



**Aboriginal
Housing
Office**



Aboriginal Housing Office Services Our Way Policy Framework

January 2021

**This policy provides strategic
parameters for Services Our Way
operations and ongoing development.**

Document approval

The AHO *Services Our Way* Policy Framework has been endorsed and approved by:

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Purpose

The purpose of this policy framework is to:

- a) confirm the following governance elements of *Services Our Way*
 - i. SOWSmart (client management system) and the SOW Operational Manual
 - ii. roles and responsibilities
- b) confirm the following parameters for strengthening delivery of *Services Our Way*
 - i. recommendations from the Interim Evaluation (interim evaluation) undertaken by Urbis and Cox Inall Ridgeway
 - ii. relevant government policy and legislation, including the DPIE Code of Ethics and Conduct
 - iii. AHO operational environment, including the AHO Engagement Framework
- c) outline a structured approach to monitoring, evaluation and review.

Background

Developed by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Homecare with a focus on supporting Aboriginal people with disability, their carers and families, SOW transitioned to the AHO in 2017 and now works with a more broader remit of vulnerable Aboriginal people and families in need. The program has a holistic approach focusing on linking individuals and families to the support they need in the community and with other government and non-government agencies instead of replicating these connections and services. It has the capacity to provide supplementary support to clients through flexible brokerage funding. In addition, it demonstrates and transfers culturally appropriate skills and behaviours to non-Aboriginal partner organisations so they can better support and engage with Aboriginal people and families.

In 2019, SOW was the subject of an interim evaluation undertaken by Urbis and Cox Inall Ridgeway which focussed on the program's reach, effectiveness and appropriateness. The interim evaluation found that SOW's success was underpinned by the following factors:

- **Aboriginal-led:** SOW was designed by, is managed, and delivered by Aboriginal staff with input from Aboriginal communities.
- **Whole-of-family approach:** The whole-of-family approach supports clients as individuals who are connected to their family and community. This is consistent with an Aboriginal cultural world-view which promotes interconnectedness, holistic responsiveness and a broad view of health and wellbeing that includes spiritual health and connection to Country.
- **Community-integrated support:** A critical factor influencing program performance is that SOW staff are from the communities in which the program operates. This means that SOW can offer clients much more personalised and culturally reliable referrals.
- **Responsive to client needs:** A core characteristic of SOW is that it responds to and reflects the needs of its clients, as opposed to requiring clients to fit a rigid

service structure. SOW applies a holistic approach to service delivery, with targeted brokerage funding available to provide tangible client support.

The interim evaluation made recommendations focussed on:

- improving program sustainability by prioritising staff wellbeing
- clearly defining the role of the program within the service landscape
- improving data collection systems and processes
- preparing for scale.

More broadly, SOW operates within a context of legislative requirements and policies. This network of recommendations, commitments and requirements, in conjunction with the expansion of SOW, highlights a need for a focus on program governance and operations. This framework, as well as ensuring SOW's compliance with legal and policy requirements, will also strengthen program transparency and provide a platform for ongoing continuous improvement.

Definitions

AHO Appeals Policy	AHO Administrative Appeals Policy
DPIE	Department of Planning, Industry and Environment
DPIE Code	<i>DPIE Code of Ethics and Conduct Professional Standards</i>
SFSC	Strong Family, Strong Communities
SOW	Services Our Way
SOW <i>Smart</i>	A tailored client management system to support SOW delivery
<i>SOW Interim Evaluation</i>	2019 interim evaluation undertaken by Urbis and Cox Inall Ridgeway
<i>SOW Operations Manual</i>	SOW Operations and Procedures Manual endorsed by the AHO Chief Executive
PDP	Performance Development Plan

Scope and Application

The primary focus of this policy framework is the SOW program. Maximising SOW operations is likely to require strengthened engagement with both AHO Divisions and AHO governance. Any secondary reform impacts will be considered in partnership with relevant operational areas.

Related Policies and Legislation

There is a detailed network of policies and legislation that shape SOW delivery in areas ranging from workplace health and safety, to child protection to information management. The following legislation and policies, however, are both central to SOW and AHO work in communities and are most closely aligned with the recommendations in of the SOW interim evaluation.

Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 established the AHO with functions including:

- Planning, developing, implementing and evaluating programs and services to assist Aboriginal people in meeting their housing needs; and
- Liaise and coordinate with government agencies and non-government bodies in the delivery of Aboriginal housing programs and services.

The Act underpins housing as a SOW outcome which needs to be maintained in defining the program's scope.

Government Sector Employment Act 2014 requires all public sector agencies to have a performance management system that meets essential elements and guidelines set by the Public Service Commissioner. The AHO ensures compliance through the organisation's Performance Development Process (PDP). The PDP provides an opportunity to increase a focus on staff wellbeing and development, consistent with the SOW interim evaluation recommendations.

DPIE Code of Ethics and Conduct Professional Standards guides all work undertaken in the DPIE cluster. The DPIE Code provides guidance in areas including appropriate use of resources, conflict of interest, records management and risk management. These elements of the DPIE Code align with the SOW interim evaluation's recommendation regarding improving data collection systems and processes. Both support proactive planning, documented decision making and program consistency.

The DPIE Code is also aligned with the application of an appeals policy. While the AHO Appeals Policy is limited to Housing Providers, administrative decisions by SOW staff are theoretically appealable. This likelihood of decisions being appealed increases with the growth of the program. Responding to the increased potential of administrative appeals, which is consistent with the SOW interim evaluation's recommendations regarding preparing for scale, requires strengthened focus on documented decision making that is directly aligned with program guidelines.

Culture is at the centre of all AHO activity. The SOW interim evaluation identified that the Aboriginal leadership and implementation of SOW as key strengths with Aboriginality a SOW eligibility requirement. The AHO is currently reviewing its Aboriginal Employment Strategy. The outcome of that review will inform the implementation of the SOW Policy Framework.

Consistency in determining Aboriginality for SOW support with access to broader AHO services through the *AHO Confirmation of Aboriginality Policy* is an additional mechanism for embedding SOW as a key component of AHO identity. The SOW interim evaluation additionally recommended a focus on clearer scope definition.

Policy Framework Parameters

The findings of the SOW interim evaluation provide the basis for strengthening the program's service provision, clarifying service scope, reducing organisational risk and improving value for money. These initiatives complement legislative and policy requirements embedded in core AHO governance. Specific initiatives will be developed and implemented in partnership with SOW staff.

Development and prioritisation of program strengthening initiatives will be underpinned by the following DPIE values: Daring, Collaboration Creative, Kind and Inclusive. These will be supplemented by the AHO Engagement Framework commitment to Respect and Trust; Listen and Yarn; Act and Deliver; Partner and Prosper with Culture at the centre of everything we do. As well as ensuring that strategies developed build on the strengths identified in the SOW interim evaluation, it will also ensure that the experiences of SOW staff and clients are central to reforms progressed as a result of this policy framework.

SOW Policy Framework Governance

Roles and Responsibilities

AHO management and staff are central to the implementation of this policy framework.

The SOW Program Manager and Place Managers play a key role in contributing to and leading the implementation of ongoing program improvements, informed by their experience and the experience of SOW staff. They are also responsible for ensuring that operational changes are socialised with SOW staff.

The Director Policy and Evidence has Executive responsibility for leading the ongoing development of SOW and ensuring that the agreed amendments are reflected in the SOW Operations Manual. The Director Policy and Evidence is also responsible for ensuring that operational changes are socialised with SOW staff and is responsible for monitoring, evaluation and review of the policy.

The AHO Executive is responsible for considering and approving proposed changes. Executive members are also responsible for ensuring their teams provide SOW appropriate support, as required.

The SFSC Program Board is accountable for the implementation of SFSC, which includes SOW. SFSC Program Board members can facilitate strategic agency level linkages to support SOW outcomes.

The AHO Board is responsible for providing strategic direction and leadership, endorsing individual policies as required and by providing oversight of a SOW review every two years.

Operational Guidance

The SOW Operational Manual, which underpins all elements of program decision making, will continue to be revised to reflect approved changes. SOWSmart (client

management system) will continue to evolve to reflect changes to the SOW Operational Manual.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Review

Individual initiatives identified as a result of this policy framework will be prioritised and implemented in line with the AHO's policy review process. The overall impact of the reforms will be reviewed every two years in tandem with a review of the policy framework. The review of the program of reform will consider the extent to which it has realised SOW interim evaluation recommendations.

The biennial review of this policy framework will consider the extent SOW has been more embedded within AHO and DPIE governance and operations.