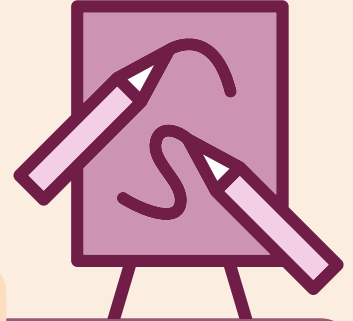




Codesign with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

What is co-design?

A process of bringing different stakeholders together to collaboratively design products, services and policies. Each stakeholder brings unique knowledges, including lived experience, technical and professional expertise, and practice based experience.



What is co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities?

Codesign with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must centre Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing and recognise historical and ongoing contexts of colonisation and dispossession. Co-design must endeavour to be an empowering, reciprocal, and inclusive process that:

1. honours the knowledge, perspectives, and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities and
2. have outcomes that work towards ending colonially driven inequity through capacity building, cultural respect, and social responsibility.

Barriers to meaningful and effective co-design

There are many barriers to co-design that can lead to unsafe processes, an ineffective outcomes that aren't meaningful. This includes tokenisation; consultation rather than a genuine co-design; a lack of consideration for inclusivity, accessibility and intersectionality when identifying and including stakeholders; not addressing unequal power dynamics within the co-design process; no accountability of outcomes. Importantly, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, culturally unsafe processes are a significant barrier as well as the theft and misuse of Indigenous knowledges.

Key Elements of Culturally Safe Co-design

Co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must emphasise cultural safety and self-determination. Key elements of culturally safe co-design include:

1. **Acknowledging Colonisation and Systemic Racism**
Recognise the impact of colonisation, systemic racism, and social, cultural, behavioural, and economic factors on individuals and communities, and the co-design process.
2. **Addressing Individual Racism and Bias**
Confront personal biases, stereotypes, and prejudices and recognise how they shape co-design processes.
3. **Fostering Self-determined Decision-making**
Prioritise partnership and collaboration driven by individuals, families, and communities to empower self-determined decision-making and ensure meaningful outcomes.
4. **Creating Culturally Safe Spaces**
Ensure co-design processes occur in accessible, and culturally safe and welcoming spaces.

Insights from Research

Critical considerations for successful codesign

Co-design is increasingly recognised for its potential to empower marginalised groups and prioritise the voices and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, to be effective, its application must privilege Indigenous ways of being, valuing, knowing, and doing. Below are key frameworks and principles for successful co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities:

➤ Anderson et al. (2022).

Development of key principles and best practices for co-design in health with First Nations Australians.

- Centre First Nations leadership.
- Ensure a culturally grounded approach.
- Promote respect, inclusivity, and community benefit.
- Ensure transparency and rigorous evaluation.

➤ Gerrard et al. (2025).

Countering systemic racism in Aboriginal co-design: Addressing power and knowledge imbalances.

- Foster authentic partnerships.
- Address colonial load and informed consent.
- Promote language and knowledge sharing.
- Monitor and evaluate processes.
- Mitigate power imbalances, racism, and historical exclusion.

➤ Kimberley Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Partnership. (2022).

Co-design guide for youth wellbeing initiatives.

- Ensure Aboriginal-led processes.
- Emphasise two-way understanding and authentic relationships.
- Provide equitable resourcing.
- Incorporate ongoing evaluation.

➤ Tamwoy et al. (2022).

Between the tracks: Navigating Indigenous and mainstream frameworks in co-design.

- Value different knowledge systems.
- Build strong, trusting relationships.
- Operate through authentic partnerships.
- Work within “between the tracks” frameworks.

References and further readings

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