Summary of findings

*Services Our Way* is a New South Wales Government service model designed to build the capacity of Aboriginal people to access disability services and encourage self-directed support. Researchers looked at the implementation of the program and the impact it has had on Aboriginal families in Nowra (NSW) where *Services Our Way* was first implemented. Our findings are based on face to face interviews with community members as well as NSW Government staff and service providers. Our main findings are:

*Services Our Way* has had positive impacts on Aboriginal people with disability and their families

- The program can celebrate the positive impacts it has had for Aboriginal people with disability and their families in the Nowra area in delivering much needed support. The program helped them address some of their priorities and enabled them to make choices in their lives that meet their needs.

- *Services Our Way* facilitated access to a range of services, and has met some of the immediate priorities of the Aboriginal families. People interviewed told stories about changes they had found difficult to achieve before they started with *Services Our Way*.

- *Services Our Way* staff showed how government services can use culturally appropriate approaches to engage with members of the Aboriginal community. Working in a culturally appropriate manner could improve services for Aboriginal people with disability and their families more broadly.

- Access to support and services, made possible as part of the *Services Our Way*, has enabled Aboriginal families to participate in social, economic and cultural activities, such as school, and to strengthen and support their community and social relationships.

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1 The evaluation team recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the Indigenous peoples of Australia. The use of the term Aboriginal in this document refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for ease of read.
Some Aboriginal families transitioned to mainstream services

- The evaluation could not determine the degree to which Aboriginal families successfully transitioned to mainstream services. Transitioning to mainstream services was limited for most Aboriginal families during this developmental stage, because for many of the families’ their first priorities were to address their most urgent needs.

- Some Aboriginal families are engaging with other service providers. The Services Our Way team continues to support many of the Aboriginal families engaged in the program. There was an expectation that people who had left the program may come back to seek support from the Services Our Way team as they experienced changes in their life.

- The slow transition of Aboriginal families away from the program, and return to the program, were not expected during the program design. The slow transition reflects and addresses the current needs of the community which might change in the future. The slow transition to mainstream services has implications for program resourcing.

The program could expand in multiple ways

The Services Our Way program in Nowra was a pilot, which changed during implementation to meet the needs of the community. The program could be expanded in a number of ways.

- The program could be expanded to more Aboriginal families in the existing area.
- The program could extend the services provided to existing Aboriginal families.
- The program could build the capacity of other services.
- The program could be expanded geographically.
- Culturally appropriate engagement could be extended to other services.
- The types of services offered could be implemented by a third-party.

If the program is expanded, the aims of the program must be clearly articulated and the operational structures identified, resourced and addressed.