

28 January 2022

The Hon Michael Sukkar, MP  
Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer  
PO Box 6022  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2602

Dear Minister for Housing and Assistant Treasurer,

**RE: FY22-23 Pre-Budget submission for The Lowitja Institute.**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the 2022-23 Budget process.

Please find attached The Lowitja's Pre-Budget submission.

Lowitja Institute is Australia's independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research institute. We work across Australia to prioritise Indigenous health research.

We are an independent voice for Indigenous researchers, and we prioritise delivering outcomes that benefit Indigenous peoples.

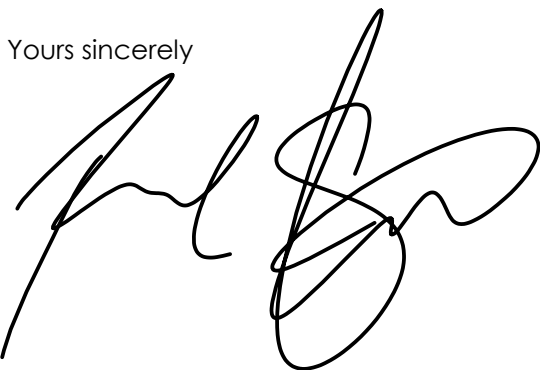
We:

- Support knowledge translation of Indigenous research into policy and practice
- Develops Indigenous research capabilities and
- Advocates on behalf of Indigenous researchers.

We work with industry partners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the general community to drive outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

For further information, please do not hesitate to contact Ms Janine Mohamed on 0448 626 266. We look forward to discussing this further with you or your office.

Yours sincerely



Peter Stewart  
Deputy Chief Executive Officer



## Pre-Budget Submission – The Lowitja Institute

28 January 2022

<b>Problem</b>	Lack of evidence and data that is centralised and accessible to inform Indigenous policy development.
<b>Solution</b>	Development of a purpose-built Indigenous Wellbeing Index Solution.
<b>Cost</b>	<b>\$10,148,000</b> for completion of Phase 2 and 3 of the Indigenous Wellbeing Index.

### Introduction

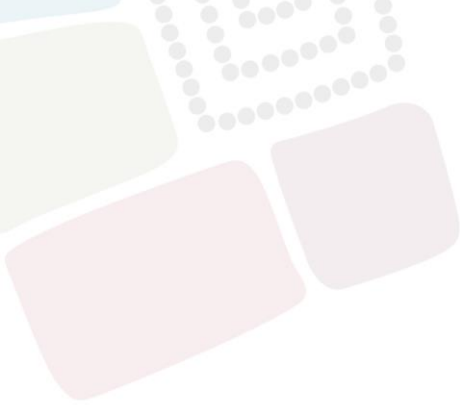
The Lowitja Institute is Australia's national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, named in honour of our Patron, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG. The Institute is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation working for the health and wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples through high impact quality research, knowledge translation, and by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

Established in January 2010, the Lowitja Institute operates on key principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, a broader understanding of health that incorporates wellbeing, and the need for the work to have a clear and positive impact.

Until 30 June 2019, the Institute also hosted [the Lowitja Institute Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health CRC](#) (Lowitja Institute CRC), funded by the Australian Government Cooperative Research Centres (CRC) Program.

The history of the Lowitja Institute CRC dates back to 1997 when the first CRC for Aboriginal and Tropical Health was established. The Institute and the CRC organisations have led a substantial reform agenda in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research by working with communities, researchers and policymakers: with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people setting the agenda and driving the outcomes.

The value and priorities of the Institute are best summarised from their 2015-18 strategic plan:



*A significant responsibility rests with Lowitja Institute to provide leadership on work that will result in improvements to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To achieve this, Lowitja Institute will embrace those who likewise share a firm commitment in valuing the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (...) The work of Lowitja Institute will be ambitious, rigorous and culturally safe. We will directly contribute towards our people achieving their greatest potential.*

In alignment with the focus of its strategic plan, the Institute attracts the next generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, and coaches them to become the next leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

As the national leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research, and with its extensive history of valuing and improving the lives of their peoples, the Institute establishes itself as a research organisation following the best practice approaches in research, tailored to the needs of their communities.

The Institute's vision is to be a "trusted research institute that values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing."

## **Brief Executive Summary of Recommendations/Asks**

The Lowitja Institute in conjunction with the PWC's Indigenous Consulting are seeking a partnership with the Federal Government to support the development of a purpose-built Indigenous Wellbeing Index.

The vision of the Index is to enable Aboriginal peoples to make informed decisions about their lives and their communities. By doing this, it will drive self-determination through empowering communities to understand and inspire the design of sustainable Indigenous-led models and solutions.

We propose a data-driven platform that embeds Indigenous Digital Sovereignty-by-design, and has the potential to empower our communities to finally have a meaningful say in policies and programs.

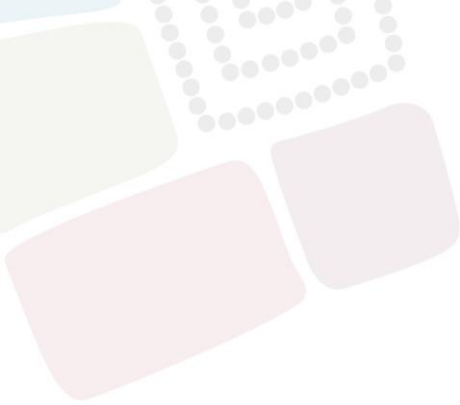
The Lowitja Institute funded phase one of the project which included the proof of concept: this work is now complete, and we are seeking funding to support phase two of the Index.

Phase two of the project is to test and validate the proof of concept with the three identified communities which include urban, regional and remote locations. In this phase we will test the product features with the needs of the community; de-risk the product development environment; work with the community to provide a greater understanding on how the community uses the data; and establish new jobs and digital skills in community.

### **Phase 2 - Budget**

**\$510,000**

Phase three of the project includes the implementation of the Index across 16 sites nationally and will be implemented over a three-year period. During these phases The Lowitja Institute will undertake the technology build, testing and maintenance of the Index.



This phase will not only roll out the Index but also create 21 new jobs in which 16 jobs will be locally based nationally, in the field of data technology and knowledge translation. Expand to 16 locations over 36-month period.

- This will include additional funding for a staff member in each location. Plus, central operational staff located within Lowitja Institute - to design and develop the community operating model; training and education needs and delivery;
- Scale to build platform: business case for investment/feasibility study;
- Expertise on governance and set up: IWI entity & governance structure IWI ownership, branding, target operating model, business structure;
- Evaluation;
- Platform testing;
- Training; and
- Delivery / Roll-out.

### Phase 3 Budget

**\$9,638,000**

## The Issues that Need to be Addressed by the Federal Government

The collection of data across many areas of research is not often well understood, and in a lot of cases has been redundantly duplicate, resulting in wasted investment, and failing to reflect the priorities of the community. There are many instances where data is not recorded or captured and only reported by exception and therefore does not provide an accurate description of the community.

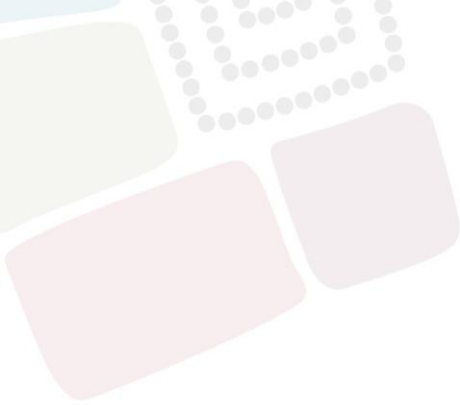
The development of the Indigenous Wellbeing Index provides the Government with an opportunity to fund a central source of evidence, to maximise the investment made in a range of research projects, health initiatives and the like.

The Indigenous Wellbeing Index will be the single source of truth, that is evidenced-based and can powerfully and credibly influence future policy development.

*Closing the Gap* outcomes over the last decade have highlighted the ongoing challenges and complexity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and for Government, and while there have been some improvements, recording and retention of data is lagging behind.

When the Prime Minister delivered his *Closing the Gap* speech in 2020, he talked about a new partnership and process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. This new process is based on truthful, strengths-based, community-led principles, that put Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the centre.

As the Prime Minister stated: "this means changing the way we work. It means expanding the opportunities for shared decision-making and making sure all mainstream agencies provide high-quality programs and services. It means making sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have better access to high-quality services, including building community-controlled sectors, and ensuring we have the data needed for ongoing improvement. It means making sure we have the systems in place to share responsibility, and to measure our progress. Without this, we can have no meaningful action and no real progress."



While there is continued investment from the Government to invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led data to support decision-making at a local level, we believe the Lowitja Institute is well placed as the lead Aboriginal research organisation, to help build the workforce and capability within communities to oversee the Wellbeing Index.

The Indigenous Wellbeing Index will mean access to richer data to build programs that work for people in the place they live. It will also help to develop regional profiles to better understand how they are tracking towards Closing the Gap targets and other community priorities. It will also mean that there will be a lot more community engagement around why data is important to the community and how it can be used to deliver better community outcomes.

## How the Federal Government can address the issue(s)

As the Federal Government works in this new way, there is increasing involvement and support for local communities to set their own priorities and tailor services to their unique contexts. The Indigenous-designed and led *Empowered Communities* initiative, which reshaped the relationship between Indigenous communities and governments, is just one example of where this has been effective.

In a commitment to subsidiarity - devolving decision-making as close to the ground as possible - community leaders are directly involved in making recommendations to government about how services and funding align with community priorities. Transparency and data sharing informs a 'learn and adapt as you go' approach and underpins local action.

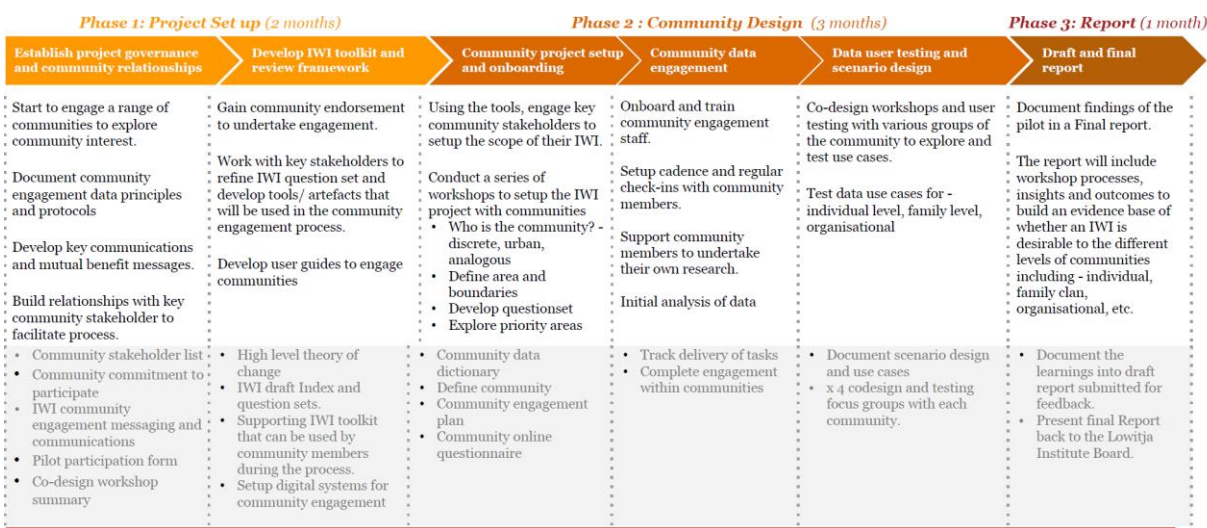
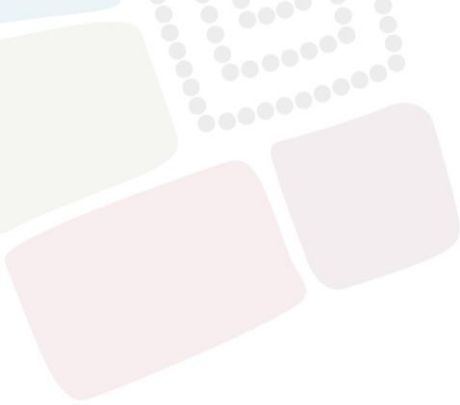
The development and implementation of an Indigenous Wellbeing Index will provide Government with a single source of truth – that is evidenced based and in real time – so there is no lag or time delay in when the data is captured: you can see it as it's recorded.

## Specific Request of the Federal Government

### Recommendation 1

The Lowitja Institute is seeking to partner with the Australian Government to implement Phase 2 of the Indigenous Wellbeing Index at a cost of **\$510,000** to complete the following activities listed below across the three communities identified.

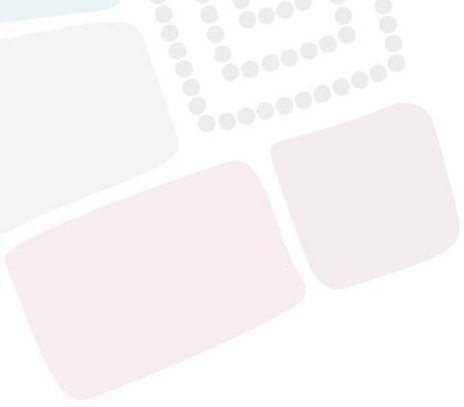
Phases	Activities / Item	Cost	Timeframe / Delivery
Phase 2	Trial 3 sites	\$350K	July – Dec 2022
	Independent Evaluation	\$80K	Jan -March 2023
	Business Case	\$80K	Jan - March 2023
	<b>TOTAL Phase 2</b>	<b>\$510K</b>	



## Recommendation 2

The implementation of Phase 3 includes funding for a full scaled roll-out over 16 communities – breakdown of the budget as follows:

Phases	Activities / Item	Cost	Timeframe / Delivery
Phase 3 - Stage 1	5 new sites + 3 trial sites	-	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	8 locally Employed staff @\$140K	\$1.4m	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	5 LI Staff @\$140K	\$875K	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	Governance	\$90K	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	Legal	\$110K	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	Training	\$190K	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	Contineny @20%	\$533K	March 2023 – Dec 2023
	<b>TOTAL Phase 3 -Stage 1</b>	<b>\$3,198K</b>	March 2023 – Dec 2023
Phase 3 Stage 2	8 new sites + 8 existing sites	-	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	16 locally Employed staff @\$140K	\$2,240K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	5 LI Staff @\$140K	\$700K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	Governance	\$60K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	Legal	\$80K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	Training	\$120K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	Contineny @20%	\$640K	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
	<b>TOTAL Phase 3 -Stage 2</b>	<b>\$3,840K</b>	Jan 2024 – Dec 2024
Technology	Build & Development	\$1.9m	January 2023
	Service & Maintenance	\$700K	Jan 2023 – Dec 2024
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$9,638,000</b>	



## Contact Details

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