



australian
community
support
organisation

**ACSO STRATEGIC
RESEARCH AGENDA
2020 - 2023**

SCOPE

ACSO's Strategic Research Agenda has been developed to guide ACSO's engagement in a research and evaluation that is aligned with its strategic goals and priorities for the next three years. A strong research agenda will support ACSO to position itself as a leader in advocating for and delivering services which divert people away from the justice system.

With this in mind, this research agenda, the first of its kind for ACSO, will provide direction on how our effort and resources will be focused to ensure alignment of relevant and timely research, both internal and external, with our strategic priorities of:

- Meaningful client experience
- Wellbeing of our people
- Influencing change
- Innovative design
- Sustainable growth

This agenda lists research topics under these priorities and supports research partnerships that will progress productive and timely research in our strategic priority areas. This agenda highlights ACSO's desire for a multidisciplinary and collaborative approach as well as an emphasis on inclusion and amplification of the client voices within our research activity.

Social justice, inclusion and diversity are core goals of our research program and ACSO is seeking to create a culture of service delivery based on evidence and the lived experiences of our clients. To do this our research program will ensure meaningful engagement with our clients and their advocates and communities. We will prioritise research which creates measurable outcomes and impacts for our clients, their families and the wider community.

OBJECTIVES

Challenging established thinking and practice

Research enables organisations to look at how it has approached its service delivery and support it to have an in-depth understanding of current business practices and processes. It allows an organisation to check if current methods remain aligned with best practice as well as providing insights into emerging and innovative new or improved ways of delivering its services.

Support good decision-making and investment

By ensuring service delivery and programs are evidence-based ACSO is in a better position to implement improvements in policy, practice and service design. Robust research and evaluation enables an organisation to effectively monitor performance, ensure it is achieving its desired outcomes and create optimal impact with its finite resources.

Our research objectives seek to:

- Generate data and information that can be used to influence policy and decision makers across systems
- Inform practice and support review and continuous improvement
- Evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of current programs and services and support cessation of ineffective practices and processes
- Inform future program and service design within ACSO
- Trial and evaluate new and innovative models of service delivery for our target cohorts
- Establish a culture which supports and sees value in research and evaluation activities



GOVERNANCE

All researchers, submitting or publishing their research externally from ACSO must complete and submit an **ACSO Research Application form** and return this to research@acso.org.au in order to gain approval to undertake research relating to ACSO.

ACSO will give due consideration to all applications submitted by internal or external researchers. However, due to the resources required to support the completion of research projects, applications that align to ACSO strategic areas will be prioritised.

Research involving ACSO facilities, staff, clients and resources is overseen by the Strategy Unit. The Service Design and Impact Unit coordinates and manages the ACSO's external research application (ERA) process and acts as Secretariat for the ACSO Research Committee.

Depending upon the complexity and size of the proposed research project an application can be tabled for consideration by the ACSO Research Committee. The Committee will also consider ethics approval for projects which are not affiliated with a research institution which can provide ethics approval.

Membership of the Committee includes business and operational staff and nominations for positions will be undertaken every two years or if a vacancy arises. The Committee is chaired by the Chief Strategy Officer.



PRINCIPLES

In Australia, all research involving humans must comply with the principles set out in the following guidelines:

- **National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research** (2007) — updated 2018 National Health and Medical Research Council
- **Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research** (developed jointly by the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Research Council and Universities Australia)
- **Applicable State and Territory Guidelines**

ACSO's Research and Evaluation Policy and Ethical Research Standards will align with the National Standard and Australian Code requirements.

These guidelines, our Policy and Ethical Standards will support ACSO in ensuring research that is being conducted with our staff, clients and data is done in a manner that is ethical and safe, has integrity and is of a high quality. These documents will also clearly articulate the responsibilities of ACSO, internal and external researchers and partner organisations working with us to undertake research and evaluation.

MEANINGFUL CLIENT EXPERIENCE

Our clients inform our practice and have a positive experience at ACSO

- Effectiveness of programs in the areas of mental wellbeing, drug and alcohol assessment and treatment, management of offending behaviour, forensic disability, re-integration and re-entry and desistance from offending
- Understanding effective models of assertive outreach
- Models of effective service delivery for programs and services specifically designed for First Nations peoples in contact with the criminal justice system
- Innovative practices in co-design of programs and services for vulnerable and complex cohorts
- Improvement and effectiveness of processes to increase client engagement and retention in services and programs
- Research into characteristics that support and increase the therapeutic alliance between worker and client
- Effectiveness of practice to increase culturally safe and responsive mechanisms within our service delivery
- Models of service that increase and address cultural connectiveness and improved social connections for vulnerable and socially isolated cohorts
- Increased understanding of the client journey in interaction with social support services and systems including longitudinal studies

WELLBEING OF OUR PEOPLE

Our people are safe, well and engaged with our One ACSO culture

- Understanding the nature and demands on staff roles within ACSO programs and services including training and development strategies to support staff wellbeing
- Exploring recruitment and retention of ACSO staff including motivation to work with ACSO, strategies for effective recruitment and retention of suitable and experienced staff
- Innovative 'best practice' training approaches for staff working with vulnerable and hard to engage cohorts
- Understanding factors contributing to staff burnout and turnover
- Exploring issues around increasing the diversity of staffing across ACSO programs and services
- Understanding the nature of and innovative responses to incident management and safety for staff working with high risk clients



INFLUENCING CHANGE

Our research, clients and partnerships will contribute to inclusive communities and criminal justice reform

- Understanding the impacts of legislative, policy and practice requirements on ACSO services and clients
- Exploring and trialling diversionary alternatives to traditional criminal justice responses
- Exploration of service models which contribute to building social capital within communities
- Understanding successful factors that contribute to long-term successful desistance by clients
- Understanding the contribution of First Nations traditional lore and cultural traditions to successful desistance by First Nations peoples
- Effective models of service delivery for remote and regional communities
- Strategies to engage local communities and organisations to assist in the reintegration of clients post-release

INNOVATIVE DESIGN

Our organisation delivers innovative services informed by evidence and enhanced by digital transformation

- Effectiveness of e-interventions in areas such as mental health, drug and alcohol treatment and reintegration
- Exploring ability to apply innovative models from other jurisdictions within Australian communities
- Understand and explore the emerging role and opportunities of technology and artificial intelligence in supporting vulnerable cohorts
- Innovative or best practice models for addressing offending behaviour by young people
- Contribution to development of 'gold standard' models of service delivery for forensic disability, reintegration and supported accommodation services
- Understanding the contribution of practical supports such as housing and assistance with living skills to desistance and success post-release

SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Our systems and capabilities enable strong performance, financial strength and strategic growth

- Ensure all research undertaken by ACSO or with academic, industry and government partners is focused on creating positive impact for clients and communities.
- Enhance the ability to use research in commercialisation of current and future ACSO programs and services
- Develop and foster research partnerships with high quality and recognised experts in criminal justice, health and disability services both within Australia and internationally
- Develop productive relationships with government and industry to leverage our research contributions and key platforms
- Target investment and funding to create research opportunities and partnerships
- Undertake longitudinal impact and cost-benefit analysis of ACSO programs and services