text citation in your written paragraphs. To do this, write the authors surname and the year of publication in brackets, at the end of the relevant sentence.

For example: Community engagement can have beneficial impacts for those involved, with direct effects for the health, wellbeing and empowerment of communities and community members (Moore et al. 2016).

It is important to reference your sources for a number of reasons, including:

- In TEI, we are trying to build the evidence-base for our work. Referencing your sources will help us to collate the research evidence and strengthen our understanding of what works.
- Referencing is a way to provide evidence to support the claims you make. Referencing your sources shows you're aware of existing research and you're using this research to inform your own work.

Who can I ask for help?

Ask your local library

If you can't find any relevant research evidence, or if you find evidence but can't access it (e.g. an academic journal), you can contact your local public library. The librarians should be able to help you:

- conduct a search for relevant information
- identify if the information is reliable and accurate
- access paid journal articles.

Contact the DCJ Central Office

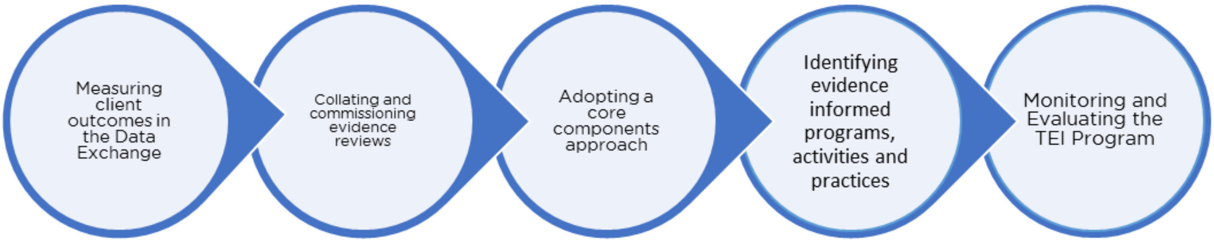
For help understanding and using evidence you can also contact the TEI Reform team in the DCJ Central Office.

Email: TEIReform@facs.nsw.gov.au

How will we build the evidence base for the TEI program?

The amount of high-quality research evidence varies dramatically across the TEI service spectrum.

We will strengthen the evidence base for the TEI program by:



Measuring client outcomes in the Data Exchange

The Data Exchange will support us to build a strong evidence-base for the TEI program. Reporting data in the Data Exchange enables us to:

- better understand the TEI client base
- track client pathways through the service system
- demonstrate the impact our services have on client and community outcomes.

TEI service providers have access to Data Exchange reports that contain information about their activities and clients. These reports are updated every 24 hours and can be accessed at any time. Service providers can use the data in these reports to identify priorities, inform practice, and improve client outcomes.

Data is an important resource for community development. Reporting data and measuring outcomes in the Data Exchange will better enable Aboriginal communities to identify priorities, monitor progress and improve the impact services have on Aboriginal communities.

Collating and commissioning evidence reviews

We will collate and commission evidence reviews to identify effective programs/interventions, core components and flexible activities that are relevant to TEI services.

We will work with the DCJ Districts, service providers and peak bodies to identify priority topics and sub-topics for these reviews. Our aim is to ensure that the evidence collected is as useful and relevant to the sector as possible. In a survey conducted in July to September 2020, respondents identified the following as priority topics:

1. Engaging and retaining vulnerable families and young people
2. Children, young people and families experiencing mental health issues
3. What works for Aboriginal communities
4. Therapeutic supports for clients impacted by trauma
5. Effective parenting programs + What works for CALD communities (equal 5th)
6. Facilitating behaviour change in young people
7. Role of community centres
8. Impact of supported playgroups

Adopting a core components approach

In the TEI program, we are adopting a core components approach to how we collate, use and build evidence. This approach enables us to provide a common evidence-informed framework that services can use to develop and implement their program activities.

Core components are the fixed elements or functions of a program/intervention. Flexible activities are the variable aspects within core components. They can take on different forms according to local context, which achieve the same objective.

Adopting this standardised but flexible approach will better enable us to:

- build the evidence around what components work best for which client groups and in what circumstances.
- understand how to adapt and tailor support to local needs.
- understand how multiple services and supports can work together to improve outcomes for children, families and communities.
- evaluate the TEI program and compare similar services.

Identifying evidence-informed programs, activities and practices

Documenting local programs and measuring outcomes is vital to building the evidence base for what works in NSW communities.

We will build the evidence base for the TEI program by:

- Collating and assessing program logics
- Identifying promising and emerging evidence-informed programs in the TEI sector
- Supporting services to develop and evaluate their programs to build the TEI evidence base.

Program Logic Assessment

In the TEI program, all service providers must develop a program logic in the first 12 months of service delivery. Program logics enable service providers to articulate what they're doing, why and what client outcomes they service contributes to.

Program logics also provide a framework for monitoring and evaluating services against the outcomes they want to achieve. This is an important step in moving towards evidence-informed practice.

DCJ will assess program logics against an assessment criteria. This process will:

- ensure program logics clearly articulate what activities are conducted and why.
- ensure the outcomes identified in program logics are mapped to the TEI Outcomes Framework and can be practically achieved.
- ensure the client group and their needs align with the TEI program.
- ensure programs and services are designed using the best available evidence of what works.
- identify programs and activities with a strong evidence base to build the evidence for the TEI sector.
- identify gaps in evidence.

We have developed resources to support this process, including:

- TEI Program Logic e-module: explains how to complete each column of the program logic. It also gives best practice examples that services can use as a guide to develop their own.
- Guide to Assessing a Program Logic: identifies the criteria that will be used to assess program logics. It outlines the key requirements expected in terms of quality, detail, scope and coherence.

Identifying promising and emerging programs

The program logic assessment process will help us build the evidence-base for the TEI program. We will use this process to identify promising or emerging evidence-informed TEI programs, activities and practices.

These programs and activities will then be assessed against a strict criteria to determine if they are evidence-based. This criteria includes:

- A strong theoretical or research background
- A clear theory of change
- Evidence-informed core components or activities
- A program manual
- Qualified facilitators
- Program evaluation

We will work with providers of promising and emerging programs to meet this criteria. Programs established as evidence-informed programs can be included in the Evidence Portal.

A network of DCJ staff, sector development organisations, Peak bodies and subject matter experts will be established to facilitate this work.

This work is particularly important for building the evidence base for what works for Aboriginal and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. It will better enable us to identify and document effective locally-designed programs and to ensure ineffective programs are not implemented.

Aboriginal organisations looking to articulate what they do and why, may find the following resources useful:

- SNAICC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Services Evaluation Readiness Toolkit
- The Healing Foundation Theory of Change.

Monitoring and evaluating the TEI program

We will measure the overall impact of the TEI program. This will help us to:

- inform program design and implementation
- determine which aspects of the TEI program are successful
- understand how clients and communities enacted change.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

As we build the evidence base for the TEI program, DCJ will endeavour to adhere to Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty refers to "the right of Indigenous people to exercise ownership over Indigenous Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of Indigenous Data"[1].

[1] https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/key-principles

How will we support the sector to access and use evidence?

The Evidence Portal

We are building an Evidence Portal to enable the TEI sector to access high-quality evidence to design and implement their services.

The Evidence Portal will be a user-friendly interactive website. It will enable service providers to quickly and easily find high-quality evidence relevant to their clients' needs.

The portal will provide key information about effective programs/interventions and core components and flexible activities.

The portal will include a number of interactive search functions. For example, users will be able to search by their client group and needs or risk factors. It will also include:

- a 'best practice' hub with useful resources and guides for using evidence
- relevant news and events
- a forum for showcasing promising programs, new research projects and evaluations.

Over time, we hope to expand the evidence portal so the information it contains is also relevant to other DCJ program areas (e.g. Housing) and other NSW government departments (e.g. Health, Education).

Why do we need an evidence portal?

In mid-2020, DCJ staff and TEI service providers completed a survey on how they currently access and use research evidence. The survey results show that the most common challenges DCJ staff and service providers faced when trying to find and use evidence in their work are:

- don't have enough time to find research
- don't have enough time to apply research to their work
- don't know how to determine if the research is high-quality

Further, a majority of respondents said they only sometimes find research evidence that is easy to understand, easy to apply, relevant to their work and high-quality. Respondents also indicated that to use research more effectively in their work, they needed access to short and simple summaries of relevant research.

The Evidence Portal seeks to address these challenges and provide the TEI sector with the research it needs. It will enable service providers and DCJ staff to quickly find and access evidence that is easy to understand and apply to their service context. This will support evidence-informed decision-making, particularly in a time-poor environment where the primary focus is on front-line service delivery.

The Evidence Portal will also help us identify gaps in the TEI evidence base. This will enable us to build the evidence-base in areas we need it most, for example, community strengthening.

Upskilling the TEI Sector

We will build the capacity of and upskill the TEI sector to use evidence to design, implement and improve our services.

The survey results indicate that to use research more effectively in their work the sector wants training on how to use research to design and improve program activities. As such, we will support the TEI sector to:

- Develop a culture of evidence-based decision making
- Access and use evidence in their day-to-day work
- Adapt and deliver evidence-based programs
- Identify and implement core components
- Use emerging evidence to design innovative programs
- Use evidence to learn and continuously improve

This support will be provided in a number of different ways, including:

- workshops with DCJ staff, sector development organisations and peak bodies so they are well positioned to support service providers.
- Tailored workshops with implementation science experts and qualified practitioners to support TEI services to adopt and implement specific programs or core components.
- One-on-one support with service providers as needed
- Online training and resources
- Training with DCJ staff to build their capacity to commission services with a strong evidence-base.