

1. Does the new vision reflect what we all want for children and families?

Yes, the vision captures important aspirations for children and families. However, in our context—remote, Aboriginal communities affected by intergenerational trauma and family violence—the vision needs to go further. It should explicitly recognise that empowerment and resilience require **culturally safe, place-based responses led by Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)**.

Empowerment must be complemented by access to essential resources within an environment that prioritises **self-determination and community decision-making**.

Families cannot thrive without access to housing, income, education, and health services, alongside governance models that prioritise **self-determination and community decision-making**. Without these structural supports, the vision risks being aspirational rather than actionable.

2. Are the two main outcomes what we should be working towards for children and families? Why/Why not? - Outcome 1: Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children - Outcome 2: Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.

Yes, both outcomes are appropriate, but they need adaptation to reflect the realities of families in our communities. For families experiencing domestic and family violence, outcomes must account for cultural and linguistic diversity, remoteness, and trauma. They should emphasise **family and community context**, not isolate children from their families. Achieving these outcomes requires **flexible funding models, longer-term agreements, and co-design processes** to ensure services are relevant and accessible.

While the outcomes are relevant, they should explicitly recognise the need for culturally safe, place-based responses led by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs).

3. Will a single national program provide more flexibility for your organisation?

Tangentyere Council offers a broad range of services to families and children, some of which are funded by the Department of Social Services (DSS). Due to short notice, this response has been prepared from the perspective of **two programs currently funded by DSS**:

- **Coolamon**, a specialist children's service delivered by the Family Violence Prevention Division, focused on supporting children affected by domestic and family violence in a remote, predominantly Aboriginal-led context.
- **Community Centres Division (CCD)**, which provides holistic, place-based supports for families through prevention and early intervention programs, including the Early Childhood Education Supported Playgroup Program.

While these two programs have provided detailed feedback, Tangentyere Council welcomes the opportunity for further discussion and input from other service areas if required.

Potentially, yes-if implemented with care- single program could reduce complexity and duplication, but only if accompanied by **streamlined processes, longer-term funding (e.g., 5 years), and flexibility in reporting and milestone adjustments.**

Currently, rigid compliance and inflexible funding create barriers, especially in remote contexts where recruitment and service delivery challenges are common. Without these changes, a single program risks becoming another layer of complexity rather than a solution.

The move to a single national program (replacing five existing programs) is conceptually positive: fewer silos, more coherence. However, from our experience the current grant system remains highly burdensome. Key issues in practice are:

- The complexity of the grant application process, the number of supporting documents, and the time taken before funding decisions are finalised. This causes disruption in service delivery and workforce planning.
- Inflexibility in funding once granted: our organisation must deliver to fixed milestones and outputs, even when on-ground circumstances shift (for example, it can be incredibly difficult for us to recruit a specialist worker in remote locations). It then becomes difficult to make use of any unspent funds - requiring a new proposal and approval process, which can take up to 6 months. By the time underspend proposal have been approved, there is little time left in the financial year to spend the funds according to the agreed terms.

We therefore support the idea of a single program, ideally accompanied by significantly streamlined processes, greater flexibility, and genuine recognition of ACCO-led service delivery and remote locations.

Risks and Challenges

Tangentyere is a large organisation with diverse service streams, including community development, primary prevention, and intensive family support. If a single national program requires **one contract and one set of requirements across all streams**, this could create new challenges. Coordinating reporting across multiple teams with different priorities and approaches may add complexity rather than reduce it. In existing programs where a single funding source is spread across teams, collaboration on reporting has proven to be labour-intensive.

A single national program could improve flexibility **if it is designed to reduce administrative burden, allow for stream-specific reporting, and incorporate relational contracting principles.** Without these safeguards, it risks becoming another layer of complexity rather than a solution.

Key Conditions for Success

- **Secure, Longer-Term Funding:** To truly improve flexibility, funding agreements should extend to **five-year cycles**, allowing for stability in workforce planning and service delivery.
- **Adaptable Reporting Systems:** Reporting frameworks must be simplified and responsive to the realities of remote service delivery. Current systems like DEX and SCORE are burdensome and misaligned with community contexts.

- **Relational Contracting:** A single program should embed relational contracting principles—regular check-ins, collaborative problem-solving, and flexibility to adapt to changing needs such as policy shifts or compliance changes in early years education.
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4. Does the service or activity you deliver fit within one of the three funding streams? Do these streams reflect what children and families in your community need now – and what they might need in the future?

Programs within our community centres align with **Stream 2: Prevention and early intervention**, and our Coolamon Program aligns with **specialist family violence services**. These streams reflect current needs but must remain adaptable to future priorities and allow **integration across streams**, as families often require multiple supports simultaneously. For example, a family accessing early intervention may also need specialist family violence support.

5. Are there other changes we could make to the program to help your organisation or community overcome current challenges?

In our context, we strongly support increasing Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) leadership. However, we caution that simply prioritising ACCOs is insufficient unless accompanied by funding models that reflect the real costs of remote service delivery (lived-experience leadership, workforce capacity-building, establishing key infrastructure). We ask that DSS include cost-loading mechanisms or remote-adjustment factors. Further, the grant design must allow flexibility for Aboriginal-led innovation and cultural governance, rather than treating ACCOs as service-delivery arms of non-Indigenous frameworks.

The department should also be focussing on a supported process of transitioning programs to ACCOs and training for DSS staff to understand and integrate learning on the context of ACCOs and Aboriginal ways of doing, being, knowing and working.

Key changes include:

- **Relational contracting** with regular check-ins and collaborative problem-solving.
 - **Simplified reporting templates** and reduced reliance on DEX/SCORE, which are misaligned with remote contexts.
 - **Flexibility for underspend reallocation** without lengthy approval delays.
 - **Remote cost-loading mechanisms** to reflect real service delivery costs, including workforce recruitment and infrastructure challenges.
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6. Do you agree that the four priorities listed on Page 4 are right areas for investment to improve outcomes for children and families?

The priorities listed (early investment, connected/co-located services, community need, and improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families) are sound. In our context, we strongly support increasing ACCO leadership. However, we caution that simply

prioritising ACCOs is insufficient unless accompanied by funding models that reflect the real costs of remote service delivery (lived-experience leadership, workforce capacity-building, establishing key infrastructure). We ask that DSS include cost-loading mechanisms or remote-adjustment factors.

7. Are there any other priorities or issues you think the department should be focusing on?

Grant design must allow flexibility for Aboriginal-led innovation and cultural governance, rather than treating ACCOs as service-delivery arms of non-Indigenous frameworks.

- Funding models that allow **Aboriginal-led innovation** and cultural governance.
 - Investment in **workforce capacity-building** and infrastructure for remote service delivery.
 - Mechanisms to support **data sovereignty** and culturally relevant evaluation.
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8. Do the proposed focus areas – like supporting families at risk of child protection involvement and young parents match the needs or priorities of your service?

Yes, these proposed focus areas align strongly with the priorities of our services at Tangentyere. Both the **Coolamon Program** and the **Community Centres Programs** work with families who are at risk and with young parents, and these groups represent a significant proportion of our client base. However, we believe the focus areas should be broadened to explicitly include **families experiencing domestic and family violence**, as this is a critical issue in our context and directly impacts child safety and wellbeing.

Coolamon Perspective:

Coolamon is a specialist children's service supporting children affected by domestic and family violence. For these families, risk factors often intersect with child protection involvement, poverty, and intergenerational trauma. Services must be culturally safe and trauma-informed, and program design should embed **Aboriginal governance and decision-making** to ensure responses are effective and respectful of cultural contexts.

Community Centres Perspective:

Tangentyere's Community Centres provide **place-based resources and holistic supports** that help families access what they need to thrive. Through programs such as the **Early Childhood Education Supported Playgroup Program** and the **Child and Family Program**, Community Centres reduces barriers to service delivery by offering integrated supports in familiar, community-controlled spaces. In situations of crisis or acute need, these services provide strong referral pathways and follow-up support, ensuring families can connect to more intensive interventions when required.

This often means that services operating primarily in **Stream 2 (Prevention and early intervention)** refer families into **Stream 1 pathways** for more targeted support. This interconnected approach is essential for meeting the complex needs of families in Alice Springs and Central Australia.

Key Recommendation:

While the proposed focus areas are relevant, DSS should ensure that program design:

- Explicitly addresses **domestic and family violence** as a priority area.
 - Embeds **cultural governance and co-design principles** to ensure services are safe, effective, and responsive to community needs.
 - Maintains flexibility for services to operate across streams and collaborate seamlessly.
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9. Are there other groups in your community, or different approaches, that you think the department should consider to better support family wellbeing?

Yes. In addition to the proposed focus areas, DSS should consider approaches that strengthen **community governance and decision-making** as a core component of family wellbeing. In our context, ensuring that service users—particularly Aboriginal families—have access to **decision-making and governance mechanisms** is integral to achieving meaningful outcomes. Families need to be empowered not only through service delivery but also through participation in shaping programs and policies that affect their lives.

At Tangentyere, this principle is embedded in our governance structures and frameworks, including the **Town Camper Wellness Framework** and Tangentyere’s Board-led decision-making processes. These mechanisms ensure that Town Camp residents have a voice in program design and delivery, reflecting their priorities and cultural values. This approach moves beyond transactional service provision and fosters **self-determination**, which is essential for long-term wellbeing.

Key Recommendation:

DSS should incorporate requirements for **community-led governance and co-design** into program design and funding agreements. This includes:

- Recognising and resourcing governance structures within ACCOs.
 - Supporting frameworks like the Town Camper Wellness Framework that articulate community-defined wellbeing domains.
 - Allowing flexibility for services to adapt delivery models based on community input and cultural obligations (e.g., outdoor, drop-in, mobile outreach).
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10. What are other effective ways, beyond co-location, that you’ve seen work well to connect and coordinate services for families?

We welcome DSS’s emphasis on connection and integration among services. At **Coolamon**, integration is essential because we work across multiple Town Camps with children and families experiencing family violence. Our partnerships span youth, men’s, women’s, and cultural programs, and these connections are critical for holistic support. However, **real integration requires more than co-location**. It depends on:

- **Flexible funding** that allows services to adapt to changing needs and collaborate effectively.
- **Local governance and shared leadership**, ensuring that integration reflects community priorities.

- **Adaptive staff structures** that can respond to mobility, multi-family households, and cultural obligations.
- Recognition of **language and cultural diversity**, which shapes how services are accessed and delivered.

Effective integration also involves **flexible delivery models**, such as outdoor programs, drop-in sessions, and mobile outreach, which meet families where they are rather than expecting them to fit rigid service structures.

We welcome emphasis on connection and integration among services. At Coolamon we work across multiple Town Camps, with multiple service partners, with children and families experiencing family violence, and integration with youth, men's, women's and cultural programs is essential. However, real integration requires flexible funding and local governance. Co-location is helpful but not sufficient: genuine connection needs shared leadership, adaptive staff structures, and recognition of the complexities of rural/remote settings (mobility, multi-family households, language and cultural diversity). Grant criteria should assess not only co-location but cultural governance, workforce stability, flexible delivery models (e.g., outdoor, drop-in) and adaptive service responses.

Shared leadership and governance structures.

- Local workforce recruitment to strengthen cultural safety.
- Integrated referral pathways and **adaptive service models** that respond to community needs.

11. What would you highlight in a grant application to demonstrate a service is connected to the community it serves? What should applicants be assessed on?

To demonstrate genuine community connection, organisations should show how this is embedded in their **strategic documents, governance, decision-making, and service delivery**.

For example:

- **Tangentyere's Council programs** prioritise multiple levels of decision-making and governance. Programs are co-designed with Town Campers to ensure services meet local needs.
- **Local employment:** CCD hires Support Workers from Town Camps, creating direct feedback loops and cultural safety.
- **Strong governance model:** Each Town Camp has a President who sits on the Tangentyere Board of Directors, ensuring community voices shape organisational decisions.
- **Town Camper Wellness Framework:** This community-designed document articulates wellness domains and informs CCD's strategic work and service delivery.

Grant criteria should assess:

- Evidence of **community governance and co-design**.

- Employment of local staff and cultural representation.
- Integration of community-led frameworks (e.g., Town Camper Wellness Framework).
- Flexibility and adaptability in service models

12. Beyond locational disadvantage, what other factors should the department consider to make sure funding reflects the needs of communities?

Locational disadvantage is only one dimension of need. DSS should also consider:

- **Cultural and linguistic diversity:** Many families in our context speak English as a second, third, or fourth language. Service delivery must account for language barriers and cultural obligations.
- **Workforce recruitment challenges:** Remote areas face significant difficulties in attracting and retaining qualified staff, particularly for specialist roles. Funding should include cost-loading for workforce development and retention.
- **Infrastructure limitations:** Connectivity issues, transport barriers, and lack of suitable facilities impact service delivery in rural and remote settings.
- **Community governance requirements:** Programs must resource governance structures that enable Aboriginal-led decision-making and co-design.
- **Complex social factors:** Intergenerational trauma, family violence, and poverty intersect with service needs and require flexible, trauma-informed approaches.

13. What's the best way for organisations to show in grant applications, that their service is genuinely meeting the needs of the community?

The strongest evidence comes from **demonstrated engagement and outcomes**, supported by documentation. Organisations should provide:

- **Existing documentation of demand:** Needs assessments, community consultations, and priority-setting records.
- **Program delivery data:** Participation numbers, engagement metrics, and service uptake trends.
- **Co-design documents:** Evidence of community involvement in program design and decision-making.
- **Governance records:** Board meeting minutes, AGM reports, and documentation of community-led governance processes.
- **Historical documentation of need:** Local Decision-Making (LDM) agreements, previous funding submissions (successful and unsuccessful), and partnership records.
- **Internal collaboration evidence:** Examples of cross-program integration within the organisation.

- **Social impact and outcomes reports:** Evaluations demonstrating tangible benefits for families and children.
- **Track record:** Previous performance in delivering outcomes and meeting contractual obligations.

Key Recommendation:

Grant criteria should prioritise **community-led governance, co-design evidence, and demonstrated impact**, rather than relying solely on quantitative metrics.

14. How could the grant process be designed to support and increase the number of ACCOs delivering services to children and families?

To increase the number of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) delivering services, the grant process must move beyond a compliance-heavy model and actively enable Aboriginal-led innovation and governance. This requires:

- **Simplified application processes:** Current grant applications are lengthy and complex, creating barriers for ACCOs with limited administrative capacity. Streamlined templates, clear guidance, and reduced documentation requirements would make the process more accessible.
- **Longer-term funding agreements:** Short-term contracts (1–2 years) undermine stability and workforce planning. Multi-year agreements (up to 5 years) would allow ACCOs to invest in staff development, infrastructure, and community-led program design.
- **Flexibility in funding and reporting:** ACCOs need the ability to adapt programs to cultural obligations, seasonal changes, and emerging community priorities without lengthy approval processes. This includes flexibility for underspend reallocation and milestone adjustments.
- **Capacity-building support:** Grants should include resources for governance strengthening, workforce training, and digital infrastructure to support remote service delivery.
- **Relational contracting:** Embedding trust-based, collaborative contracting models with regular check-ins and shared problem-solving will foster stronger partnerships between DSS and ACCOs.

15. What else should be built into the program design to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

Program design must recognise and leverage the strengths of ACCOs like Tangentyere, which operate with confident **cultural competence** built on decades of experience. Tangentyere has 45 years of proven outcomes through strong governance and community development practice. To improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, DSS should:

- **Acknowledge ACCO expertise and leadership:** Funding models should reflect the size, experience, and capacity of ACCOs, rather than treating them as subcontractors to mainstream agencies.

- **Embed cultural governance and co-design:** Programs should be shaped by Aboriginal decision-making structures, ensuring services are culturally safe and responsive.
- **Support relational contracting:** A foundation of trust and collaboration must underpin grant processes. Relational contracting models allow for flexibility, adaptability, and open dialogue, which are essential in remote and culturally diverse contexts.
- **Invest in community-led evaluation frameworks:** Move away from deficit-based metrics and allow ACCOs to design strengths-based indicators that reflect cultural priorities, such as connection, identity, and intergenerational healing.
- **Provide remote cost-loading:** Recognise the additional costs of delivering services in remote areas, including workforce recruitment, infrastructure, and transport.

16. What types of data would help your organisation better understand its impact and continuously improve its services?

For Tangentyere, the most useful data is **strengths-based and community-led**, rather than deficit-driven metrics like SEIFA or AEDC. These traditional measures often disadvantage Aboriginal communities and fail to capture meaningful indicators of wellbeing. Instead, we need:

- **Community-defined success measures**, such as those outlined in the **Town Camper Wellness Framework**, which reflects domains of wellness identified by Town Campers themselves.
- **Qualitative data** that captures lived experience, cultural connection, and intergenerational healing.
- **Program participation and engagement data**, combined with narrative insights, to understand how families interact with services.
- **Feedback from co-design and governance processes**, ensuring services remain aligned with community priorities.

This approach allows continuous improvement while keeping **self-determination and cultural safety at the centre of evaluation**.

17. What kinds of data or information would be most valuable for you to share, to show how your service is positively impacting children and families?

We would share:

- Narrative-rich case studies that demonstrate real-life impact and cultural relevance.
- Community-led evaluation reports based on the Town Camper Wellness Framework.
- Social impact documentation, including outcomes related to connection, identity, and resilience.
- Evidence of governance and co-design, showing how families influence service delivery.

- Program delivery data, such as participation numbers and engagement trends, contextualised with qualitative insights.

18. If your organisation currently reports in the Data Exchange (DEX), what SCORE Circumstances domain is most relevant to the service you deliver?

While we currently report through DEX, the **SCORE domains are misaligned with our context**. They isolate children from families and fail to capture indicators that matter in Aboriginal communities, such as cultural identity and community connection. Additionally:

- SCORE assumes literacy, stable connectivity, and staff continuity—unrealistic in remote settings.
- It does not reflect trauma-informed practice or cultural governance.

We recommend allowing ACCOs to **design relevant outcome frameworks in partnership with DSS**, incorporating qualitative reporting alongside quantitative data.

From our experience, SCORE domains are inappropriate for our clients, many of whom speak English as a second, third or even fourth language; and many also struggle with written and digital literacy. This data capture is also not necessarily consistent with data sovereignty principles, and often fails to account for sensitivities around data collection for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. Therefore, we regard these mechanisms as taxing and inappropriate whilst often also failing to capture meaningful change for the young people we serve. Perhaps monitoring and evaluation mechanisms could be locally designed.

19. What kinds of templates or guidance would help you prepare strong case studies that show the impact of your service?

Templates should:

- Include **culturally appropriate prompts** for service users, focusing on connection, identity, and wellbeing.
- Provide **guidance for capturing Good News Stories**, including scripts for interviews and questions that elicit meaningful narratives.
- Allow flexibility for **visual and oral storytelling**, which aligns with Aboriginal ways of sharing knowledge.
- Be simple and adaptable for remote contexts, where digital literacy and connectivity may be limited.

20. What does a relational contracting approach mean to you in practice? What criteria would you like to see included in a relational contract?

We strongly endorse DSS's move toward **relational contracting**. This approach represents a significant shift from transactional, compliance-heavy models to one that prioritises **collaboration, trust, and flexibility**. For Tangentyere, relational contracting means creating space for genuine partnerships where both DSS and service providers work together to achieve outcomes for children and families.

What Relational Contracting Means in Practice

- **Regular Check-ins and Open Dialogue:** Frequent, structured conversations between DSS and providers to share updates, address challenges, and adapt to changing circumstances.
- **Flexibility to Adapt Milestones and Budgets:** Contracts should allow adjustments in response to policy changes, workforce challenges, or emerging community needs without lengthy approval processes.
- **Shared Problem-Solving:** A partnership approach where DSS and providers jointly identify solutions, rather than imposing rigid compliance requirements.
- **Trust-Based Relationships:** Moving away from treating smaller organisations like subcontractors or franchises. Instead, recognising ACCOs as equal partners with expertise in cultural governance and community-led service delivery.

Current contracting models often impose **rigid reporting and prescribed procedures**, which discourage flexibility and stifle **community co-design**. This is particularly problematic in remote Aboriginal contexts where service delivery must adapt to cultural obligations, seasonal changes, and complex social realities.

Criteria for Relational Contracts

- **Evidence of Community Governance and Co-Design:** Organisations should demonstrate strong cultural governance and decision-making structures.
- **Commitment to Outcomes-Based Reporting:** Focus on meaningful impact rather than compliance-driven outputs.
- **Capacity for Collaboration:** Organisations should show readiness for adaptive planning and open communication.
- **Cultural Competence:** Ability to deliver services that are culturally safe and responsive to community needs.

21. What's the best way for the department to decide which organisations should be offered a relational contract?

The best way for DSS to determine which organisations should be offered a relational contract is to assess both **capacity and commitment to collaborative, outcomes-focused service delivery**. A relational approach should be about building trust, flexibility, and shared accountability.

From our experience at Tangentyere, the following criteria and practices are essential:

1. Evidence of Community Governance and Co-Design

Organisations should demonstrate strong governance structures that embed community voices in decision-making. For example, Tangentyere's Board includes Town Camp Presidents, ensuring programs reflect local priorities. This governance model is critical for relational contracting because it guarantees accountability to the community, not just compliance to government.

2. Proven Track Record in Outcomes-Based Service Delivery

Relational contracting prioritises outcomes over outputs. Organisations should show evidence of delivering measurable improvements for families and children, supported by qualitative and quantitative data. DSS should also provide support for ACCOs to build evaluation frameworks and tools that align with cultural contexts.

3. Capacity for Collaboration and Adaptability

Relational contracting works best when organisations can engage in **open dialogue and adaptive planning**. Historically, when Tangentyere experienced relational models of contracting, the benefits included:

- **Frequent check-ins** and space for honest conversations about service delivery.
- **Peer learning opportunities**, where DSS facilitated connections with other providers for shared problem-solving.
- **Flexibility to respond to change**, such as policy shifts or emerging community needs.

4. Commitment to Continuous Improvement

Organisations should demonstrate willingness to innovate and adapt based on feedback and evaluation. DSS can support this by embedding capacity-building resources into contracts.

Relational contracts should be offered to organisations that:

- Have strong cultural governance and community-led decision-making.
- Demonstrate proven outcomes and a commitment to co-design.
- Show readiness for collaborative engagement and adaptability.
- Operate in contexts where flexibility is essential (e.g., remote Aboriginal communities).

DSS should also **resource relational contracting properly**, including:

- Training for DSS staff on cultural competence and partnership approaches.
- Support for ACCOs to develop evaluation frameworks and narrative-based reporting.
- Mechanisms for regular, structured check-ins and shared problem-solving.

22. Is your organisation interested in a relational contracting approach? Why/Why not?

Tangentyere Council is strongly interested in a relational contracting approach because it offers the potential for genuine partnership, flexibility, and trust—moving away from rigid, compliance-driven models that treat organisations like subcontractors. For this approach to succeed, it must be implemented in practice, not just in theory, by embedding mechanisms such as regular check-ins, open dialogue, flexibility to adjust milestones and budgets, and shared problem-solving. These elements are critical in remote and culturally diverse contexts where service delivery needs to adapt quickly to changing circumstances. We believe DSS could benefit from our experience and would be willing to support the department in shaping what a **best practice**

relational contracting model looks like, ensuring it reflects the realities of Aboriginal-led service delivery and delivers meaningful outcomes for children and families.

23. Is there anything else you think the department should understand or consider about this proposed approach?

DSS should recognise the **realities of remote service delivery**, which include challenges such as limited connectivity, high workforce turnover, and cultural obligations that influence program delivery. These factors require **flexibility in funding agreements** to allow services to adapt to seasonal changes, community priorities, and unexpected circumstances without lengthy approval processes.

A relational contracting approach will only succeed if it is **practical and responsive**, not just theoretical. This means embedding mechanisms for **regular communication, adaptive planning, and trust-based collaboration**. DSS should also consider resourcing relational contracting properly—providing support for ACCOs to develop culturally relevant evaluation frameworks and narrative-based reporting, rather than relying solely on deficit-driven metrics.

Tangentyere Council is willing to **work with DSS to co-design a best practice relational contracting model**, drawing on our experience in remote Aboriginal-led service delivery. This partnership could help ensure the approach is effective, culturally safe, and aligned with community needs.