

Closing the Gap

Commonwealth 2024 Annual Report

Commonwealth 2025 Implementation Plan



Australian Government



CLOSING THE GAP

The Commonwealth acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.

About the Words We Use

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples each have their own unique languages, beliefs, cultural practices, traditions and diversity within each culture. This Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Implementation Plan uses the collective term 'First Nations people' to reference and reflect the unique identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We respectfully acknowledge that Torres Strait Islander people are First Nations people living in Australia and 'Aboriginal' should be read to include the diversity of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

This report may contain images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away.

Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Report and Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2025 Implementation Plan

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ISSN 2653-5777/ISSN 2653-5750 Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Report and Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2025 Implementation Plan (print)

ISSN 2653-5785/ISSN 2653-5769 Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2024 Annual Report and Commonwealth Closing the Gap 2025 Implementation Plan (online)

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Jordan Lovegrove, Ngarrindjeri

Many pathways, many journeys



The artwork by Jordan Lovegrove, Ngarrindjeri, of Dreamtime Creative recognises the many pathways, many journeys of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Closing the Gap. The Commonwealth is working with states, territories and community-controlled peak organisations to fundamentally accelerate improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through shared decision making that benefits the different facets of First Nations people. The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is centred around four Priority Reforms depicted by the outer meeting places. Nineteen socio-economic targets in key outcome areas, represented by the dots in the inside meeting place, reflect the desired result for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The people symbols on the outside of the central meeting place represent government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sharing decision-making as well as responsibility and shared accountability to Close the Gap.

Jordan Lovegrove is a Ngarrindjeri Artist who grew up in Adelaide, South Australia. His family is from Raukkan, an Aboriginal community situated on the south-eastern shore of Lake Alexandrina in Narrung, 80km southeast of Adelaide. Raukkan is the home and heartland of Ngarrindjeri country. Jordan is one of the first Aboriginal artists to do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander vector art, and has perfected this skill over many years.



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Prime Minister's Foreword

On behalf of the Commonwealth Government,
I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands
and waters on which Australians live and work,
and I pay my respects to Elders past and present.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is a landmark partnership, bringing together all Australian governments and the Coalition of Peaks to achieve genuine equality. My Government remains committed to realising the vision of the National Agreement.

I am deeply grateful for the extraordinary work of the Coalition of Peaks and for the commitment shown by state and territory governments, which are responsible for so many services and supports.

Australia has a proud story of hope and achievement. Yet there are still too many areas where outcomes are not improving fast enough. We can do better. We must do better.

The task before us is to build a future in which all Australians have access to the same opportunities. Closing the Gap is nothing less than a living, breathing manifestation of the great Australian ethos of the fair go.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap is based on the understanding that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the programs and services that affect them, better outcomes are achieved.

We cannot pretend we are fully measuring up to the fair go when basic needs like health care, a safe home, and educational opportunities are not afforded to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To close the gap, governments have to be willing to share decision-making with communities and empower the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations delivering critical services on the ground.

The 2025 Implementation Plan outlines how the Commonwealth will progress the National Agreement's Priority Reforms and socio-economic targets. It is supported by real investment to accelerate progress in housing, employment, health, education, justice and safety, with a focus on economic development opportunities for First Nations people.

At the heart of my Government's commitment to Closing the Gap is a commitment to First Nations people to having ownership of their futures, built on a foundation of economic opportunity.



That is the foundation on which everything else can be built. If we get it right, we can break the cycle that has ensnared generations. This starts with a safe home, a job, access to education and good health.

Working with the Northern Territory Government, we are already addressing overcrowding by building 270 new homes each year as part of a \$4 billion investment over a decade — and investing another \$120 million in improvements to existing housing.

And we are further investing in critical services in remote First Nations communities in the Territory, with \$842.6 million to roll out over the next 6 years under the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. Importantly, this investment package was designed and will be rolled out in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory.

From this year we will make a further \$70 million available for concessional loans that will help Indigenous Business Australia keep up with demand. Importantly, \$20 million of this will be quarantined for single-carer families. This is particularly important for women who are sole carers, who are often locked out of home ownership.

By providing shared equity in these situations, we can help people access home ownership. Our Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program will create 3,000 real jobs in remote communities – 3,000 jobs with proper pay and conditions.

As we build Australia's future as a renewable energy superpower, clean energy projects and processing and refining facilities will also unlock new jobs and prosperity for Indigenous communities. What underpins our First Nations Clean Energy Strategy is the principle that generating renewable energy on country should bring new economic power to communities.

To combat food insecurity and its impact on health, we will reduce the costs of 30 essential products in more than 76 remote stores down to what you'd pay in the city, as well as boosting warehouse capacity to shorten freight distances and to make supply chains to remote communities less vulnerable.

In more than 10 remote communities in northern and central Australia, we are also upgrading or opening laundries to combat the infections that can be the gateways to serious disease.

We are funding suicide prevention through an important program to improve First Nations social and emotional wellbeing. This includes funding to support higher education scholarships for up to 150 tertiary education students studying psychology.

We are listening and delivering important programs to make a positive difference.

My Government's resolve to implement the National Agreement is steadfast and we know Australians share our commitment to a fair go for all of us. That is why we will continue walking along the path towards reconciliation, in genuine partnership with First Nations people.

I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Indigenous Australians, Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, and the Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health, the Hon Ged Kearney MP, for their leadership, wisdom and support. And, of course, the former Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Linda Burney MP, who has given her heart and soul to so many causes – none more so than making a difference in the lives of First Nations People.

As Linda said in her farewell speech to Parliament last year:

"Healing in Australia is a profound, long-term, incremental thing. It's about people. It's a tough road, but I think we will get there."

I share her optimism. The Australia we imagine – more united, reconciled, confident and equal – is within our grasp.

The National Agreement is our blueprint to build this better future.

The Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Prime Minister



Minister for Indigenous Australians' Foreword

Improving the social, health, justice, education and economic outcomes for First Nations people can only be achieved by working in partnership across all levels of government and with the Coalition of Peaks – we are all collectively responsible.

This report provides insight into the progress the Commonwealth Government has made to contribute to closing the gap in 2024, and the crucial work to be done in the next year to improve outcomes for First Nations people.

At the core of the National Agreement are 4 Priority Reforms that have been informed by First Nations people and communities; ensuring policies and programs are created and delivered in partnership; strengthening the community controlled sector; transforming mainstream institutions; and sharing data and information.

As the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Agreement found, much more needs to be done. This report includes the Commonwealth's response to the Productivity Commission's report. Throughout this report there are examples of where we are making progress and where we are focusing on more action to deliver on the Priority Reforms.

We are making progress; especially in our response to the unacceptable levels of First Nations people living in overcrowded and run down houses. Partnering with the Northern Territory Government, Aboriginal Land Councils and Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory, we are investing \$4 billion over 10 years. This partnership, signed on 20 June 2024 at the remote community of Milikapiti on the Tiwi Islands, will deliver 270 houses each year, with the aim of halving over crowding.

We are focussed on ensuring more people in remote areas have jobs with real wages and decent conditions. As we committed, this year we have commenced the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program (RJED) and progressed development of a new remote employment service. The new remote employment service will complement RJED by supporting people who are looking for work. RJED will initially create 3,000 jobs over the next 3 years and will be available in all 60 regions.



The Government is providing \$16.9 million over 5 years from 2024-25 to support development of a First Nations Economic Framework and establish a First Nations Economic Partnership (the Partnership). The Partnership will support participation by First Nations representatives in collaborative policy development to support an economic empowerment agenda.

We have delivered on Better Renal Services for First Nations People, with a new 4 chair dialysis unit in the remote South Australian town of Coober Pedy opened in June 2024. So far, the clinic operated by the Western Desert Nganampa Walytja Palyantjaku Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation, widely known as Purple House, has had a profound impact, enabling numerous patients to return home and reconnect with their families.

We are delivering on our landmark justice reinvestment package supporting communities to find local solutions to improve community safety and reduce incarceration rates with 26 sites funded to date.

The Government has made significant investments of \$4.4 billion to end the national crisis of Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence in Australia. The Government will continue working to ensure Australian women and children are safe, with a strong focus on First Nations women and children through the standalone First Nations National Plan.

The new office of the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People is up and running and will be instrumental in protecting and promoting the rights, interests and wellbeing of First Nations children and young people.

We are expanding the successful Indigenous Rangers Program through a \$355 million investment to support First Nations people to care for their Country and share their knowledge. There will be more than 1,000 new Indigenous ranger jobs created across the country.

The Government released the First Nations Clean Energy Strategy on 6 December 2024, to help unlock greater economic opportunities for First Nations people from Australia's renewable energy transformation. The 5 year strategy has 3 goals — to power First Nations communities with clean energy; achieve economic benefits for First Nations people; and enable equitable partnerships.

In 2025 our focus will be on continuing to improve health outcomes, reduce housing overcrowding, improve food security, keep First Nations women and children safe and increase economic empowerment.

The Commonwealth will invest \$50 million from 2025-26 to improve food security outcomes for First Nations people living in remote communities through supporting lower prices of certain essential food products and items in remote stores. We are also investing in building a nutrition workforce with over 100 local First Nations staff in remote stores.

We have committed an additional \$24.7 million over 4 years from 2025-26 in First Nations social and emotional wellbeing and mental health responses. This funding will provide tools for First Nations practitioners. We are also providing funding to increase numbers of First Nations psychologists (by up to 150).

I am determined to work in partnership with my Ministerial colleagues, First Nations Australians, the Coalition of Peaks and state and territory governments to bring about a positive future for First Nations people.

I am also focused on building a strong working relationship and open dialogue across the Parliament. Cooperation and collaboration is crucial to improving outcomes for First Nations Australians.

Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy
Minister for Indigenous Australians





Photo: Children at the 2024 Barunga Festival, Northern Territory.

Executive Summary

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) remains the most critical policy platform for delivering improved outcomes for First Nations people.

This is the Commonwealth's combined 2024 Annual Report and 2025 Implementation Plan. It highlights what the Commonwealth Government has delivered in 2024 and outlines its priorities for the next 12 months to contribute to achieving the goals of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Commonwealth will work alongside states, territories and local government, and in partnership with the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities in this important work.

Delivering for First Nations people in 2024

There has been substantial progress toward the commitments made in last year's implementation plan and the Commonwealth is making significant investments across priority areas including housing, education, health and jobs.

The activities in the report demonstrate the Commonwealth is doing more than providing funding. The activities demonstrate a strategic approach to coordinate cross jurisdictionally, remove barriers, explore and support creative community led options and drive partnerships – across government, across sectors and across communities – to support successful outcomes.

It also shows a significant shift in the way the Commonwealth is working, consistent with the 4 Priority Reforms outlined in the National Agreement.

Shifting the way Government works with First Nations people

The Commonwealth also continued moving towards greater sharing of decision making with First Nations people and stakeholders by continuing to strengthen partnerships, focusing on co design and culturally appropriate approaches, supporting First Nations led research, and increasingly transferring service delivery to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).





Provide culturally safe, high quality and timely health and wellbeing services



Increase employment and economic opportunities



Provide access to appropriately sized housing and essential services



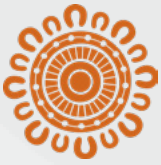
Support early years development and remove barriers to education and training

2024

- Expanded coverage of the Closing the Gap PBS Program for 660,000 First Nations patients
- Over 220 enrolments and 60 completions in the First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program
- Invested in 33 First Nation health infrastructure projects
- Delivered 10 Birthing on Country projects
- 300 jobs approved through the New Jobs Program Trial
- Developed the RJED program and commenced first grant round
- Delivered 5 'Launch into Work' Projects with 79 First Nation participants
- First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership announced
- More than 200 homes built in remote communities in the Northern Territory
- Community Wi-Fi infrastructure installed in 22 remote First Nations communities
- 185 projects identified for delivery under the Housing Australia Future Fund
- First Nations Clean Energy Strategy released
- Expanded the Connected Beginnings Program to support 24,800 children across 50 sites
- 634 First Nations students supported by Regional University Study Hubs
- Over 10,300 First Nations people enrolled into Fee-Free TAFE
- Extended Indigenous Boarder Provider grants program

2025

- Provide \$24.7 million to support First Nations social and emotional wellbeing
- Establish or upgrade 12 laundries in remote communities
- Identify and establish up to 21 additional regional and remote sites for new renal dialysis clinics
- Establish subsidy scheme to support provision of low-cost food and essential products
- Launch a new remote employment service
- Establish First Nations Economic Partnership and Framework
- Implement Indigenous Procurement Policy reform
- Commence delivery of a place-based First Nations Women in Business Pilot
- 270 new houses will be built for First Nations families across 40 remote NT communities
- Deliver 23 First Nations water infrastructure projects
- Increase the number of Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) Indigenous Home Ownership Program concessional loans
- Replace the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test
- Finalise the First Nations Teacher Strategy
- Implement core funding to support the ongoing operations of SNAICC and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) as First Nation education Peaks



Increase access to justice



2024

- Supported 27 community-led justice reinvestment initiatives across Australia
- National Access to Justice Partnership (NAJP) agreement signed
- Invested \$4.2 million in Community-led safety patrols under the Central Australia Plan
- Increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services funding to \$838 million



2025

- Implement the Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL) First Nations prison to employment program in up to 15 locations
- Respond to the Justice Policy Partnerships Bail and remand report
- Develop a Closing the Gap schedule to the NAJP



Supporting families and kin



- Provided over \$150 million to fast-track implementation of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025*
- Released *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*
- Intimate partner homicide dashboard released
- Delivered the inaugural *National Disability Insurance Scheme First Nations Strategy*



- Establish a National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety
- Release the National Child and Family Investment Strategy
- Launch *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*
- Invest \$21.6 million to provide critical family, domestic and sexual violence services to First Nations communities



Enhance connection to Country and Culture



- Created 12 new and expanded Indigenous Protected Areas
- 178 significant cultural heritage items held overseas returned
- Expanded the Indigenous Rangers program, prioritising new ranger roles for First Nations women



- Enhance support for community-led language learning and add 2 new language centres
- Establish the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Climate Resilience Centre
- Transition management of 8 Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs) to community-controlled organisations



Embed Priority Reforms



- Appointed the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner
- Appointed the Interim National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- Governance of Indigenous Data Framework released



The National Agreement is a commitment from all Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives to fundamentally change how we develop policies and programs that impact the lives of First Nations people.

The Productivity Commission's Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement came into effect on 27 July 2020 when signed by First Ministers of all Australian governments, the Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. It provides a clear roadmap of Priority Reforms to align efforts at all levels of government and different sectors to deliver better outcomes for First Nations people and communities and achieve the Closing the Gap socio-economic targets.

Since the National Agreement came into effect, there has been much goodwill and effort but as several reports have shown, change has been too slow. The Productivity Commission's first 3-yearly Review of the National Agreement (Productivity Commission's Review) released on 7 February 2024 found that governments are not adequately delivering on the commitments in the National Agreement and have not fully grasped the scale of change required to their systems, culture, operations and ways of working to deliver the unprecedented shift they have committed to. The Productivity Commission's Review concluded there has been no systematic approach to determining what strategies need to be implemented to disrupt business-as-usual practices of government.

The Productivity Commission's Review made clear that delivering the Priority Reforms requires proactive and positive engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making on policy and program design, implementation and evaluation. Governments must establish strong foundations for trust with communities to share decision-making and genuinely engage. Governments must evolve new mindsets, loosen government processes and work hand-in-hand with First Nations people and communities on solutions that will work in individual communities.

Fulfilling the National Agreement will require genuine shared decision-making and trust, real accountability, real collaboration and coordination, and real support for First Nations people.

Appendix A of this report outlines the Commonwealth's approach to the recommendations in the Productivity Commission's Review. Achieving meaningful change will require significant collective effort from all partners to the National Agreement, and the Commonwealth has a critical cross-jurisdictional coordination role. Noting the call in the Productivity Commission's Review for greater accountability, the Joint Council on Closing the Gap (Joint Council) and its Partnership Working Group (PWG) have committed to a renewed focus on responsibility and progress.

As outlined throughout this report, many of these measures have already commenced. In 2025 and beyond, the Commonwealth will continue to focus on implementing drivers of transformation and progressing agreed recommendations and actions.

Priority Reforms

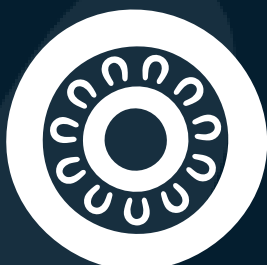
The National Agreement seeks to improve life outcomes of First Nations people, with 4 Priority Reforms central to these changes being realised. Embedding the Priority Reforms means disrupting the status quo.

The Priority Reforms are interlinked and interact, requiring all of them to be progressed to achieve the objectives of the National Agreement.

While the socio-economic targets are measures of progress towards closing the gap, it is the Priority Reforms that all levels of government need to enact to deliver tangible and sustainable outcomes for First Nations people.

The Commonwealth has heard what First Nations people have been saying, that when First Nations people have a genuine say in the design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect them, better life outcomes are achieved. This is what the Priority Reforms will achieve and why they are so important.

The Commonwealth has made solid progress with implementing the Priority Reforms in 2024. Key achievements are highlighted in this section, in addition to specific actions for Priority Reforms One and Two in the socio-economic chapters covered throughout this Report.



1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.



2. Building the Community-Controlled Sector

There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.



3. Transforming Government Organisations

Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.

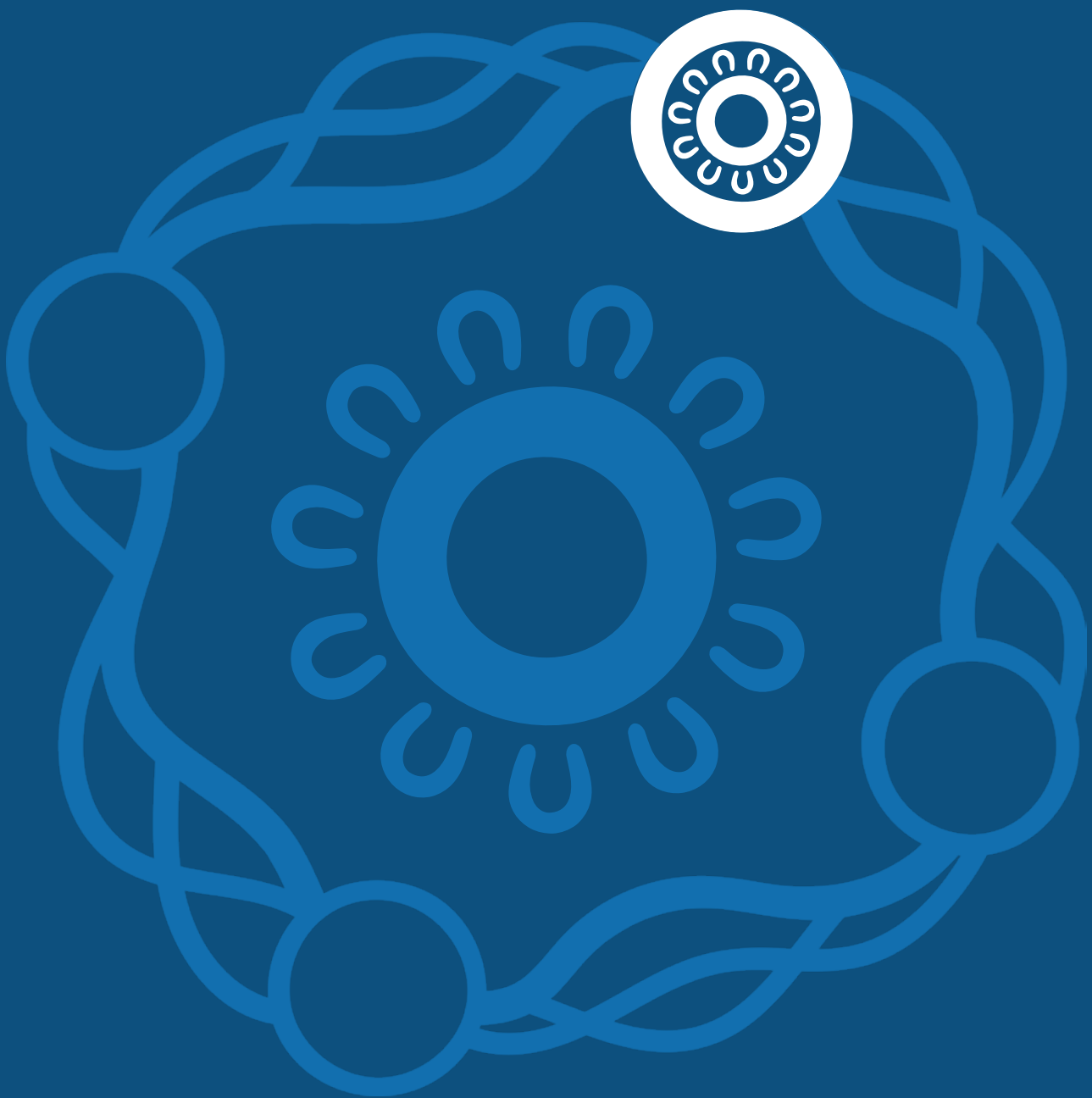


4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.

Priority Reform One

Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making



The Commonwealth is building and strengthening partnerships that empower First Nations people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap. Stronger partnerships will drive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led outcomes and initiatives.

Joint actions under Priority Reform One

The Commonwealth is an active partner in the 5 current policy partnerships (Justice, Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Housing, Early Childhood Care and Development, and Languages) and continues to contribute to strengthening these partnerships in 2024. Further detail on the progress of the 5 Policy Partnerships is provided throughout this report in relevant chapters.

The Commonwealth has taken a strong role in helping drive stronger collaboration, alignment of priorities and delivery through the Policy partnerships. In May 2024, the Commonwealth Participated in the inaugural Policy Partnership Co-Chairs forum, which identified 8 priority challenges for Policy Partnerships:

- Securing adequate, sustainable funding and resourcing for workplans and strategies.
- Jurisdictional accountability mechanisms.
- Clarity on authorising environments and endorsement processes.
- Ensuring the right level of state and territory representation.
- Establishing a means to raise cross-sector issues.
- Probity and commissioning.
- Managing power dynamics.
- Mapping impact including analysis of intersecting and cross-sectoral opportunities.

These challenges were further discussed with the Minister for Indigenous Australians and the Lead Convener of the Coalition of Peaks at the second Co-Chair forum in October 2024 and will be the focus of further work in 2025.

A further 3 new partnerships have been identified for future implementation: the VET and Skills Policy Partnership, the Data Policy Partnership, and the First Nations Economic Partnership.



Spotlight on the 2024 Partnership Stocktake

The annual Commonwealth partnership stocktake provides a key indicator of the Commonwealth's progress on embedding Priority Reform One. In 2024, the stocktake was strengthened to include a requirement for First Nations partners to endorse the submission. The Commonwealth received information on 108 self-reported arrangements by government agencies working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander bodies, of which 73 were new since 2023.

The stocktake assessed the partnerships against the strong partnership elements of the National Agreement and identified an increase in partnerships with shared decision-making across the Commonwealth, demonstrating the commitment to embedding Priority Reform One.

The complete Commonwealth partnership stocktake is available at
www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Spotlight on the First Nations VET and Skills Policy Partnership

The First Nations VET and Skills Policy Partnership will determine the most effective model for a joined-up approach to drive First Nations-led outcomes in VET. The initial focus will be on establishing Commonwealth and First Nations partnership arrangements through an Interim Partnership Committee, expanding to consider a nationally networked Policy Partnership as part of the governance design deliberations; provide advice on projects and research; and steer immediate work on the National Skills Agreement actions and priorities.

During 2024, the First Nations VET and Interim Partnership Committee met to agree draft terms of reference and governance, and to develop a forward work plan. Future meetings will focus on designing the enduring national VET Policy Partnership arrangements and overseeing the project of national significance to improve First Nations VET outcomes.

Photo: First Nations-led outcomes in VET are a focus.



Embedding Priority Reform One in Commonwealth policies and programs

The Commonwealth demonstrates its commitment to Priority Reform One through co-chairing and funding of Policy Partnerships, and by engaging in shared decision-making where the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as governments. Partnership agreements with community-controlled peak organisations progressed during 2024, including with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) and SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and are expanded upon throughout this report.

The National Indigenous Employment and Training Alliance (The Alliance) is an Indigenous-led national peak body committed to supporting stronger outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers and learners and supporting the growth and impact of the employment and training sector.

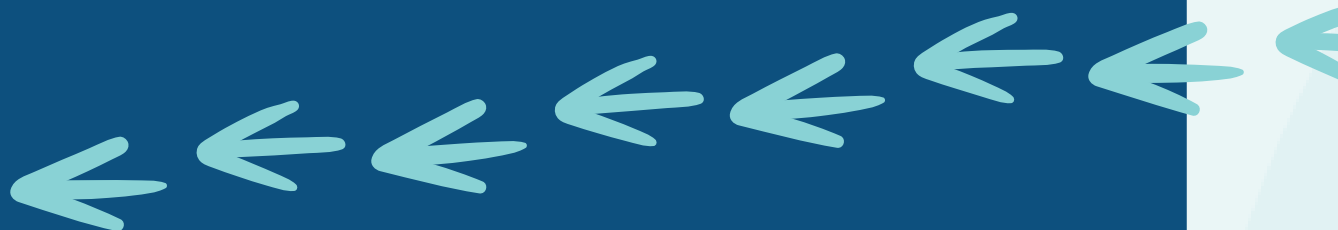
During 2024 the Commonwealth announced \$0.5 million funding per annum to 2026-27 to enable The Alliance to operate as a peak body and support their work.

The Alliance will play a key advisory role in reforms to Workforce Australia and through access to the Workforce Australia Capacity Building Fund will build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector and First Nations owned enterprises to deliver employment services.

During 2024, the Commonwealth progressed the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program with advice from a First Nations Reference Group. A National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) Independent Advisory Council First Nations Reference Group (IAC FNRG) to elevate the voices of First Nations people living with disability in policy decision-making was also established.

Spotlight on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI)

The Australian and Northern Territory Governments, together with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APONT), have signed a landmark Partnership Agreement to strengthen service delivery in remote First Nations communities in the Northern Territory. The Australian Government has committed \$842.6 million over 6 years to deliver the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI). The Government will work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and APONT to oversee delivery of the Partnership Agreement, ensuring it drives Priority Reforms and improves socio-economic outcomes under the National Agreement.



Priority Reform Two

Building the Community-Controlled Sector



The Commonwealth invests in the community-controlled sector as an essential partner for improving outcomes for First Nations people because they are best placed to deliver holistic, culturally safe and responsive services to First Nations people and communities and employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Joint actions under Priority Reform Two

The Commonwealth has contributed to progressing Sector Strengthening Plans (SSPs) with peak bodies and states and territories to collaborate on approaches to build sector capacity and capability, as well as critical infrastructure. There are currently 4 established SSPs in various stages of implementation (Disability, Early Childhood Care and Development, Health, and Housing). All governments accepted in principle the Disability Royal Commission recommendations to revise and strengthen the Disability SSP. Further sectors endorsed for SSPs are Justice, Languages, and Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence. Together these will drive increased service delivery, coverage, capacity, quality and resources of ACCO's.

Embedding Priority Reform Two in Commonwealth policies and programs

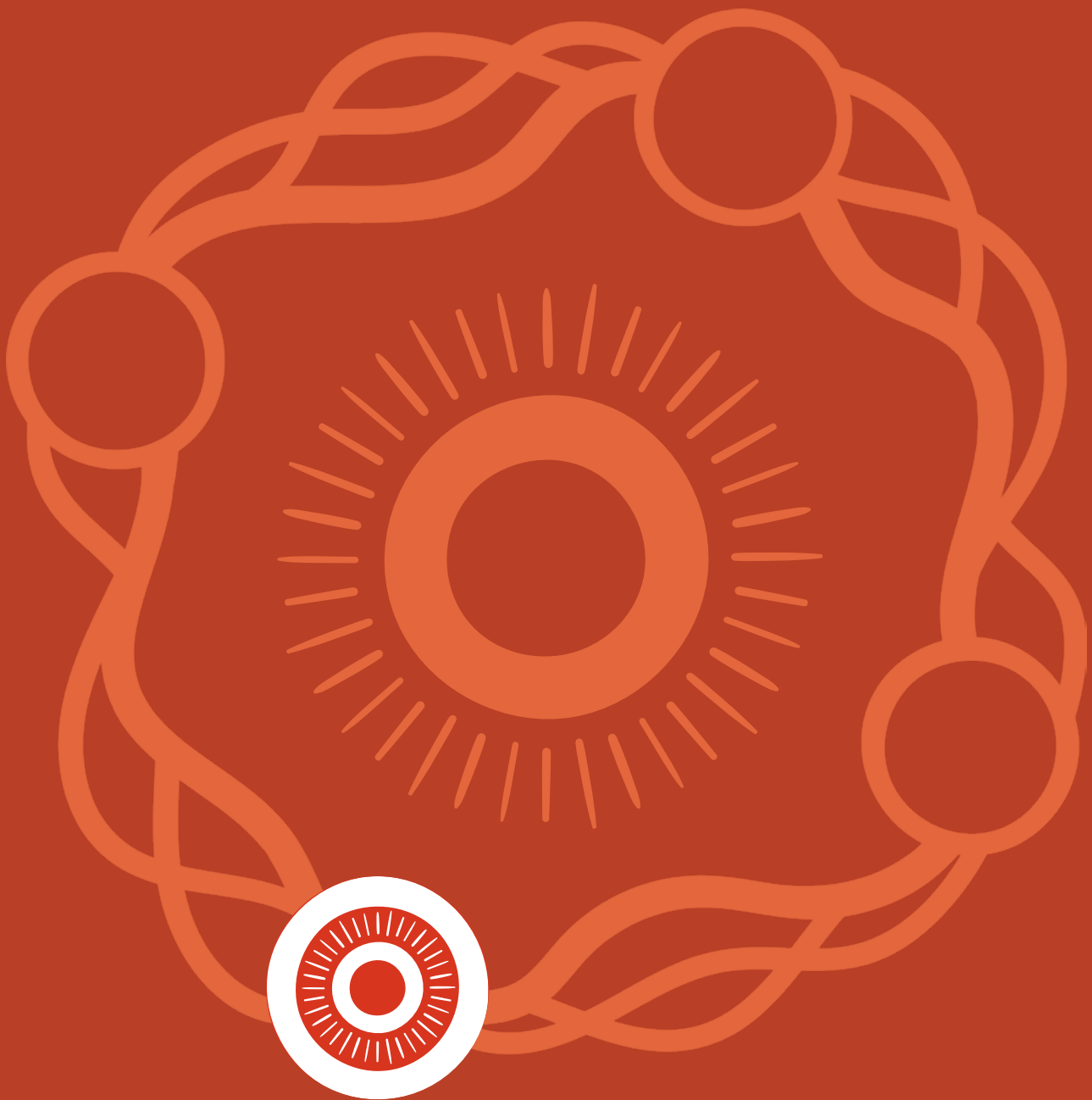
In 2024, the Commonwealth continued to deliver on its commitment to increase the proportion of services delivered by First Nations organisations to achieve Priority Reform Two and empower First Nations communities by transitioning programs delivered by non-Indigenous organisations to First Nations-led organisations. Further details on the programs transitioned in 2024 are provided in the relevant socio-economic chapters throughout this report.

The availability and scale of community-controlled organisations can vary greatly between regions, which can prevent some First Nations communities from accessing these services. For this reason, as well as the importance of community control to self-determination, Priority Reform Two includes 'building the sector' as a commitment to support growth and strengthen the First Nations service sector's capability to deliver the outcomes they seek.

To deliver services in partnership with First Nations organisations, communities and people, the Commonwealth and representatives, including the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) identified over 30 opportunities to transition program and service delivery from non-Indigenous organisations to First Nations organisations. More than 20 of the identified programs are scheduled to transition by 30 June 2027.

Priority Reform Three

Transforming Government Organisations



Priority Reform Three is a commitment to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. As part of this, government institutions need to undergo deep and enduring transformation, particularly in terms of identifying and eliminating institutional racism, discrimination and unconscious bias, and embedding and practising meaningful cultural safety.

The Commonwealth does not tolerate culturally unsafe services and systems – those which diminish, demean or disempower the cultural identities and cultural needs of First Nations people and communities.

The Commonwealth is dedicated to the transformation of government institutions and systems so they are culturally safe and accountable and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This will help ensure improved outcomes across the social, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and physical health and wellbeing of First Nations people.

The Commonwealth has made progress under Priority Reform Three in the last 12 months, including:

- To identify and eliminate racism, the Australian Human Rights Commission released the National Anti-Racism Framework, containing 63 recommendations for a whole of society approach to eliminating racism, with proposed reforms across Australia's legal, justice, health, education, media and arts sectors as well as workplaces and data collection. In addition, the new Australian Public Service (APS) Integrated Unconscious Bias training program is being developed as part of the APS Reform Capability Reinvestment Fund to overcome unconscious bias in the workplace to become an environment that nurtures a range of approaches and celebrates individuality.
- To embed and practice meaningful cultural safety across the APS all Executive Level 2 Directors (strategic team leaders in a position to influence team members directly) are now required to complete cultural capability and competency training through the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC). In addition, the successful AIATSIS' CORE online cultural training course is now a foundation module (for all APS staff to complete) to strengthen organisational First Nations cultural capability through greater awareness of the vast history and cultural heritage of First Nations people.
- To drive transformational change across Commonwealth central agencies, the Commonwealth is finalising a Central Agencies Strategic Action Plan (CASAP) in consultation with the Coalition of Peaks. The CASAP sets out actions central agencies will undertake to enhance core Commonwealth processes, including Commonwealth Budget and Cabinet processes, in line with the Priority Reforms, to ensure processes better meet the needs of First Nations people.

Priority Reform Three continued

- To support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures within the APS the Commonwealth embraced the principles of Yarning Circles used in First Nations communities for thousands of years and ran a successful Chief Operating Officers (COO) Collaboration Circle pilot program. This removal of traditional hierarchical APS structures allowed senior APS leaders and First Nations staff to share free-flowing ideas and collaborate in decision-making in a culturally safe and responsive manner. Recommendations from the Collaboration Circle pilot have been endorsed by the APS COO Committee and include the development and implementation of a 3-year roadmap for the APS to build cultural capability. In 2025, the Collaboration Circle will become a permanent sub-committee of the COO Committee.
- To fast track First Nations leadership and representation at the SES level, the Commonwealth conducted a culturally safe APS-wide recruitment exercise at SES Band 1 level. The initiative is known as the SES 100. At June 2024, there were 85 First Nations SES in the APS (up from 54 in June 2023). The program has achieved the highest representation of First Nations SES ever seen in the APS.
- To improve engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on matters relating to child safety, the Safe and Supported Partnership Agreement was signed on 8 March 2024. This is the first national policy framework negotiated under the terms of the National Agreement and, as such, puts First Nations people at the decision-making table with the same status as governments for the first time. This Agreement seeks to ensure decisions that impact First Nations children are made in the spirit of genuine partnership and shared decision-making.
- The Commonwealth also established the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, with Lil Gordon, a Ngemba woman from Brewarrina in north-west New South Wales with strong connections to Awabakal Country, being appointed as the Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, as of 13 January 2025.

Spotlight on the Personal Acknowledgment of the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme

A Personal Acknowledgement is an important element of the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme. Senior government representatives have been trained to engage with Stolen Generations survivors about their personal story of removal.

In 2024, 55 survivors received a Personal Acknowledgement, which gives survivors the opportunity to have their story of removal — and the impact this had on their life — heard and acknowledged.

Drafting the acknowledgement provides a unique opportunity for government representatives to reflect on the survivor's story.

The Scheme has contributed to the cultural awareness of over 100 senior government representatives who have participated in training for the role from more than 30 Commonwealth organisations. A total of 77 Personal Acknowledgements have been delivered and a further 115 are in progress since the program commenced.

Further information on the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap



Photo: A Personal Acknowledgement takes place in Darwin.

Priority Reform Four

Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level



Priority Reform Four focuses on increasing First Nations people's ownership and control of location-specific data as a key enabler of self-determination, empowering them to set priorities and ensure services reflect local needs. Priority Reform Four means providing robust evidence for Commonwealth and First Nations partners to enable equal partnership and decision-making.

Joint actions under Priority Reform Four

In 2024, the Commonwealth took strong steps to support joined up commitments under the National Agreement to deliver on Priority Reform Four with all other partners.

The Commonwealth took a lead role in delivering on the agreement to establish a Data Policy Partnership as part of the Joint Council response to the Productivity Commission's Review. This includes the development of an ambitious and sustainable program to support Indigenous data development and capability. A lead agency for this work will be identified in the first quarter of 2025.

The Commonwealth has partnered with key stakeholders to undertake data scoping and improve data collection on First Nations people living with disability. This work is building an evidence base to understand the over representation of First Nations people living with disability across Closing the Gap socio-economic targets and improvements in progress over time. To date a scoping study of First Nations data sources, methodologies and limitations has commenced to develop a National First Nations Disability Data Strategy as committed in the Disability Sector Strengthening Plan (SSP).

The Commonwealth is supporting the Joint Council to build data capability through place-based Community Data Projects across areas such as health, education and family safety, working in partnership with peak bodies and groups such as SNAICC, NACCHO, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) and the Indigenous Data Network. The Commonwealth continued to support Community Data Projects by:

- Funding the AIHW to develop community data portals for 6 community sites including in the Western Suburbs of Adelaide, Maningrida, the Kimberley Region, Blacktown Local Government Area, Doomadgee and Gippsland.
- Commissioning a 'Community Data Projects Lessons Learned' study to help improve community data projects and inform investment in community data initiatives.
- Contracting the University of Melbourne to deliver Indigenous Data Network Community Data Projects with First Nations communities and partner organisations at 3 case study sites in Ngaanyatjarra, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (NPY) Lands, Brisbane and the East Kimberley.

Accurately measuring the impact of actions taken under the Priority Reforms continues to be a challenge. Some Priority Reform metrics require data that is currently not being collected, and the data that is available is either not disaggregated adequately or not adequate to measure against the Priority Reforms. In 2024, the Commonwealth funded the Australian and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) to draft a measurement framework to support assessment of progress towards the Priority Reforms. This Framework, to be considered by the Partnership Working Group (PWG) and the Joint Council, seeks to provide the indicators and measures that will enable measurement of the progress made against all 4 Priority Reforms.

Priority Reforms Four continued

Embedding Priority Reform Four in Commonwealth policies and programs

The Commonwealth is committed to transforming government data practices and improving Indigenous Data Sovereignty by changing the way it works with First Nations people.

The launch of the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data (GID), which was co-designed with First Nations partners over a period of 18 months, was one of 2024's highlights in this area.

The GID will be implemented over the next 7 years and will ensure agencies commit to governing First Nations data in an inclusive and ethical manner.

Examples of data sharing with communities include the Connected Beginnings program's school readiness related dashboards at 50 sites supporting communities to tell their stories and decide on their local priorities, and health data sharing with the community-controlled sector to design and implement local responses such as point of care testing in communities (e.g. Blood Borne Viruses).

Spotlight on the Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data

Published during Reconciliation Week in May 2024, the GID seeks to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with greater control over government-held Indigenous data—across the entire data lifecycle. Jim O'Shea (pictured), a Proud Gumbaynggirr man, co-chairs the Health Department's GID Working Group. He commended the enthusiasm and sincerity of staff involved in the establishment of the Indigenous Data Working Group for recognising the importance of data for self-determination, stating that:

"The wealth of Aboriginal expertise, experience, and knowledge that we have at the table is exceptional. Collectively, we are striving to achieve better, cleaner data that will significantly benefit and support our ability to reflect on and improve the systems we currently report into and under. The development of a Framework Implementation Plan is a great step towards much-needed and better governance of Indigenous data, which will lead to better reporting in the future."

Since its publication, the GID has been downloaded over 3,300 times, by over 2,600 unique users. Multiple agencies have begun establishing internal GID Working Groups, collaborating with First Nations partners on implementation. The GID won the 2024 APS Data Award for Diversity and Inclusion.

Further information is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Jim O'Shea, Co-Chair GID Working Group.





2025 Priority Reforms Key Activities

In 2025, the Commonwealth will continue to support the delivery of critical joined up actions agreed by all Closing the Gap partners to achieve the 4 Priority Reforms including by:

Supporting state and territory jurisdictions to fully establish the 6 place-based partnerships – **Priority Reform One.**

Developing and implementing new Policy Partnerships (Economic, VET and Skills) – **Priority Reform One.**

Establishing the Data Policy Partnership (DPP) to formally commence by December 2025 – **Priority Reforms One and Four.**

Implementing 3 Sector SSP (Justice, Languages, and Family, Domestic, and Sexual Violence) – **Priority Reform Two.**

Continuing to develop data portals for the Blacktown, Maningrida and Western Suburbs of Adelaide sites, aiming to have an operational data portal that provide data relevant to community priorities at the Blacktown site by 30 September 2025 – **Priority Reform Four.**

Completing the scoping study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data resources (Disability) by mid-2025 – **Priority Reform Four.**

Photo: Yota Dokitji – New Birth Galiwin'ku Knowledge Exchange and Project Showcase event, held on 18-21 June 2024.





*Photo (above): Minister McCarthy
with former Minister for Indigenous
Australians Linda Burney and
former Senator Patrick Dodson.*

Socio-economic outcomes

The National Agreement has 19 socio-economic targets across areas that have an impact on life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The progress against the targets is monitored by the Productivity Commission to ensure all parties to the National Agreement understand how their efforts are contributing to progress.

All Australian governments have responsibility for working with their Peak partners to deliver actions that will make progress toward achieving Closing the Gap goals.

Health and Wellbeing

Socio-economic Outcome 1

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives.

Target: Close the Gap in life expectancy within a generation by 2031.

Socio-economic Outcome 2

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91%.

Socio-economic Outcome 14

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.

Target: Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.

Improving the life expectancy of First Nations people relies on complex, multi-sector, whole-of-government approaches in genuine partnership with First Nations people. First Nations health and wellbeing is holistic encompassing not only physical health but social, emotional, cultural, spiritual, and ecological wellbeing for individuals and communities. These all have a significant impact on the life expectancy of First Nations people.

The impact of historical harmful government policies continues, contributing to intergenerational trauma, socio-economic disadvantage and barriers to access and use of healthcare, has all led to health and ultimately life expectancy disparities for First Nations people. All Closing the Gap socio-economic targets, especially the targets in this chapter, contribute significantly to First Nations people enjoying long and healthy lives.



Photo: Aboriginal Elder, Valda Bokmakarray at the vaccine rollout by Mala'la Health Service, Maningrida.

Photo from: Mala'la Health Service Aboriginal Corporation.

Health and Wellbeing continued

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Improved access to culturally safe, high-quality and timely health care – Outcome 1

Improving access to affordable and culturally appropriate health care is essential to ensuring more First Nations people enjoy long and healthy lives. In 2024 the Commonwealth reduced the cost of medicines, increased the First Nations health workforce, improved critical health infrastructure and supported a groundbreaking review to improve aged care for First Nations people.

Expanded coverage of the Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Co-payment Program in 2024, through investment of \$11.1 million will make a significant difference. There are over 660,000 First Nations patients registered for the scheme, with benefits being extended to all PBS medicines dispensed by community pharmacies, approved medical practitioners, private and public hospitals. Further work will enable clients of approved Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services to receive critical life-saving medicines, without the need for a normal PBS script, and without charge.

When First Nations people access community-controlled safe services with First Nations health workers, they tend to have better health outcomes because the care is culturally safe, trusted and high-quality. The First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program will provide 500 First Nations trainees with an opportunity to gain health care qualifications. At the end of 2024, there were already over 220 First Nations people enrolled and 60 have completed the program, helping address workforce shortages in ACCHOs and delivering more culturally safe services closer to home.

Deteriorating and inadequate health infrastructure can compromise service delivery, pose safety risks for patients and staff, and inhibit efforts to attract staff.

In 2024, the Government invested \$100 million into 33 First Nations health infrastructure projects across Australia to construct new clinics, renovate

existing clinics and build staff housing for workers in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Health Service Sector. This investment is critical to improving services to clients and conditions for staff. An additional \$46.5 million is being provided in 2025-26 to support the delivery of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service infrastructure projects established under Closing the Gap Major Capital Works grant opportunities.

Older First Nations people play a critical role as community leaders and protectors of cultural heritage. The Commonwealth is committed to making sure older First Nations people age well. In 2024, the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, Andrea Kelly, led an extensive national consultation process, including over 135 in-person consultations across all jurisdictions. The Interim Commissioner delivered the Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Report to the Government in December 2024. The report highlights the need for transformative change to the aged care system to meet the current and anticipated needs of older First Nations people and ensure they have access to culturally safe aged care, including 27 urgent actions the report asks the Government to commit to as a priority.

Preventing and addressing chronic disease – Outcome 1

Preventing and addressing chronic disease is central to ensuring First Nations people enjoy a good quality of life and live longer. Reducing the burden of disease experienced by First Nations people will help achieve faster progress towards achieving Outcome 1. To achieve this, in 2024 the Commonwealth has made significant progress on delivery of measures to prevent life-threatening disease and illness, with a focus on diabetes, cancer and rheumatic heart disease.

Improving access to critical renal dialysis units for First Nations people in remote areas has been a priority. The first of 30 dialysis units, funded under the Better Renal Services for First Nations Peoples Measure, officially opened in Coober Pedy in 2024 with patients able to return home for treatment.

Other announced units are being established in Yatala, Balgo, Tom Price, Wiluna, Badu Island, Atitjere, Borroloola and Ti-Tree, providing access to life-saving treatment that urban Australians take for granted. To fully understand the incredible impact of the new Coober Pedy Dialysis Clinic on patients and community a case study is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Early detection is critical to chronic disease management and treatment. This has also been a focus in 2024 with \$11.5 million provided over 3 years to raise awareness and uptake of free health assessments for First Nations people. Health assessments reduce mortality from disease, health care costs, and improve the quality of life of First Nations patients.

Increased culturally safe maternity service – Outcome 2

Culturally safe maternity services are critical to maintaining the gains made toward improving the proportion of First Nations babies born healthy and strong (Outcome 2), which is currently on track to be met by 2031.

In 2024, the Commonwealth continued to support the delivery of culturally appropriate home visit pregnancy programs (that continue until the child is 24 months old) in 15 locations across Australia.

More than 190 First Nations babies have been born under the program with 93% born within a healthy birthweight range and 97% fully immunised at 24 months old (higher than the national rate of 89%).

The Commonwealth successfully delivered 10 Birthing on Country (BoC) projects. These include the Galiwin'ku Djakamirr program, which supports culturally safe birthing for Galiwin'ku women through the training of a Djäkamirr's (Doula) workforce; and the Alukura Midwifery Group Practice in Central Australia designed to enable self-determination and connection to family, culture and community across the perinatal period.

BoC models of care contribute to better health outcomes for First Nations mothers and babies, including a 50% reduction in preterm birth rates, reductions in child protection involvement, and reduced removals of First Nations babies (63% lower for mothers in BoC compared to standard care where trialled).

Spotlight on Birthing on Country

The South-East Queensland Birthing in Our Community project, established in 2013, now delivers across 3 additional sites in urban Southeast Queensland, with the project estimated to reach over 750 First Nations women, babies and families per year. In 2024, evidence shows both BoC models of care and the Australian Family Partnership Program are positively impacting Outcome 2, including: the number of babies born with a healthy birthweight; reductions in preterm birth rates; increased access to culturally safe maternal care; and higher rates of antenatal appointment attendance.

Further information on the impacts of Birthing on Country in South-East Queensland is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Birthing on Country staff member, Donna with a client.



Health and Wellbeing continued

First Nations-led initiatives to improve social and emotional wellbeing – Outcome 14

The Commonwealth is committed to addressing the preventable loss of First Nations lives to suicide and is taking action to help stop the decline in the rates of First Nations people reporting high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.

Listening to First Nations people is key to changing the trajectory of this outcome. The Commonwealth is enabling the voices and needs of First Nations people to be embedded in mental health and suicide prevention policies and programs through the \$2.6 million extension of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Policy Partnership.

Tailored, sensitive and culturally-informed approaches are required for First Nations people and communities that face unique challenges in the context of mental health and suicide. These challenges are shaped by cultural, historical, and systemic factors that have created disproportionate disadvantage and vulnerabilities in communities.



In 2024, the Commonwealth funded a range of First Nations initiatives to provide culturally appropriate services in suicide prevention and aftercare, including:

- The 24/7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support line 13YARN with over 60,000 calls answered since the service launch in 2022.
- The NACCHO flagship Culture Care Connect (CCC) program, a first of its kind program delivering critical localised and culturally appropriate services in suicide prevention and aftercare. CCC funding has supported the employment of approximately 110 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country, and established 30 Community-Controlled Suicide Prevention Networks, 37 Aftercare services and 8 state and territory affiliate organisations, who provide coordination of state level responses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific mental health first aid training.
- Thirrili Ltd provided Indigenous Suicide Postvention Services in response to over 80 incidents, supporting over 450 clients, and engaged with over 40 communities in 2024.
- Gayaa Dhuwi to finalise and launch the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy which establishes a framework for all governments to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations and communities to reduce the rates of suicide and self-harm amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Combining the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention and the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing into a national centre to translate evidence into best practice for First Nations suicide prevention, mental health and wellbeing.

Photo: First Nations-led initiatives to improve wellbeing.

Improving Food Security in Remote Australia for First Nations people – Cross-cutting

The Commonwealth is finalising the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities in partnership with NACCHO, states and territories to provide long-term, sustainable solutions to improve food security in remote communities.

The Commonwealth is working alongside local organisations, store operators and community leaders to improve food security and build resilience in remote areas. The Commonwealth invested \$9.6 million through the Store Efficiency and Resilience Package, with more than 15 remote stores to benefit from the initiative.

Some of the first stores to benefit are:

- The Maningrida Store, 7 hours east of Darwin, will receive almost \$500,000 to expand cold storage, install a fuel tank and purchase equipment to improve food supplies during

the wet season when access is limited.

Maningrida is one of the largest Indigenous communities in Australia, with some of the highest rates of heart disease in the world.

- The Kalkarindji Community Store, 470 kilometres southwest of Katherine, will receive \$160,000 to upgrade its refrigerator and freezer storage capacity with 2 freezer containers, cyclone rated concrete footings and electrical upgrades.
- The Amata Anangu Store, in South Australia's Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands will receive \$120,000 to enhance food supply and resilience for nearby communities during emergencies.

This package is not just offering relief, it is an investment in the health and wellbeing of First Nations people to significantly improve food security. Further actions in 2025 will build on the work already under way to deliver food security to remote communities.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership – Priority Reform One

The SEWB Policy Partnership members agreed to refresh the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023*, including the development and implementation of a First Nations-led Commissioning Framework. In 2025, work will commence on building a strong evidence base for addressing social and emotional wellbeing in First Nations communities, with Gayaa Dhuwi contributing as the Peak co-lead of the Policy Partnership.

Strengthening the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Sector – Priority Reform Two

ACCHOs have certainty to plan for the future with 4-year rolling funding agreements from 1 July 2024. These arrangements are supported by \$300 million in funding under the Australian

Government's Indigenous Australians' Health Programme and will help services to retain skilled staff and provide continuity of care for First Nations people.

The Government is also building the community-controlled sector to deliver high-quality services to meet the health and wellbeing needs of First Nations people across Australia. In 2024, the Department of Health and Aged Care, with ACCHOs identified 30 First Nations health services that could be better delivered by First Nations-led organisations under the First Nations Health Funding Transition Program. The Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme was the first program to transition on 1 July 2024, with the remaining 29 programs to transfer to community-control, where appropriate, by 30 June 2027.

The Government also continues to build the community-controlled sector through the Department of Health and Aged Care's Northern Territory Pathways to Community Control Program (P2CC). In September 2024, the Jabiru Health Centre successfully transitioned to management by Red Lily Health Board Aboriginal Corporation.

Health and Wellbeing continued

2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

The Commonwealth is committed to improving complex health outcomes of First Nations people with and at risk of chronic and preventable disease. This cohort of First Nations people is significantly over-represented in poor health and life-expectancy outcomes. For the Commonwealth to close the gap on Outcome 1, the delivery of clinical preventive health services must be improved.

To achieve this, in 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Identify and establish up to 21 additional regional and remote sites for new renal dialysis clinics in partnership with ACCOs to facilitate treatment for First Nations patients – **Outcome 1.**
- Invest \$15.4 million over 3 years from 2025–26 to detect, treat and prevent rheumatic heart disease in high-risk communities – **Outcome 1.**
- Invest \$14.7 million over 3 years from 2025–26 to support states and territories to screen, treat and eliminate trachoma – **Outcome 1.**
- Invest \$11.4 million over 4 years from 2025–26 to establish or upgrade up to 12 community laundries and maintain and operate them in remote First Nations communities across northern and central Australia to reduce the prevalence of skin infections that can lead to serious secondary illnesses – **Outcomes 1 and 2.**

The Commonwealth is improving access to culturally safe health services to help First Nations people get the quality health care they need and ensure cultural values, strengths and differences are respected, and racism and inequity are addressed. In 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Develop an implementation strategy in partnership with ACCHOs to address issues raised in the National Review of First Nations Health Care in Prisons to reform health care in the custodial setting for First Nations people – **Outcome 1.**

- Invest \$1 million in the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association to provide a Specialist Trainee Support Program to increase the number of specialists to provide First Nations patients with culturally appropriate high-quality specialised care – **Outcome 1.**
- Recruit up to 210 of the 260 new First Nations health care positions to improve cancer outcomes for First Nations people and provide access to chemotherapy treatment closer to home. This will also create viable career pathways in health for First Nations people, while facilitating access to treatment and Care on Country – **Outcome 1.**

The Commonwealth will work hard to maintain gains made toward improving the proportion of First Nations babies born healthy and strong in 2025 through the:

- Roll out of 10 Birthing on Country activities across rural, remote, very remote and regional locations to increased access to culturally safe maternal care – **Outcome 2.**

The Commonwealth is committed to addressing the preventable loss of First Nations lives and improving the mental health, social and emotional and wellbeing of First Nations people and communities. To this end, in 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Extend funding for Culture Care Connect for one year whilst independent evaluation is completed. The evaluation will support understanding of ways to improve accessibility and appropriateness of the program to increase the effectiveness of First Nations suicide prevention services and coordination of care for First Nations people – **Outcome 14.**
- Extend funding for the Red Dust program to facilitate the completion of an independent evaluation. Red Dust delivers programs to support community driven and culturally appropriate programs in the Northern Territory. These are delivered through the Strong Young Women's Program, Strong Young Men and Boys Program and the Healthy Living Program which focus on social and emotional wellbeing, connection to culture and country, healthy relationships and maternal health – **Outcome 14.**

- Extend funding for the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre for 3 years to support First Nations lived experience networks and elevate the voices of First Nations people to share their stories to co-design, inform, and deliver culturally safe mental health and suicide prevention initiatives – **Outcome 14.**
- Extend funding for 2 years for the Ngangkari traditional healers to continue the Uti Kulintjaku initiative which supports mental health and wellbeing and deeper conversations about mental health and healing for Anangu and those working in Aboriginal health and related services – **Outcome 14.**
- Establish a \$12.0 million flexible funding pool over 4 years from 2025-26 to enable short term, place-based SEWB supports for First Nations families and communities to manage significant trauma – **Outcome 14.**
- Invest \$4.2 million over 4 years from 2025-26 to develop, update and disseminate First Nations-led SEWB assessment tools and processes, enabling services to measure impact and inform improved service design – **Outcome 14.**
- Invest \$8.6 million over 4 years from 2025-26 to support the higher education fees of up to 150 First Nations psychology students to increase the availability of culturally safe and appropriately qualified First Nations psychologists, able to provide mental health care services in areas of need – **Outcome 14.**

Food Security means having continuous access to a range of food, drinks and other essential groceries that are reasonably priced, safe and meet the dietary and cultural needs of the household. The Commonwealth is committed to improving First Nations remote community nutrition outcomes. In 2025, the Commonwealth will:

- Release and implement the National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities Action Plan, including monitoring of progress and evaluation of the Strategy – **Cross-cutting.**
- Invest \$50.0 million over 4 years from 2025-26 to provide remote stores with low-cost access to approximately 30 food products and essential products through a subsidy scheme administered by Outback Stores Pty Ltd (Outback Stores), and create a dedicated governance training and support package for remote stores – **Outcome 1.**
- Invest \$21.4 million over 4 years from 2025-26 to improve diet-related outcomes for First Nations people in remote communities by upskilling local First Nations store-based staff (in up to 106 stores) to promote good nutrition and inform healthy choices when community members are shopping and preparing food – **Outcome 1.**

Education and Early Years Development

Socio-economic Outcome 3

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Target: By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%.

Socio-economic Outcome 4

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.

Socio-economic Outcome 5

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96%.

Socio-economic Outcome 6

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70%.

Socio-economic Outcome 7

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67%.

Photo: High quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education.

Photo from: SNAICC.



Higher levels of education are linked to a range of life outcomes, including improved health and wellbeing, employment and self-determination. Improving education outcomes of First Nations people is fundamental to improvements across all Closing the Gap socio-economic targets.

The Commonwealth is committed to working in partnership with First Nations people and organisations to improve outcomes of First Nations students and is making progress in investing in the community-controlled sector. By placing culture at the forefront, a stronger sense of belonging and identity is fostered for First Nations students. Keeping young people engaged in learning and completing their education creates pathways to a wealth of opportunities for First Nations people to reach their full potential.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Improved access to culturally safe, high quality early childhood education – Outcome 3

High quality early childhood education sets children up for success — it builds social, cognitive and emotional skills that facilitate an achievable and positive learning experience. The Commonwealth is dedicated to First Nations children having access to high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

In 2024, the Commonwealth maintained progress with \$2.1 million committed over 3 years to the First Nations Playgroup Pilot (the Pilot). The Pilot funded 13 ACCOs to provide accessible and affordable spaces, resources and opportunities for First Nations children to play together and for parents and carers to gain social and parenting support.

This was achieved by working in partnership with SNAICC to support the development and implementation of the Pilot, in alignment with Priority Reform One. The involvement of the ACCOs ensures the playgroups are culturally informed, embed community priorities and perspectives, and respond to community needs in place. The Government will also provide funding of \$2.1 million to extend the SNAICC's Early Years Support Program for 12 months. The extension will continue support for evidence based early childhood learning and development outcomes delivered by ACCOs, including through operational and leadership support.



Education and Early Years Development continued

Support children in their early years through education, health and family services

- Outcome 4

The Commonwealth is focused on providing a range of early childhood education, health and family services for children. Connected Beginnings is community owned and led. It improves access to existing early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services so children are safe, healthy and ready to thrive at school. It is a place-based grant round, which prioritises investments that meet the needs and aspirations of community with the aim of building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors.

Connected Beginnings has cross-cutting impacts, improving First Nations families' access to early childhood, maternal and child health and family support services. Improved access to key interventions should increase the proportion of First Nations children who are developmentally on track at age 5.

In 2024, 10 new Connected Beginnings sites were established in Gosford, Wyong, Dubbo and Kempsey (New South Wales), Ipswich (Queensland), Port Adelaide (South Australia), and Ballarat and Bairnsdale (Victoria), Canberra (Australia Capital Territory) and Kununurra (Western Australia). The 2024 expansion supports a further 7,900 First Nations children, bringing the total number being supported to around 24,800 across 50 sites.

Connected Beginnings National Sites

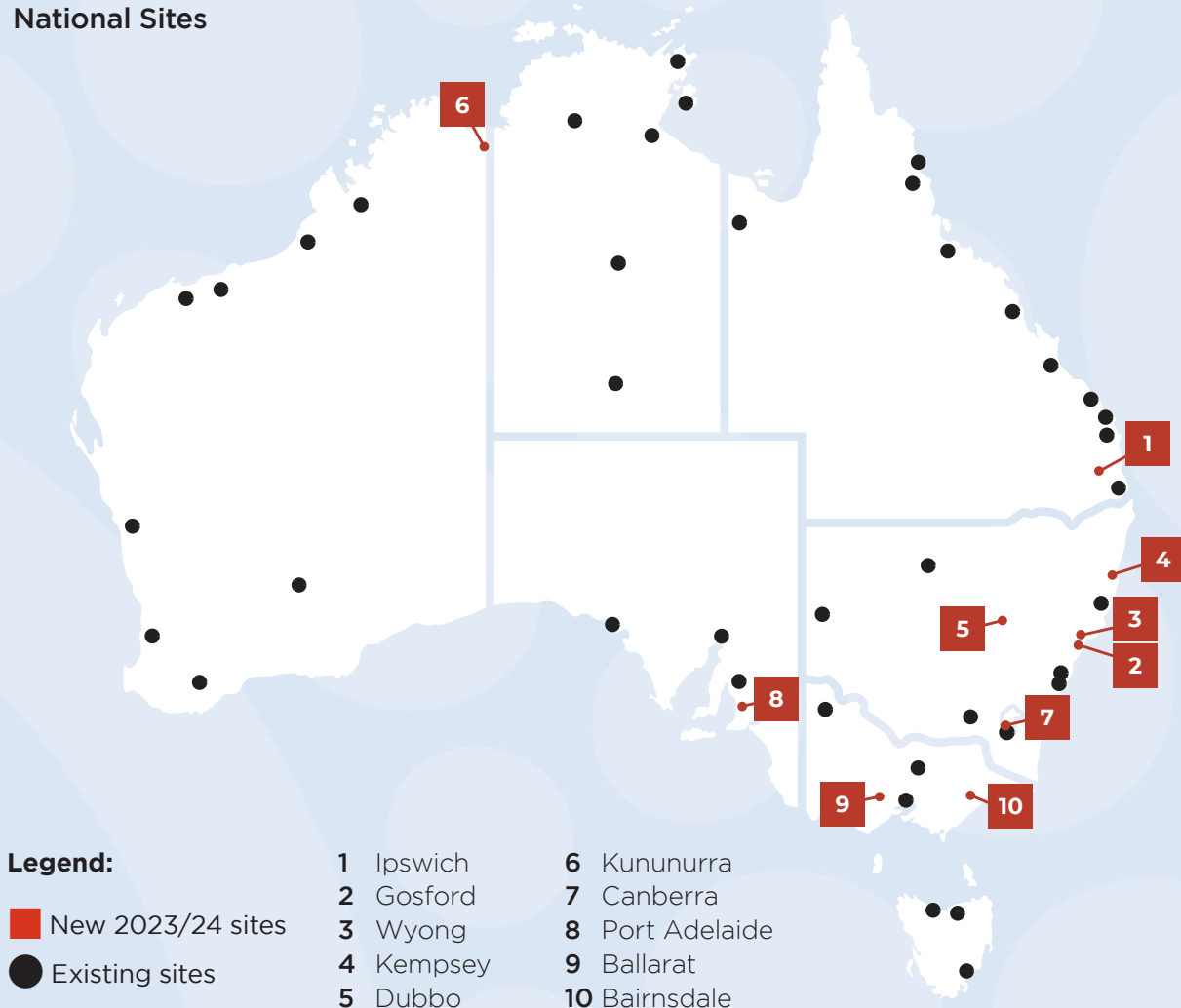


Photo: Connected Beginnings
in Ceduna, photo by SNAICC



Spotlight on Connected Beginnings — Kids growing up strong and connected to culture in Ceduna

Connected Beginnings has laid the foundation for community-led systems change in Ceduna, Scotdesco and surrounding homelands, including working with families of the Yalata and Oak Valley (Maralinga) communities who often pass through Ceduna and Koonibba.

“Our focus and our purpose of Connected Beginnings is engaging with our families. It’s making sure that our families are safe, that their voices are listened to, and that when we’re making decisions on programs centred around those families, that they are at the heart and soul of what we do. I want our kids to be treated fairly and to grow up safe and strong, connected to culture” – Project Officer

You can read more about Connected Beginnings at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Spotlight on University Study Hubs – Voices of participants

"Honestly, it (attending the University Study Hub) was the best decision I've made. Now that I am a second-year student studying at Macquarie University, I hope that more young Indigenous boys and girls from communities take this opportunity because it is worth it."

– Eileen Farrell, Wuyagiba Study Hub

You can read more about University Study Hubs at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

*Photo: Eileen Farrell,
Wuyagiba Study Hub,
taken by Andrea Jaggi*



Reducing barriers to First Nations people continuing their education – Outcomes 5 and 6

The Commonwealth understands that, for First Nations students to achieve their full learning potential, barriers to education need to be addressed. Barriers experienced by First Nations students are often structural, arising from a broad range of factors including location/remoteness, economic security, marginalisation and access to information.

Through the On-Country Learning measure, every operating school in Central Australia received additional funding in Semester 1, 2024 with their place-based activities guided by School Action Plans. These plans were underpinned by more than 150 consultation sessions held with communities to discuss their vision, aspirations and activities to be funded. These plans were signed off by a community representative and the school leadership, in line with the Australian and Northern Territory Governments' commitment to working with community under the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan.

Schools have implemented a range of activities, including supporting additional employment, community and student engagement, teacher professional development, flexible learning and wellbeing supports, and improved literacy and numeracy initiatives.

In very remote areas of Central Australia, attendance results and enrolments improved in 2024 compared to 2023. Further, the average number of disengaged students from very remote government schools reduced by 80 students on average in Term 2, 2024. Additionally, more than 210 staff were employed through the measure in 2024, of which 43% were First Nations.

In 2024, 634 First Nations students were supported by the Regional University Study Hubs program representing over 12% of students. The hubs help First Nations students in regional and remote areas access tertiary education in their local community by offering study spaces, computer facilities and internet access, as well as academic skills and wellbeing support.

In 2024, 10 new Regional University Study Hubs across Australia were announced, with additional funding to support 2 existing Country University Centres in New South Wales.

Free TAFE and vocational education addresses financial barriers and provides the necessary wrap-around supports to assist First Nations people acquire skills in areas experiencing significant skills shortages, with enrolments prioritised for groups excluded or under-represented in the labour market, with First Nations people identified as a priority group. The Commonwealth is delivering over \$1.5 billion funding for Free TAFE and vocational education places across Australia from 2023-26. From 1 January to 30 September 2024, over 10,300 First Nations people enrolled into Fee-Free TAFE, which made up 5% of total enrolments. Free TAFE is making training more accessible and providing First Nations people with the skills to engage in meaningful ongoing employment in a range of fields.

Education and Early Years Development continued

Increase access to culturally appropriate programs and services – Outcomes 5 and 7

The Commonwealth is working to close the gap on Outcomes 5 and 7 by establishing pathways towards careers as Indigenous Rangers. The Junior Rangers Program enriches First Nations students' primary and secondary school education by combining classroom with on-Country learning. The program has improved school retention and grade progression rates and provides students with the practical skills in land and water management to potentially pursue careers as Indigenous Rangers.

During 2024, funding agreements were finalised, and activities are underway for 41 new Junior Rangers projects at over 50 locations nationally, supporting over 2,600 First Nations primary and secondary students annually. Through a separate grants process in mid-2024, the Commonwealth invested a further \$4.44 million for 3 new Junior Rangers projects in Central Australia (Ti Tree, Santa Teresa, Papunya and surrounding communities), with funding agreements executed and providers commencing staff recruitment, program design and building stakeholder relationships. Formal delivery of on-Country learning activities with First Nations students will commence in Term 1 of 2025. Over 100 First Nations primary and secondary students will participate in these projects.



Photo: Connected Beginnings in Ceduna

Photo from: SNAICC.

Spotlight on Junior Rangers — Mossman High and the Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation

The Jabalbina Junior Ranger Program is delivered by Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation in collaboration with Mossman Botanical Gardens and Mossman State High School (the partners) in Queensland, supporting First Nations secondary students.

The year 9 and 10 students work to a 4-day timetable, with mornings devoted to literacy and numeracy programs, and afternoons devoted to junior ranger activities. On-Country activities have a focus on conservation and ecosystems management, including water quality testing and tree planting, as well as learning about native plants and animals.

The impact of this program has exceeded partners' expectations. Mossman State High School reports significant improvement in attendance, increasing from an average of 21% in Term 1 (before the program launched) to 74% in Term 2, and 71% in Term 3 (once the program was underway).

Read more about Junior Rangers at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Junior Ranger at Wawu Dimbi assisting with tree planting at a designated revegetation site.

Photo from: Jabalbina Yalanji Aboriginal Corporation.



Education and Early Years Development continued

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with government – Priority Reform 1

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) supports genuine partnership and shared decision making by bringing together government and First Nations representatives to develop recommendations to improve early childhood outcomes for First Nations children and families.

In 2024 the ECCDPP commissioned and published research into funding model options for ACCOs integrated early years services and an evidence review on the optimal number of hours of early childhood education and care for First Nations children. The report informed the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care, which acknowledged the important ongoing role of the ECCDPP in driving improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In 2024, the ECCDPP provided its first set of recommendations, inaugural annual report and 3-year strategic plan to Joint Council. The ECCDPP has identified 16 updated priorities which will be progressed in 2025. The Commonwealth has committed a further \$11.4 million to extend the ECCDPP to 2028.

The Better and Fairer Schools Agreement (BFSA) was developed in partnership with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) and the Coalition of Peaks.

This is the first time a national school reform agreement has been developed including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives about the reforms and commitments that should be prioritised to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes.

In the 2024-25 Budget the Commonwealth committed to develop a new National First Nations Education Policy and engage with First Nations stakeholders. This commitment is referenced within the BFSA. Process design commenced in October 2024, driven by First Nations people and collaborative decision-making to ensure First Nations voices are central to the policy development. Work will continue in 2025, and the policy is expected to be finalised by the end of 2026.

Strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Sector – Priority Reform Two

Connected Beginnings is a community-owned and led program that ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in how activities funded are delivered to their people, in their own places and on their Country. Connected Beginnings is a 'place-based' grant round, which prioritises investments that meet the needs and aspirations of community with the aim of building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors. During 2024, all 10 new Connected Beginnings sites were led by Aboriginal community-controlled backbone organisations and 7 sites with ACCHOs as the health partner. Of the total 50 Connected Beginnings sites, 34 are led by ACCOs and 45 have ACCHOs as the health partner. A 2023 mid-term evaluation noted the program has led to the creation of culturally safe spaces in the community it serves, providing families with a sense of confidence to engage with the program further. The expansion of the program is complete and was achieved by working in partnership with SNAICC and NACCHO.



2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

The Commonwealth knows ages zero to 5 are crucial for a child's life-long development. It is vital for First Nations children to commence school developmentally on track — emotionally, physically and socially. Closing the Gap and achieving sustainable self-determined outcomes for First Nations people starts with education. The Commonwealth is committed to supporting First Nations children and young people to achieve their full learning potential and be engaged in education or employment. In 2025, the Commonwealth will:

- Establish new early childhood education and care (ECEC) services, and increase the capacity of existing ECEC services, through the \$1 billion Building Early Education Fund. The Fund will build and expand around 160 ECEC centres in areas of need including in the regions and outer suburbs. The Fund will support priority cohorts, including First Nations children – **Outcomes 3 and 4.**
- Replace the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) Activity Test from January 2026 to guarantee at least 72 hours of subsidised ECEC each week for children who need it. Families caring for a First Nations child will be eligible for 100 hours of subsidised ECEC per fortnight – **Outcomes 3 and 4.**
- Extend the Closing the Gap Partnership on Early Childhood Care and Development for 3 years from 2025-26 – **Outcomes 3 and 4.**
- Provide \$47.1 million over 3 years from 2024-25 to 2026-27 to extend the Indigenous Boarding Provider grants program for remote and very remote First Nations boarding students for 2 additional calendar years in 2025 and 2026. This provides opportunity for 2,500 First Nations students to access secondary school – **Outcome 5.**
- Additional grant round for a further \$6 million to support implementation of Junior Rangers program expansion at 50 locations, providing more place-based opportunities that are community driven and tailored to local needs and priorities – **Outcomes 5 and 7.**
- Extend the Aurora Education Foundation's Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) initiative to provide tutoring and mentoring programs to First Nations high school students in New South Wales and Western Australia – **Outcome 5.**
- Extend the GO Foundation scholarships program to provide access to quality education, mentorship, and pathways to employment for young First Nations people – **Outcome 5.**
- Extend funding to the Clontarf Foundation for the 2026 school year to support education outcomes for young First Nations men – **Outcome 5.**
- Extend funding to the MultiLit program under the Scaling Up Proven Primary Reading Program for 12 months to support First Nations primary school students who are behind their peers to catch-up in reading and early literacy – **Outcome 5.**
- Finalise the First Nations Teacher Strategy that aims to attract and retain more First Nations teachers – **Outcome 5.**
- Implement core funding, as agreed in the 2024-25 Budget, to support the ongoing operations of SNAICC (\$16.6 million over 4 years from 2024-25) and NATSIEC (\$12.5 million over 4 years from 2024-25) as First Nations education peaks – **Outcomes 3, 4 and 5.**

Employment and Economic Development

Socio-economic Outcome 8

Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62%.

Employment is critical to the health and prosperity of First Nations people. It offers social and economic benefits that flow to individuals, families, communities and the economy, and impacts all Closing the Gap socio-economic targets. Filling jobs within communities by employing local residents supports an increased sense of contribution for those employed, and improved social identity, social cohesion and living standards within communities.

There has been positive progress in the proportion of First Nations people in employment. The Commonwealth is committed to continuing this trajectory by supporting the creation of local jobs for First Nations people and offering complementary wrap-around support services.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Increase employment opportunities in remote communities

In 2024, the Commonwealth committed to replacing the Community Development Program (CDP) with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions. The commitment stemmed from the need to address thin labour markets in remote Australia, who are unlikely to naturally resolve into positive outcomes.

Reinforcing the Commonwealth's commitment to work in partnership with First Nations people, a First Nations Reference Group (FNRG) is working with the Commonwealth to provide advice on the design and implementation of the complementary programs to replace the CDP.

During 2024, the Commonwealth progressed replacing the CDP through a 2-stage process, first with implementation of a Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program and the design of a new remote employment service to provide tailored support to remote job seekers.

The New Jobs Program Trial (NJPT) provided an opportunity for community organisations, local governments, and CDP providers to create up to 300 jobs through funding for wages.

In 2024, 300 jobs were approved through the NJPT including roles in hospitality, tourism, youth community services, farming and mechanics. The jobs were available in 17 CDP regions.

The NJPT has been extended to 30 June 2025 to allow existing employers to complete their projects. NJPT employers will be encouraged to transition to jobs in the new RJED program.

During 2024, the Commonwealth developed the RJED program, incorporating advice received from the FNRG, insights from the NJPT and feedback received through community consultation.

In December 2024, the RJED Grant round opened for applications, and will be immediately followed by a second grant round. The RJED Grant Opportunity offers funding for up to 630 jobs for the first and second grant rounds. The RJED program will create 3,000 jobs with fair pay and conditions in remote Australia over the next 3 years.

Provide culturally appropriate, wrap-around employment support

Wrap-around services support First Nations people overcome barriers to work, which could include lack of jobs in the local area, lack of driver's license, and lower levels of formal education and training. The Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISEP) connects First Nations people to jobs, career advancement opportunities and culturally safe pathways to employment. ISEP projects are designed in partnership with First Nations communities to allow providers to deliver activities that address local needs.

The ISEP offers pre-employment and career progression supports specifically for First Nations people. It commenced in 2024 with 37 organisations delivering projects to their communities, of which 27 are First Nations organisations. ISEP projects are designed with First Nations communities to connect First Nations people to jobs, career advancement opportunities, wrap-around support services and culturally safe pathways to employment. This approach allows providers, in partnership with First Nations communities and stakeholders, to deliver ISEP activities that address local needs, barriers to employment support, and responding to regional priorities. Projects included providing support for employer cultural competency training, and employee mentoring and career advancement activities.



Photo: Tamara Moore, Bardi Jawi Womens Ranger Coordinator; Pat Goulding, Bardi Jawi IPA Coordinator; and Bianca Benioni - NIAA Engagement.

Employment and Economic Development continued

In 2024, the Government announced a new remote employment service will be launched in 2025. The new service will support people who are looking for work or need help to become job-ready by providing skill development and resources to take up job opportunities, including those created through the RJED program. It will support over 42,000 people across more than 1,200 remote communities. The design of the new service has progressed, informed by feedback from previous community consultations across 2023 and 2024, existing evidence and insights gained from the NJPT and CDP, including CDP trials.

The Launch into Work Program supports the delivery of pre-employment projects to prepare people specifically for entry-level roles through training, practical activities in the workplace and mentoring. During 2024, the Commonwealth developed and implemented 5 Launch into Work projects specifically tailored to First Nations people. The projects were co-designed with First Nations organisations that deliver life and work readiness training and mentoring services, and employ Indigenous Employment Officers within the employing organisations.

The co-design process ensured workplaces employing First Nations people provide culturally safe and welcoming work settings and engage First Nations suppliers to deliver culturally appropriate training and mentoring. In 2024, 79 First Nations people participated in the program, and 86% of these participants have moved into employment.

Parent Pathways is a new, voluntary pre-employment service for eligible parents and carers of young children under 6 years that commenced on 1 November 2024. Parent Pathways supports parents receiving Parenting Payments, Carer Payment, Special Benefit, as well as parents and carers facing disadvantage who do not receive a payment, to achieve their education, employment and career goals, while keeping their family front and centre. The new service is culturally sensitive and trauma-informed, providing personalised assistance and flexible support to help with personal, study or work goals. To further tailor support, understanding of and access to Parent Pathways, information about the service is also available in 10 First Nations languages.

The Commonwealth is providing \$50.4 million over 5 years from 2023-24 to establish a new evidence-informed First Nations prison to employment program called Reconnection, Employment and Learning (REAL). The program will provide mentoring and help people to reconnect with health, housing and other social services, and to improve employment outcomes, reducing the risk of re-offending. Consultations for this program began in 2024 and initial locations are currently being determined.



Spotlight on the New Remote Jobs Trial

The Waringarri Media Aboriginal Corporation plays a vital role in keeping the local community in the Kimberley informed. An Indigenous-owned, not-for-profit organisation, it covers regional news through Waringarri Radio, online audio, video streaming, and a strong social media presence.

Through new funding provided by the NJPT, Jaru woman, Nathalia Rose Imberlong, is working as a broadcaster and administration clerk, learning everything there is to know about broadcast media.

"I feel very proud of myself for working here ... it gives me purpose to get up every morning, knowing I am doing something that I enjoy and am passionate about. I'm making my kids proud by coming to work and encouraging them to strive for their dreams."

Read more about this story here www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Nathalia Rose Imberlong at Waringarri Radio.

Employment and Economic Development continued

Advancing economic independence of First Nations people

Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) plays a critical role in advancing the economic independence of First Nations people through expert business advice, tailored finance solutions and investment initiatives that empower individuals and businesses.

In 2024, the Commonwealth introduced legislation to expand the role and remit of IBA as part of the *Future Made in Australia (Production Tax Credit and Other Measures) Bill 2024* (the Bill). The Bill amends legislation to allow IBA to borrow and raise capital, boosting its ability to invest in First Nations businesses and communities. This will support more First Nations people to start, grow and sustain business, purchase homes and invest in commercial ventures and will provide the flexibility and certainty required to commercially structure investment that support and promote First Nations economic self-determination. It will also provide entities with capital the ability to benefit from IBA's established relationships with First Nations communities and businesses, to lead investment in projects that will support better life outcomes for First Nations people.

The Government is driving economic growth for First Nations people through international trade and investment and through a broader approach to embed perspectives into Australia's foreign and trade policies. Early outcomes have been achieved, including concluding the historical Intellectual Property (IP), Genetic Resources and associated Traditional Knowledge Treaty in May 2024, which established an international framework to protect genetic resources and traditional knowledge. This landmark treaty affords legal recognition for First Nations peoples' traditional knowledge in the international intellectual property system and enables First Nations people and communities to benefit from their cultural heritage and promote their unique and diverse export in international markets.

The new First Nations Visitor Economy Partnership (FNVEP), announced by the Government on 30 October 2024, will support greater participation and economic opportunities for First Nations people and businesses in Australia's tourism industry. The FNVEP will provide leadership and guidance on respectfully embedding Australia's rich cultural heritage in Australia's tourism offerings. By growing the First Nations tourism industry, it will be able to meet the increasing demand from international and domestic visitors for First Nations experiences. This presents great opportunities for businesses and job creation in Australia's regions and First Nations communities.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Work in partnership so employment programs meet the needs and wishes of First Nations people and communities – Priority Reform One.

Established in June 2023, the Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group (ALG) provides ongoing advice to the Commonwealth on implementation of the \$250 million Central Australia Plan, A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia. In 2024, the Commonwealth announced \$30 million in funding over 5 years to deliver a Remote Training Hubs Network in response to the ALG's advice. Community consultations also took place with the Northern Territory Government and the Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller.

The ALG has been extended to June 2025 and will continue to provide advice on the design and implementation of the Remote Training Hub Network and monitor other investments, including community infrastructure, digital connectivity and on-Country learning.

A FNRG was established in March 2024 to provide advice to the Commonwealth on the design and implementation of the RJED program. The FNRG is comprised of economic development experts from across remote Australia and representatives from a range of First Nations organisations, including peak organisations, and the Australian National University.

Feedback from the FNRG has informed and influenced key design elements of RJED, including the Grant Opportunity Guidelines, and enabled consideration of cultural awareness and the unique conditions of remote Australia such as distance and labour markets.



2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

Employment lies at the heart of socio-economic opportunity. It provides economic benefits to individuals and families, including financial security, increased social mobility and access to higher standards of living. The Commonwealth is committed to continuing to close the gap in employment for First Nations people by creating employment opportunities, supporting economic development and continuing to offer wrap-around support services. In 2025, the Commonwealth will:

- Establish a First Nations Economic Partnership and Framework over 5 years from 2024-25 – **Outcome 8.**
- Finalise the first RJED grant round and open the second grant round, with an allocation of at least 630 jobs across these 2 rounds – **Outcome 8.**
- Measure ISEP performance through Project Monitoring Plans (PMP). PMP information will be made available for project monitoring, performance and evaluation purposes and to refine ISEP projects – **Outcome 8.**
- Implement Phase 1 of the REAL Program in up to 15 locations – **Outcome 8.**
- Extend and strengthen the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) from 2024-25 for 5 years and implement reforms. The reforms will increase the integrity of the IPP by strengthening the eligibility criteria, strengthen verification and assurance measures, and will drive demand for First Nations businesses by increasing procurement targets – **Outcome 8.**
- Provide \$3.4 million over 3 years from 2025-26 to increase the participation rate of First Nations women in business through a place-based business mentoring and coaching program, co-designed and delivered by First Nations businesses and organisations in partnership with Indigenous Business Australia – **Outcome 8.**

Housing and Infrastructure

Socio-economic Outcome 9

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.

Target 9A: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88%.

Target 9B: By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:

- within discrete Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard
- in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a “town camp” or “town based reserve”).

Socio-economic Outcome 17

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

Target: By 2026, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equal levels of digital inclusion.



First Nations people have significantly less access to affordable, secure and quality housing. Overcrowded housing leads to poorer outcomes in terms of health and wellbeing, education and safety.

In 2021, almost 20% of First Nations people were living in overcrowded housing, with the proportion significantly higher in remote (32%) and very remote (55%) Australia.

The Commonwealth is focused on providing solutions for overcrowded First Nations housing (including homelessness) and infrastructure, digital inclusion and access to essential services to improve the health and wellbeing of First Nations people.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Providing access to appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing – Outcome 9a

In 2024, the Commonwealth announced a landmark \$4 billion investment in remote housing to deliver 2,700 new homes (housing more than 10,000 First Nations people) in remote communities across the Northern Territory. The initiative aims to significantly reduce overcrowding by approximately half in the next 10-years. Through this historic investment, the Commonwealth has provided safer and more secure homes in remote communities, making a difference to the lives of First Nations people in the Northern Territory.

In the next 10 years, the Commonwealth will deliver more homes for remote areas as well as employment and training opportunities for those who live in the communities and homelands.

In June 2023, the Commonwealth provided a \$2 billion Social Housing Accelerator Payment to states and territories to increase the stock of social housing across the country. States are planning to deliver at least 320 dwellings to assist First Nations people and families, as detailed in their implementation plans. As of 30 June 2024, 37 social dwellings in New South Wales and Victoria were delivered and a further 58 underway across New South Wales, Tasmania and Queensland.

The first funding round under the \$10 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) to support the delivery of 20,000 social and 10,000 affordable rental dwellings in its first 5 years was successful, with Housing Australia recommending contract negotiations for 185 projects which included 4,220 social and 9,522 affordable homes across the HAFF and National Housing Accord programs. Disbursements from the HAFF will also provide \$330 million over 5 years to support a range of acute housing needs including \$200 million for the repair, maintenance and improvements of housing in remote First Nations communities.

Spotlight on the Northern Territory Housing and Homelands partnership

In June 2024, the Commonwealth entered a Partnership Agreement with the Northern Territory Government, Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory and 4 Aboriginal Land Councils (Northern Land Council, Tiwi Land Council, Central Land Council and Anindilyakwa Land Council) to share decision-making on long-term Northern Territory housing funding arrangements.

The delivery of much-needed housing for First Nations families, across remote Northern Territory communities has accelerated significantly throughout 2024, supported by the joint Australian and Northern Territory Governments \$4 billion investment in remote housing from 2024-2034. These houses are designed to meet liveability standards, and supported by a cyclical repair and maintenance program.

In 2024-25, 270 new houses are planned for delivery in remote Northern Territory communities to reduce overcrowding and create better life outcomes for First Nations families.

Housing and Infrastructure continued

The Commonwealth is providing \$9.3 billion over 5 years from 1 July 2024, through the new National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness (NASHH) to state and territory governments to help people experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness. The NASHH also embeds the Government's commitment to Closing the Gap by requiring Partnership Bodies to be established in each jurisdiction comprising First Nations community and state and territory government representation, ensuring First Nations people are at the table when decisions are made.

Providing essential services to the same standard as other Australian towns – Target 9b

The lack of access to essential services in remote First Nations communities often leads to poor health outcomes. The Commonwealth understands achievement of many socio-economic targets relies heavily on the provision of essential services.

Water Security

More than 400 remote and regional communities lack access to good-quality drinking water across Australia. National drinking water health guidelines for bacteria and chemicals are exceeded in many First Nations communities. In addition, the seasonal pressures on remote First Nations communities' drinking water sources in hot and dry conditions has significant flow-on effects for economic and health outcomes.

The Commonwealth is committed to ensuring remote First Nations communities have access to reliable and safe water. As part of the \$150 million Australian Government National Water Grid funding reserved for regional and remote water infrastructure projects, the first of 23 announced projects to boost water supplies was completed at the Iga Warta Homeland on Adnyamathanha Country in the Flinders Ranges. This project has provided the community with a new groundwater supply, replacing the previous sole bore water source contaminated by regular bacterial outbreaks.

Infrastructure

The Commonwealth is upgrading essential infrastructure on Northern Territory Homelands, with \$220 million through the Restoring Funding for Northern Territory Homelands Agreement. In 2024, 8 of 37 identified upgrade projects were complete. This includes upgrades of existing hybrid solar power, internal road upgrades including curbing and guttering, the drilling and equipping of new bores, installation of new communal ablution blocks and the installation of new water storage tanks.

The First Nations Clean Energy Strategy

In 2024, the Commonwealth released the *First Nations Clean Energy Strategy 2024-2030* which sets out the principles and actions required across all levels of government, industry and communities, to ensure First Nations peoples can lead and benefit from the clean energy transition. The Commonwealth will provide \$70 million over three years from 2025-26 for the First Nations Clean Energy Futures Implementation and Grants Programs to: support access to professional advice to establish benefit sharing arrangements; increase First Nations-led clean energy projects; and support access to clean energy information and resources.



Digital Inclusion

With the world increasingly reliant on digital access and connectivity, First Nations people in regional and remote communities are particularly at risk of missing out on a range of services and opportunities that require digital access. This was reiterated by the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, which in December 2024 released the First Nations Digital Inclusion Roadmap: Beyond 2026 that reflects the outcomes of the Advisory Group's extensive stakeholder and community engagement over the year. In 2024, 301 of 322 (21 remaining) remote First Nations communities in South Australia, Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory had telecommunications equipment upgraded to the NBN Sky Muster Plus Premium platform under the Commonwealth funded Remote Indigenous Communities Telecommunications (RICT) program.

Through the Commonwealth Digital Connectivity Project, community Wi-Fi infrastructure has been installed in 22 remote First Nations communities in the Northern Territory, ensuring people in these communities have reliable phone and internet access so they can stay connected and access important online services. Part of this funding contributes to the Government's Central Australia Plan for mobile and internet services and digital literacy support. These communities were also provided adequate training to upskill community members who may not have had access to these technologies before, ensuring they can access information and services safely and effectively.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Housing Policy Partnership – Priority Reform One

The Housing Policy Partnership (HPP) continues to drive First Nations led outcomes for housing and improvements of housing in remote First Nations communities. HPP has made progress toward building relationships between members, establishing a framework for jurisdictional working groups and identifying future priorities.

Sector Strengthening Plan – Priority Reform Two

The Commonwealth conducted a mapping exercise with state and territory governments through the HPP to stocktake work in progress to action Housing Sector Strengthening Plan (HSSP) priorities and identify any gaps for action at a national level. To support this, the HPP agreed to a formal research partnership with the University of Adelaide for an Australian Research Council Linkage Project to develop a shared First Nations housing data resource to monitor First Nations housing and give a voice to First Nations householders.

Housing and Infrastructure continued

2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

The Commonwealth is committed to tackling overcrowding and fixing poor housing and living standards for First Nations people to improve health, educational, economic and social outcomes.

To close the gap on Outcome 9a, we must address the areas of greatest need in the Northern Territory, where the problem of overcrowding is most acute. In 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Provide another 270 new houses for First Nations families across 40 remote Northern Territory communities and 3 additional Alice Springs town camps, providing appropriate size housing for First Nations people – **Target 9a.**
- Provide Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Northern Territory governments with funding from the \$200 million acute housing measure for remote First Nations communities through a Federation Funding Agreement Schedule to support repairs, maintenance and improvements of housing in remote First Nations communities – **Target 9a.**
- Deliver a national pilot capacity building program in the community housing sector, to enable participating organisations to better access and manage funding from government housing finance programs – **Target 9a.**
- Monitor the progress of all jurisdictions building social dwellings using Social Housing Accelerator Payment funds to reduce social housing wait list times – **Target 9a.**
- Provide up to \$70 million to increase the number of IBA Indigenous Home Ownership Program concessional loans and remove the related construction conditions to increase home ownership and reduce overcrowding for First Nations people and communities – **Outcome 9a.**

We cannot Close the Gap without improving water quality and reliability for First Nations communities. The Commonwealth is committed to reducing the risk of contamination to water supplies and associated health-related challenges. In 2025, to improve water security for First Nations communities in the Northern Territory the Commonwealth will:

- Provide \$27.8 million National Water Grid funding for the Northern Territory Better Bores for Communities Phase 1 project, to support 10 remote communities through bore drilling and installation of essential equipment – **Target 9b.**
- Deliver 23 First Nations water infrastructure projects in partnership with state and territory governments to address longstanding water security issues – **Target 9b.**

The Commonwealth is increasing efforts to enhance opportunities for First Nations people and communities to access the benefits of participation in the digital world. As a fundamental part of supporting the economic, social, and environmental wellbeing of First Nations people, in 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Install Community Wi-Fi equipment in a further 9 remote Northern Territory communities through the Digital Connectivity Project – **Outcome 17.**
- Establish a First Nations Digital Support Hub and a Network of Digital Mentors to support the digital ability and connectivity literacy of First Nations people across Australia – **Outcome 17.**
- Provide 23 remote First Nations communities with free community-wide Wi-Fi in partnership with NBN Co. – **Outcome 17.**

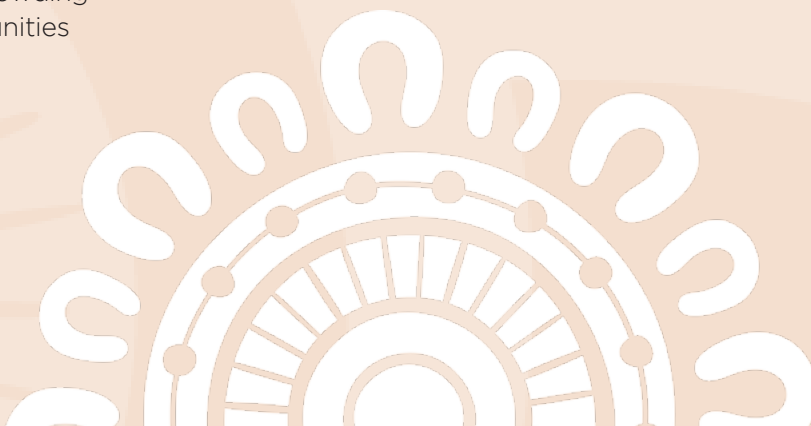


Figure 1: The 23 remote First Nations communities receiving free community Wi-Fi



- 1 Loanbun, WA
- 2 Kurangjo/Kurnangki, WA
- 3 Mindi Rardi, WA
- 4 Bungtardi/Bungardi, WA
- 5 DarlIngunaya, WA
- 6 Burawa, WA
- 7 Junjuwa, WA
- 8 Amata, SA
- 9 Pipalyatjara, SA
- 10 Mimili, SA
- 11 Kaltjiti, SA
- 12 Pukatja, SA

- 13 Pormpuraaw, Qld
- 14 Kowanyama, Qld
- 15 Doomadgee, Qld
- 16 Hope Vale, Qld
- 17 Ampilatwatja, NT
- 18 Areyonga, NT
- 19 Arawerr, NT
- 20 Galiwinku, NT
- 21 Mungkarta, NT
- 22 Wandawuy, NT
- 23 Gan Gan, NT

Justice for All

Socio-economic Outcome 10

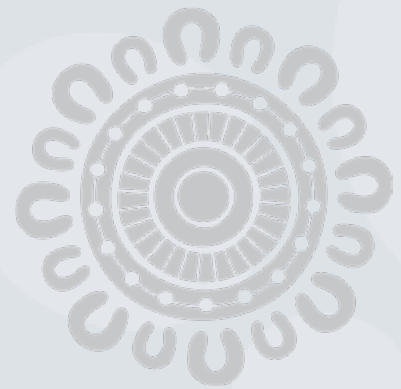
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15%.

Socio-economic Outcome 11

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (10-17 years) in detention by at least 30%.



First Nations people continued to be over-represented in the justice system, making up 36% of Australia's prison population, despite comprising less than 4% of the total population.

Closing the Gap on First Nations incarceration rates depends on reform within state and territory justice systems across Australia as well as progress in Closing the Gap on the socio-economic drivers of contact with the justice system, including in housing, employment, health and education. The Commonwealth acknowledges the role that systemic racism has played in driving the overrepresentation of First Nations people in the justice system and supports community-led approaches and joined-up partnership across the justice sector to improve justice outcomes for First Nations people.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Community-led Justice Reinvestment initiatives – Outcome 10 and 11

Justice reinvestment is a long-term, community-led approach that aims to prevent crime, address the drivers of contact with the justice system, and improve justice outcomes for First Nations people in a particular place or community. Justice reinvestment often begins with communities coming together to identify the best way to prevent and reduce contact with the criminal justice system, and using the strengths of community, cultural knowledge, lived experience and data to design initiatives and measure progress over time. It is important to note that changes in justice outcomes as a result of such initiatives take time to realise and the benefits may not be apparent immediately or be easily quantifiable in the short term.

The Commonwealth committed to a National Justice Reinvestment program in the 2022-23 Budget to establish up to 30 place-based community-led justice reinvestment initiatives over 4 years. This is part of the largest commitment to justice reinvestment ever delivered by the Commonwealth and recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold the solution to the issues that affect them.

In the 2023-24 Budget, the Government committed an additional \$10 million over 4 years to support place-based justice reinvestment partnerships located in the Central Australia region of the Northern Territory, under the \$250 million Central Australia Plan. The Justice Reinvestment in Central Australia Program allows communities to access funding for justice reinvestment initiatives aimed at crime prevention, or providing community led treatments for drug and alcohol addiction, or diversionary supports for illegal drug use.

Since the opening of both Programs in September 2023, there are now 27 community-led justice reinvestment initiatives. Of the 26 that opened in 2024, 9 are in Queensland, 6 are in Western Australia, 6 are in the Northern Territory, 2 are in New South Wales, 2 are in South Australia and one is in Victoria. This program empowers First Nations people to draw from their lived experience to design culturally appropriate initiatives to address the structural causes of crime in a way that works for their local community.

To support Justice Reinvestment activities, an interim National Justice Reinvestment Unit will be established within the Attorney-General's Department in early 2025. The interim Unit will develop a framework to guide measurement and evaluation of initiatives funded under both Justice Reinvestment Programs. It is anticipated that the interim Unit will transition out of government into a community-controlled or Indigenous-led organisation after the interim period. The Interim Unit will lead the process to design this final National Justice Reinvestment Unit. A key component of the design processes will be partnering with communities that are delivering justice reinvestment activities to ensure the voices of those with lived experience are reflected.

Community safety patrols in Central Australia region – Outcomes 10 and 11

Community Safety Programs help reduce contact with the criminal justice system by diverting First Nations people away from contact with police and providing transport to safe places. In Central Australia, they are a highly visible example of community-led, place-based services.

In 2024, the Commonwealth invested \$4.2 million for additional safety patrols in Alice Springs and remote communities including for more recently established Traditional Owner patrols with the Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation. The patrols employ First Nations people, ensuring culturally appropriate assistance and safe transportation for residents in remote locations. Patrollers also assist people through referrals to youth services, and alcohol and drug support.

This funding for community-led safety patrols will boost capacity during busy periods such as the 2024-25 school holidays, and forms part of the Government's commitments to strengthen community safety under the Central Australia Plan.

Spotlight on a Community-Led Approach to Justice Diversion and Empowerment

The Nyoongar Outreach Services (NOS) is a community-led initiative dedicated to reducing the risk of offending among First Nations youth aged 13 to 18 and increasing their engagement with education and employment.

An example of how the service worked in 2024 relates to a young person who had extensive involvement with law enforcement for petty crime, was not attending school and was in a home environment that lacked structure, guidance and supervision during the day.

Once this person was referred to NOS, a dedicated First Nations NOS Youth Engagement Officer worked with the young person, their family, relevant government agencies and local not for profits to ensure all support needs were addressed.

Since being part of NOS, the young person has joined the local football team, and a boxing club dedicated to developing skills in self-discipline and endurance. Their school attendance increased from 15% to around 90%, with the principal commenting, *“staff can see the boys are a lot happier within the school environment”*. Criminal activity reduced to nil reported incidents.

The guardian of the young person has a strong desire to break the cycle and become a positive role model. With the young person’s behaviours managed, she has been able to commence a work ready training course and plans to enter the workforce as soon as she gains the skills and confidence.

Read more at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Nyoongar Outreach.



National Access to Justice Partnership – Outcomes 10 and 11

In 2024, the Standing Council of Attorneys-General (SCAG) agreed to the terms of a new \$3.9 billion National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-30 (NAJP). The new NAJP is the largest investment from the Commonwealth in legal assistance ever, delivering a critical increase of funding over 5 years from 1 July 2025 to support frontline legal assistance services, including:

- \$837.8 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services, which is an increase of 64% from the previous agreement
- \$366.8 million for Family Violence Prevention and Legal Services.

These services increase access to justice and help to prevent the escalation of legal problems in a culturally safe way.

They are also a critical part of delivering on the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody as they help to ensure just outcomes for First Nations people at risk of being incarcerated, particularly through the Custody Notification service, which will transition to the NAJP.

The NAJP will commence on 1 July 2025 following the expiry of the current National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP) 2020-25. The Commonwealth's commitment of funding for NAJP, well before the expiry of the NLAP, will give the sector the certainty it needs to continue vital services. To complement the delivery of services under the NAJP, the Commonwealth also provides funding to legal assistance peak bodies, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and First Nations Advocates Against Family Violence.



CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Justice Policy Partnership and Justice Sector Strengthening Plan – Priority Reforms One and Two

The Justice Policy Partnership (JPP), established in 2021, provides a mechanism for all levels of government and First Nations organisations to come together. Its purpose is to reduce the over-representation of First Nations people in Australia's criminal justice systems as both victims and offenders. Its members meet quarterly and include Commonwealth and state and territory governments, representatives from the Coalition of Peaks, as well as First Nations justice experts. This partnership approach is important to ensure accountability of all justice agencies to meet the justice targets in a way that aligns with the Priority Reforms and delivers integrated solutions that address the diverse needs of First Nations people.

The JPP is also leading on Cross-Sector Partnerships, with an initial focus on:

- **Disability-Justice:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with disability are disproportionately represented in the justice system due to underdiagnosis, limited data, and insufficient awareness among justice professionals. To address these gaps a Justice-Disability Working Group is being established to undertake deep dives into priority sectors across the justice-disability landscape to inform the JPP.
- **Youth Justice:** With escalating imprisonment rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth, the JPP agreed to scope youth justice policy reform which centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision-making.

The Justice SSP was approved by Joint Council in 2023 for development as part of the Justice Policy Partnership Strategic Framework. In 2024, 2 JPP co-leads representing government and community commenced information gathering to inform the development of the Justice SSP.

2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

The Commonwealth recognises the benefits that community-led approaches have in reducing contact with the criminal justice system for First Nations people. A focus in 2025 will be to support programs that are led by and designed with First Nations people, through:

- Delivering the remaining \$6.78 million funding support for 4 additional justice reinvestment initiatives in First Nations communities, within Central Australia.
- Developing a Measurement and Evaluation Framework to measure success of initiatives funded under the Justice Reinvestment Programs.

The Commonwealth is committed to improving access to culturally appropriate legal services, by funding services that connect First Nations people with frontline organisations that can appropriately support them. It will achieve this in 2025 by:

- Investing \$3.9 billion over 5 years to support frontline legal assistance services, delivered through the NAJP. This includes a national total of approximately \$738 million in 2025-26 for all parts of the legal assistance sector, \$231 million of which is dedicated for First Nations specific legal assistance services.
- Developing, alongside all state and territory governments, a Closing the Gap Schedule to the NAJP in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled justice organisations to embed Priority Reforms in the NAJP.

The Commonwealth will also prioritise joined-up partnership across the justice sector to ensure accountability of all justice agencies to meet their targets in a way that aligns with the Priority Reforms and meets community needs. To support this in 2025, the Commonwealth will:

- Facilitate progression of key work streams under the 2024-25 Justice Policy Partnership's Implementation Roadmap, including on strengthening justice partnerships, building new cross-sector partnerships, developing a national Justice Sector Strengthening Plan and designing anti-racism strategies across the justice sectors.
- Develop the next stage of a SSP for the justice sector to be reviewed by Joint Council, informed by the delivery plan produced in 2024.
- Establish and co-chair with National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) a working group to respond to recommendations contained in the Justice Policy Partnership's Bail and Remand Reform Report.

Families and Kin

Socio-economic Outcome 12

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system.

Target: By 2031, reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0-17 years old) in out-of-home care by 45%.

Socio-economic Outcome 13

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.

Target: By 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero.

First Nations people experience violence and abuse and contact with the child protection system at disproportionately high rates with devastating impacts on their health and wellbeing, and families and community. Addressing the social and economic drivers, including racism, that lead to First Nations families encountering violence, abuse and the child protection system requires urgent action requires urgent action and leadership at all levels of government.

Family safety solutions in First Nations communities are multi-faceted and require long-term focus and commitment. First Nations children and families consistently raise the need for culturally-safe prevention and early support services, responsive secondary service systems, including counselling, parenting programs and specialist services for vulnerable families, to reduce the rate of family violence, abuse, and children being placed in out-of-home care.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Reducing representation of First Nations children in the protection system – Outcome 12

In February 2024, the Government announced the establishment of a legislated, independent and empowered National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commissioner). The dedicated National Commissioner will independently investigate issues and make informed recommendations to promote First Nations children's rights and wellbeing.

The National Commissioner will engage with stakeholders across government, including the National Children's Commissioner and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families are heard and reflected in advice to Government. The Commissioner will stand up for the rights and interests of First Nations children and young people.

Families and Kin continued

Availability and quality of legal support for First Nations children – Outcomes 12 and 13

The *Barriers Experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families Accessing Legal Supports Scoping Study* undertaken by SNAICC in partnership with the NATSILS highlights the inequitable access to justice for First Nations people in Australia. The availability and quality of legal support for First Nations children, young people and families engaged with child protection systems are simply not met, resulting in much poorer legal outcomes.

Most significantly, gaps in legal representation and support contribute to the ongoing removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, severing their connection to community, language, culture, Country, and kin. This not only devastates families but perpetuates cycles of intergenerational trauma, inflicting deep and lasting harm across generations.

Family Violence Prevention Legal Services – Outcome 13

Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) provide critical support to First Nations women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). The Commonwealth provided an additional \$8.6 million to stabilise the FVPLS sector workforce, a first step towards pay parity, with 16 organisations nationwide providing culturally responsive legal services, and holistic wrap-around non-legal support for First Nations women and children experiencing FDSV.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support – Outcomes 12 and 13

In September 2024, SNAICC delivered its final Design Report on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support (the Centre). This will be an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led body to support evidence-based and outcomes-focused approaches to delivering support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

A tender process for the selection of a provider to establish the Centre is underway, with a preferred provider to be selected early in 2025.

The Centre will contribute to the implementation of Action 3 (Data Sovereignty) in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026* under *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*.

Keeping First Nations Women and Children Safe – Outcome 13

First Nations women and children are 33 times more likely to be hospitalised due to violence than non-Indigenous women and 7 times more likely to die because of family violence.

The Government is fully committed to building on the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032* (National Plan) and its existing work and consider how to further prevent violence — to stop it from occurring in the first instance, to prevent it from escalating, and to stop women and children from being killed.

In June 2024, the Commonwealth released the Intimate Partner Homicide Dashboard, reporting quarterly on verified incidents of partner homicide perpetrated against a female, including First Nations women. At the time of this report 7 First Nations women were victims of intimate partner homicide in 2024.

In cases where a perpetrator was specified, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare found over 7 in 10 (72%, or 3,400) assault hospitalisations involving First Nations people were due to family violence in 2022–23. Specifically, 45% were due to assault by a spouse or domestic partner, 2.7% by a parent and 24% by another family member.

Spotlight on the establishment of a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

In February 2024, the Government announced the establishment of a legislated, independent and empowered National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people (National Commissioner). Establishing the National Commissioner is a significant step towards empowering First Nations children and young people.

In September 2024, the Commonwealth and the Office for Youth co-hosted a pivotal First Nations Youth Roundtable on Ngunnawal Country in Canberra. This event marked a significant opportunity and milestone for first formal engagement and dialogue among young First Nations leaders, community members, and policymakers for the establishment of the National Commissioner.

These discussions with First Nations young people from the Youth Advisory Group program and the Youth Steering Committee featured insights from members of the Leadership Group, including Catherine Liddle (CEO SNAICC), Natalie Brown (Chair of the Our Booris, Our Way Implementation Oversight Committee), and Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts (Inaugural Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People in the ACT). This event marked a significant opportunity and milestone for first formal engagement and dialogue among young leaders, community members, and policymakers for the establishment of the National Commission.

Lil Gordon was appointed as the Acting National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, operations commenced 13 January 2025.

Further information on National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: The office of the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People commences operations in 2025.



Families and Kin continued

Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2025-2035

The Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2025-2035 (Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices) which will sit alongside the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 will be the first of its kind. From September 2024, the Steering Committee supported by SNAICC conducted over 70 engagement sessions with a range of stakeholder groups across Australia and considered more than 50 public submissions.

This consultation ensures that *Our Ways - Strong Ways - Our Voices* will be shaped by the perspectives and voices of survivors who have experienced violence. It is being developed in partnership with the Steering Committee supported by SNAICC, prioritising the voices and knowledge of First Nations people to develop their own solutions to address issues impacting their communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032

To fast track the implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 in 2024, the Commonwealth provided:

- \$91 million for 4 immediate priority grants to reduce FDSV against First Nations women and children through community-led and culturally safe prevention and support services has been awarded to 61 ACCOs or Indigenous-led organisations to provide strength-based, trauma-informed, holistic, family focussed, community-led programs and services to First Nations peoples and/or their communities.
- \$10.8 million to 9 organisations for community-led prevention services, programs, and campaigns for First Nations children in 4 jurisdictions (Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia and Northern Territory) to deliver activities including on-Country learning to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Activities under the grant round aim to prevent violence against women and children by challenging gender stereotypes and promoting healthy relationships from an early age.
- \$13.9 million to 25 organisations for FDSV programs in ACCOs in 7 jurisdictions (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Northern Territory and Tasmania) to centre First Nations cultural knowledge, frameworks and responses in the design and delivery of FDSV programs and services, to better meet the needs of First Nations people.
- \$37.4 million to 13 organisations for community-led men's wellness centres, and \$11.3 million to 14 organisations under increasing capacity pressures for crisis accommodation services for First Nations people in 6 jurisdictions (New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, and Northern Territory). This will provide spaces for male domestic violence programs and activities to support culturally appropriate engagement of men, including pro-social early support; cultural healing and education on respectful relationships; healthy parenting; mentoring; and understanding diverse experiences of abuse such as technology-facilitated abuse and coercive control.

Senate Inquiry into Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children

On 15 August 2024, the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee (Committee) delivered its final report on Missing and Murdered First Nations Women and Children. This report reveals the devastating impact of violence against women and children in First Nations communities. A full list of the 10 recommendations made by the Committee is available at www.aph.gov.au.

The Commonwealth response to the inquiry was tabled in Parliament on 25 November 2024, noting its \$4 billion investment to eliminate violence against women and children in Australia, including First Nations women and children.

Media organisations have an important role to play in addressing some of the issues raised in the Inquiry. The Minister for Indigenous Australians wrote to the Australian Press Council seeking careful consideration of the needs of First Nations families and communities in media coverage of these cases. In addition, the primary responsibility of the states and territories for law enforcement, including policing and justice system responses to FDSV were also highlighted in the Report for action.

The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030

The Commonwealth National Office for Child Safety has continued to progress and monitor implementation of the 62 measures under the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030 (National Strategy) through both the First Commonwealth Action Plan 2021–2025 (led by the Commonwealth) and the First National Action Plan 2021–2025 (jointly led by Commonwealth, state and territory governments). First Nations people are a priority cohort under the National Strategy.

The ‘One Talk at a Time’ educational campaign is being successfully delivered in partnership with agencies across the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, and advocates and experts from the non-government sector, including First Nations people. The campaign aims teach all adults and children about child sexual abuse, including how to have ongoing, proactive, preventative conversations with children, young people and other adults. The National Office for Child Safety has engaged a supplier to undertake a culturally safe and trauma informed process to co-create resources with First Nations communities to support them to engage with the campaign.

Women and Children’s Safety Services in Central Australia

The Commonwealth invested \$4.1 million in Women’s Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA) to fund 6 additional roles for the Central Australia region, including case manager positions in Yuendumu, Papunya, Ntaria and Ti Tree. This has cleared the waitlist in these remote communities and reduced the need for people to travel to Alice Springs to seek help. WoSSCA also engaged a new Children’s Advocate to support children, currently almost 30% of WoSSCA’s clients, to help identify children’s needs and connect them to specialist services to support their wellbeing. In 2024, WoSSCA helped women and children in Alice Springs and surrounding areas, delivering crucial assistance ranging from temporary accommodation to proactive case management, to connections with organisations, services and programs that aim to prevent and respond to gender-based violence.

Families and Kin continued

First Nations people living with disability – Cross-cutting

The Commonwealth has an ambitious agenda for an inclusive Australian society where policy and services are responsive to First Nations people with disability to improve their life outcomes, as underpinned by *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*. In 2024, the Commonwealth:

- Responded to the *Final Report of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (Disability Royal Commission). The Commonwealth 'accepted' or 'accepted in principle' the recommendations of Volume 9: First Nations People with Disability within its responsibility. Consultation commenced to develop options for a First Nations Disability Forum or other shared decision-making mechanism.
- Worked with First Nations stakeholders to deliver an inaugural National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) First Nations Strategy 2025-2030 that will guide policies and services to improve outcomes for First Nations people with disability.
- Advanced the establishment of an Independent Advisory Council First Nations Reference Group (IAC FNRG) to strengthen the voices of First Nations people with disability in NDIS policy and decision-making. The IAC FNRG is scheduled to convene from February 2025.

Driving gender equality for First Nations people

The experiences and voices of First Nations women and girls have been excluded from historical efforts to advance gender equality, with mainstream movements generally overlooking the strong and sustained advocacy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women for their rights. The Commonwealth understands gender inequality intersects with the impacts of racism and ongoing injustice for First Nations women. The prejudice and systemic disadvantage First Nations women face is rooted in a specific combination of gendered and racist assumptions. The Commonwealth is working with First Nations women to achieve change. In 2024, the Commonwealth:

- Provided \$3 million dollars over 4 years to support the Wiyi Yani U Thangani Institute for First Nations Gender Justice at the Australian National University. The institute is a dedicated space for First Nations research and it will harness the aspirations and strengths of First Nations women and girls and ensure they form the foundations of initiatives that respond to their needs and ambitions. The institute will champion the voices of First Nations women to bring about the changes they want to see.
- Released *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality*, centring First Nations women and girls as a priority to address their unique experiences in relation to racism and gender inequality, with a focus on eliminating gender-based violence.

Spotlight on The First Peoples Disability Network

The First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) is creating a more inclusive disability sector

Since 2022, the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN) have been funded by the Commonwealth to develop and implement their National Disability Footprint (the 'Footprint'). This is a key action under the Disability Sector Strengthening Plan across areas including education, housing and justice. FPDN have been a leading voice to ensure reforms are informed by the intersectional needs for First Nations people living with disability.

FPDN are actively engaged in policy discussions to advocate for reform, provide guidance and support and ensure that the voices of First Nations people living with disability are given priority. They have recently provided submissions to the NDIS Getting Back on Track Bill, the *Review of Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031*, and the *Truth and Justice Commission Bill* August 2024. In addition, FPDN have appeared at Senate Committee Hearings on National Disability Insurance Scheme reforms, showcasing the needs of First Nations people living with disability. Outcomes include new draft rules supporting First Nations NDIS Participants in cultural activities.

For more information on 'the Footprint' see www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Dr Scott Avery, UTS and FPDN members; Mr Damian Griffis, Aunty Kay Sadler and Ms Tahlia-Rose Vanissum.



Families and Kin continued

Reducing sexuality and identity discrimination and marginalisation for First Nations people

The First Nations Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Sistergirl and Brotherboy (LGBTQIA+SB) community continues to experience significant and intersecting points of discrimination and marginalisation in Australia.

While specific data and research on the First Nations LGBTQIA+SB community, including health related behaviours, is still emerging, the Commonwealth is supporting this diverse and vibrant intersecting Indigenous minority in a range of ways, including:

- Releasing the *10 Year National Action Plan for the Health and Wellbeing of LGBTQIA+ People 2024-2035* to ensure First Nations LGBTQIA+SB people achieve equitable health and wellbeing outcomes with access to safe, respectful, high-quality and inclusive health and wellbeing services over the next 10 years.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Strengthening Plan – Priority Reform One

The Commonwealth is scoping a Community-Controlled Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence SSP through a working group co-chaired by the FNAAFV. The SSP will be embedded in a national joined-up approach with Coalition of Peaks members and First Nations community representatives to committing to priority actions that will build the capacity of ACCOs providing FDSV services on the frontline.

Safe and Supported Partnership Agreement – Priority Reform One

Safe and Supported is the first national policy framework to be negotiated using the terms of the National Agreement. For the first time First Nations people are sitting at the table with the same share in decision-making as governments. The Leadership Group, convened by SNAICC, is a group of child and family sector experts and ACCO sector leaders. This partnership agreement showcases how governments and First Nations people can work together to ensure decisions impacting First Nations children and young people can be made through genuine partnership.

Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Strengthening Plan and new Policy Partnership - Priority Reform One

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on Family Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV) and the First Nations Family Safety Plan Steering Committee have both raised exploring the establishment of a FDSV Policy Partnership. In 2024, the Department of Social Services commenced a strategic review of the governance in place to support the current *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032* and to prepare for governance for *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*. Commencing in early 2025, the Commonwealth will consider this advice to develop a proposed new governance structure, including roles, responsibilities, and accountabilities for further consultation. The overall aim is to put in place governance that will support the delivery of this expansive program of work and generational change across both plans.

The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership - Priority Reform One

The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership provides for \$30 million over four years and is an example of a place-based partnership under the Government's Central Australia Plan. The Commonwealth has executed funding agreements for the Strengthening Families and Communities Brokerage Fund with the MacDonnell and Central Desert Regional Councils. Funding of \$0.7m each has been provided to the Central Desert Regional Council and the MacDonnell Regional Council to progress the Strengthening Families and Communities Brokerage Fund and develop community-led family safety and strengthening initiatives.

Transferring authority to First Nations experts - Priority Reform Two

The Commonwealth worked in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks to design a National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety to champion the rights and interests of First Nations communities affected by FDSV.

Transferring services to First Nations experts - Priority Reform Two

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) possess a wealth of First Nations cultural knowledge, expertise and lived experience,, ensuring they are best placed to design and provide services to better meet the needs of First Nations people and communities. Work is progressing under the Families and Children Activity to ACCOs. This will facilitate community-led approaches to early intervention and prevention activities. The purpose is to improve the wellbeing of families, children and young people, including after separation, enhance family functioning and economic engagement, and strengthen communities.



Photo: Strengthening Families and Communities is a partnership focus.

Families and Kin continued

2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

First Nations children are over-represented in child protection and out-of-home care services compared to non-Indigenous children. The reasons for this are complex, connected to systematic racism, past policies, poverty, intergenerational trauma, racism, discrimination and forced child removals. Over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care must be reduced as a matter of urgency. This includes eliminating institutional racism and discrimination in child protection, particularly with respect to the implicit and explicit bias at decision-making points along the child protection continuum. To close the gap on Outcome 12, the focus on education, including understanding of the cultural differences in First Nations child-rearing practices, family structure and early intervention must be improved nationally.

The Commonwealth is committed to helping reduce the over-representation of First Nations children in out-of-home care. In 2025 the Commonwealth will:

- Implement the Danila Dilba Health Service pilot program trialling a new approach to supporting First Nations women, children and families at risk of, or impacted by, family and domestic violence and reduce the number of children entering the child protection system in the Greater Darwin region – **Outcomes 12 and 13.**
- Release the national child placement minimum standards to reduce the over-representation of First Nations children and young people in child protection systems – **Outcome 12.**
- Promote the existing *Keeping Our Kids Safe: Cultural Safety and the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations* on TV, radio and social media in the first half of 2025, including new resources developed in partnership with SNAICC and the Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) – **Outcome 12.**
- Implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support to drive self-determined research grounded in First Nations knowledge to support evidence-based approaches to delivering support to First Nations children, young people and families – **Outcome 12.**
- Monitor state and territory governments in effective implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle – **Priority Reform Three.**

First Nations women and children are entitled to live their lives in safety, without fear of intimidation, family violence or abuse. All First Nations people are also entitled to the full and equal protection of the law. FDSV and abuse is causing untold damage to First Nations women, children and men, their families and communities. Eliminating FDSV and keeping First Nations women and children safe is an ongoing urgent priority. In 2025, to further build on existing measures to tackle this national crisis, the Commonwealth will:

- Release the National Strategy's Second Action Plan to strengthen alignment with relevant Closing the Gap Priority Reforms – **Outcome 13.**
- Launch a dedicated plan, *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, informed by the findings of the Inquiry, to guide a whole of society approach to address the unacceptable rates of violence against First Nations women and children – **Outcome 13.**
- Invest \$41.9 million to extend the First Nations Leaving Violence Program Regional Trial to include 3 new sites in Broome (Western Australia), Darwin (Northern Territory) and Dubbo (New South Wales) – **Outcome 13.**
- Establish a National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Safety to champion the rights and interests of First Nations communities affected by FDSV and oversee the implementation of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices* – **Outcome 13.**

- Invest \$21.6 million to extend activities which deliver critical prevention, early intervention and response services to address FDSV in high-needs First Nations communities.
- Release the National Child and Family Investment Strategy under the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–26 to underpin the Commonwealth’s \$10 million investment through a clear set of national principles and best-practice actions to prioritise funding for the First Nations child and family service system – **Outcome 13.**
- Administer the Innovation Fund grant opportunity to shift from crisis-driven responses towards preventative and early supports to build on the social determinants of child and family wellbeing, and drive a proportionate shift in investment to the ACCO sector for services delivered to First Nations families – **Outcome 13.**

Priority actions are required to support the intersectional needs of First Nations people with disability. In 2025, the Commonwealth will:

- Continue to drive implementation of responses to the Disability Royal Commission and the Independent Review of the NDIS, and the National Disability Footprint – **Cross-cutting.**
- Deliver the NDIS First Nations Strategy to ensure an inclusive and culturally safe NDIS and co-design a Strategy Implementation Plan with the First Nations community – **Cross-cutting.**
- Continue to implement gender responsive budgeting, with all departments to undertake gender analysis on Cabinet Submissions and New Policy Proposals and to undertake a Gender Impact Assessment (GIA) where key criteria are met – **Cross-cutting.**

Connection to Country, Culture and Languages

Socio-economic Outcome 15

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.

Target 15a: By 2030, a 15% increase in Australia's land mass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests.

Target 15b: By 2030, a 15% increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.

Socio-economic Outcome 16

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages are strong and flourishing.

Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

Outcomes 15 and 16 of Closing the Gap encompass First Nations people's relationship to land and water, native title recognition and revitalisation of First Nations languages.

For more than 65,000 years, First Nations people have cared for Australia's land, rivers, seas, flora and fauna. Native title determinations recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their lands and waters and reflect greater recognition of traditional laws and customs. The maintenance, repatriation and revitalisation of First Nations languages is an intrinsic element of First Nations culture that plays a critical role in building a sense of belonging for many First Nations people and communities. Language is also an essential element of social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual wellbeing for First Nations people and communities that contributes to a range of positive life outcomes. In addition, returning ancestral remains and cultural heritage material to Country is a key objective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and contributes to healing and reconciliation under Outcome 15.

2024 KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

Indigenous Protected Areas – Outcome 15

The Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program supports First Nations people to care for their Country through voluntary agreements with the Government to manage the area for biodiversity and cultural conservation. By supporting Traditional Owners to care for Country, IPAs offer multiple benefits including better environmental resilience, stronger economic opportunities in remote areas, and a more enduring connection to land and culture.

In 2024 the Commonwealth invested \$14.7 million to establish 12 new and expanded Indigenous Protected Areas, with the new projects protecting 7.6 million hectares of land and 460,000 hectares of sea Country. The new IPAs go towards the Government's commitments to protect 30 per cent of land by 2030 and expand investment in IPAs by \$10 million per year. The expansion of the IPA program provides increased opportunity for First Nations people to maintain their physical and spiritual connection to Country.



Photo: Minister McCarthy visiting Borroloola.

Connection to Country, Culture and Languages continued

Return of Cultural Heritage Program – Outcome 15

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) leads the Return of Cultural Heritage program which supports Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander people to affirm their custodianship of their cultural heritage material held overseas and make decisions about where and how it can be best looked after in the present. Highlights in 2024 included the La Perouse Aboriginal Community delegation to Trinity College, University of Cambridge for the handover of 4 Gweagal spears taken by James Cook in 1770, the Warumungu delegations to Fowler Museum at the University of California for the handover of 20 items and the Horniman Museum and Gardens in London for the handover of 10 items, the return of 116 items from a private collection in the United States, the Warlpiri delegation to Germany for the handover of 24 items from a private collection, and the Kaurna on-Country return event to celebrate the return of 4 items from the Grassi Museum in Germany.

Indigenous Rangers Program – Outcome 15

The Indigenous Rangers Program (IRP) also assists First Nations people to care for their Country. Indigenous rangers use traditional knowledge and cultural practices, combined with modern conservation techniques, to manage land, river and sea Country and deliver environmental, cultural, social and economic development outcomes.

In 2024, the Commonwealth invested \$355 million to expand the IRP over the next 4 years. More than 1,000 new Indigenous ranger jobs will be created across the country with 115 projects receiving funding through the IRP Expansion Round One funding opportunity including 35 in Queensland, 23 in Western Australia, 21 in New South Wales, 12 in Northern Territory, 11 in South Australia, 9 in Victoria and 4 in Tasmania. The expansion will set aside up to 770 new ranger roles for First Nations women, acknowledging the important role they play in caring for Country, including the protection of sacred women's sites.

This expansion round also includes grants of up to \$50,000 per year over 4 years to strengthen ranger groups and support their long-term sustainability. Round 2 of the IRP expansion is expected to open in 2025.

In addition to IPAs and Indigenous Rangers, the Government has committed \$15 million over 4 years from 2024–25 from the Future Drought Fund to work with First Nations people and communities to support connection to Country through management of drought and climate risks.

Native Title claims, proceedings and future acts – Outcome 15

The *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) establishes processes by which native title can be claimed and recognised in Australia. Approximately 46% of Australia's landmass is now covered by native title, and the total landmass covered by recognised First Nations legal rights and interests is approximately 57%. There were 27 native title determinations in 2024, including 26 made by consent. One of these determinations was the largest in the history of New South Wales. The claim ran for over 12 years, and its determination recognised the rights of the Ngemba, Ngiyampaa, Wangaaypuwan and Wayilwan people to more than 95,000 square kilometres of land and waters in the state's west.

The Government has provided \$20.2 million over 4 years from 2024-25 (and \$3.6 million per year ongoing) to the Federal Court of Australia and the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT). This funding is intended to help progress the backlog of native title claims, support post-determination agreement-making, and preserve culturally and historically significant native title records. On 6 December 2024 it was announced that 2 new judges were appointed to the Court to help manage the native title caseload. This funding will assist native title claimants by supporting the Federal Court to work through long-running and complex claims according to the law and the facts before the Court, and by ensuring vital records are preserved. Resourcing the NNTT to facilitate complex dispute resolutions will help native title holders to focus on the important business of managing native title and achieving their communities' aspirations.

Spotlight on Women Rangers

The Tjuwanpa Women Rangers are a group of Western Arrarnta women, from Ntaria (Hermannsburg), west of Alice Springs who look after country across 5 Aboriginal Lands Trusts. The group has been working to protect cultural sites and bushfoods for future generations, and to help native plants and animals return to Country.

"We are an independent women's ranger group. Being a ranger to a coordinator has allowed me to be a leader and that is why you come to work every day. When you achieve something, this is a reward for community. As an Aboriginal woman you learn skills, two-way education through training, elders and cultural knowledge. It's good to have women's group be able to use Western Arrarnta, it makes us strong, we support each other, and it is a safe place for us to work."

Completing certificates involved in training to support younger rangers, working with the school with little kids, we are role models. We protect our country with managing weeds and conservation, you need to love the job. Working alongside elders and learning about plants and the significance of land and women's areas and try to protect bush tucker from feral plants. It's a big job to do so we do certain areas like waterholes for families and animals around waterholes."

– Sonya Braybon, Tjuwanpa Women's Rangers Coordinator

The group will see the scope of their program expand in 2024–25 through the IRP Expansion.

Further information on the work of the Tjuwanpa Women Rangers is available at www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Photo: Tjuwanpa Women Rangers.



Connection to Country, Culture and Languages continued

The Government has also provided \$0.6 million over 2 years from 2024-25 to the Australian Law Reform Commission to support its review of the future acts regime in the Native Title Act 1993 (Cth), which was announced on 4 June 2024. The review will develop options to improve the regime and make it operate more fairly and efficiently, and report back by 8 December 2025.

Prescribed Bodies Corporate Capacity Building Program – Outcome 15

Native title holders must establish a corporation called a Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC) to manage and protect their native title rights and interests once a determination of Native Title has been made. There are currently 282 PBCs across Australia at the time of writing. The Commonwealth recognises the essential role PBCs play in supporting Native Title holders to take advantage of social, cultural and economic opportunities arising from their Native Title rights and interests, through its PBC Capacity Building Program.

Building the capacity of PBCs enables Native Title holders to engage with economic opportunities, negotiate strong agreements and share in the benefits of projects on Native Title land. This supports the economic empowerment of First Nations people to be partners in major initiatives, such as Australia's transition to net zero. Strong PBCs supports the regional economy, increasing engagement with industry and supporting projects to get off the ground.

In 2024, 12 PBC Capacity Building grants were awarded, totalling more than \$11.7 million. Improvements were made to how the program is run to increase PBCs' ability to access grant funding. The Commonwealth created new guidance documents for applicants and offered more direct engagement with PBCs to support their applications. The Government also funded 6 PBC regional forums to support open dialogue between native title holders and government officials, and facilitate PBCs to come together to share best practice information with other PBCs in their region.

Development of an Inland Waters Target – Outcome 15

The Commonwealth is working in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks and state and territory governments to develop the Inland Waters Targets to measure progress towards securing First Nations peoples interests in water bodies inland from the coastal zone under state and territory water rights regimes. On 5 July 2024, the Joint Council on Closing the Gap agreed to a jurisdictional Inland Waters Target approach to ensure governments work in partnership with First Nations people to determine a baseline inland waters metric, reform activities, actions, and targets. This is a significant development in progress to date, as this is the first target under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to adopt a jurisdictional approach.

Photo: NIAA CEO and staff with community members at Garma 2024.





*Photo: Shaykayla Cullinan
inspecting teeth in the classroom.*

Spotlight on Healthy Teeth in APY Lands

The Closing the Gap through Oral Hygiene and Language in Remote Australia Project (the project) teaches dental health practices in language with the aim of tackling inequities in dental health outcomes for First Nations people whilst strengthening languages.

In 2024, the project engaged First Nations children in fun learning activities that reinforced language related to oral hygiene in wangka (language). Participants used Yankunytjatjara terms to talk about brushing their teeth (kaṯiṯi paltjini), rotten teeth (kaṯiṯi kuya-kuya), good teeth (kaṯiṯi palya), and toothpaste (kaṯiṯiku latja). The integration of Yankunytjatjara into oral hygiene practices helps slow and reverse language attrition in strong language communities and fosters a sense of ownership, belonging, and pride in maintaining good oral health.

Activities were delivered in collaboration with the Indulkana and Mimili communities, with more than 180 people participating in Katiti Wiru (Healthy Teeth) games and actively participating in Mai Wiru (Healthy Eating) activities. Kids were fully engaged with these workshops and activities. This project was designed for Anangu tjitji tjuṯa (Anangu kids) in their wangka (language), within their tjanampa ngura (community), and was delivered by their walytja tjuṯa (family).

Karina Lester (MLT Yankunytjatjara Senior Aboriginal Language Worker).

You can read more information about this program www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/closing-gap

Connection to Country, Culture and Languages continued

First Nation led initiatives to strengthen and celebrate languages – Outcome 16.

In 2024, the Commonwealth provided \$7.8 million in resourcing to First Languages Australia to support their role as secretariat for the LPP and as the national Peak body for First Nations languages. The Government has re-affirmed this commitment by extending this support to 30 June 2028. A significant increase in baseline funding to the Indigenous Languages and Arts Program (ILA program) was also provided through the 2024-25 budget to support First Nations people to express, conserve and sustain their cultures through languages and arts activities around Australia.

In line with the LPP priority of supporting people, groups and organisations who work in languages, the Commonwealth has also committed funding to assist the delivery of the next 2 PULiMA Indigenous Language and Technology Conferences. PULiMA plays a significant work in elevating the work done by the language sector, creates a forum for sharing and learning, and highlighting the importance of First Nations languages.

CHANGING THE WAY WE WORK THROUGH THE PRIORITY REFORMS

Languages Policy Partnership and SSP – Priority Reform One and Two

The Languages Policy Partnership (LPP) makes recommendations to ensure First Nations languages are strong, supported and flourishing across Australia. The LPP enables a joined-up approach – partners to the LPP Agreement include all governments, the Coalition of Peaks, and other First Nations representatives. In 2024, the LPP consulted and developed 7 national priorities and 3 urgent priorities that would have an immediate and significant positive impact towards addressing the critical state of First Nations languages, which were presented to Joint Council. The 3 urgent priorities are languages legislation; mechanisms to create or expand community-controlled funding pools and grant programs across jurisdictions; and additional support to grow the community-controlled languages sector.

First Languages Australia, supported by a Working Group of the LPP, are developing the Languages SSP. Once implemented, the SSP will help build the capability of the First Nations languages sector by identifying actions that meet the sector's needs including in the areas of workforce, capital infrastructure, service provision and governance, and a consistent funding model.

Protecting cultural heritage through partnership – Priority Reform One

The Australian Government has been working in partnership with the First Nations Heritage Protection Alliance to co-design reforms aimed at strengthening protections of First Nations cultural heritage. A new agreement was entered into in July 2024 to continue the co-design partnership to June 2026.

2025 KEY ACTIVITIES

The Commonwealth is committed to supporting the utilisation of First Nations knowledge of sustainable land and water management practices, to generate social and economic benefits for First Nations communities and promote environmental resilience. To progress this in 2025 and support Outcome 15, the Commonwealth will:

- Expand the Indigenous Rangers Program to create 1,800 new jobs over 4 years, including capacity building grants of up to \$50,000 per year. The Government aims to double the number of rangers by the end of the decade and has committed over \$1.3 billion (until 2028) for the program. Following the successful funding of over 1,000 new jobs in Round 1, the second round of the expansion is expected to deliver approximately 800 new ranger jobs in 2025 – **Outcome 15**.
- Re-establish an Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) Managers Network, to support knowledge sharing between land and sea managers – **Outcome 15**.
- Work with 8 IPA managers towards transitioning the management of IPAs to community-controlled organisations, including a Registered Native Title Body Corporate (RNTBC), supporting Priority Reform Two to build the community-controlled sector – **Outcome 15**.
- Develop a First Nations Water Strategy to inform Commonwealth actions under the proposed National Water Agreement and the Inland Waters – **Outcome 15**.
- Establish the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Climate Resilience Centre to create a coordinated regional response to climate change led by First Nations people and Traditional Owners. 2025 will focus on the delivery of the Torres Strait and Northern Peninsula Area Climate Resilience Grant Program – **Outcome 15**.

The Commonwealth seeks to progress actions that help streamline the Native Title claims process to ensure it is timelier and effectively supports Native Title claimants to protect their rights and interests. Partnership will be a key focus to ensure solutions work in practice for Native Title organisations. Some actions that the Commonwealth will focus on in this area for 2025 are:

- Continue to develop a National Native Title Compensation Framework, working closely with states, territories and the National Native Title Council – **Outcome 15**.
- Digitise and preserve historically and culturally significant Federal Court and National Native Title Tribunal native title records – **Outcome 15**.

Supporting the revitalisation of First Nations languages is a commitment of the Commonwealth in 2025, which will be achieved through:

- Extend the support for the LPP from 2025-28.
- Investment of \$53.8 million over 4 years to enhance support for community-led language learning, including the addition of 2 new language centres. This will expand the ILC network to 29 language centres expected to be in operation by 2027-28 – **Outcome 16**.
- The LPP will finalise commissioned works agreed in 2024: a National Interpreting and Translating Framework, a collections strategy and an economic narrative around the benefits of investing in languages – **Outcome 16**.
- Delivery of the First Nations Language Education Initiative (Teaching First Nations Languages in Schools) to enable the development and placement of 60 First Nations educators in primary schools – **Outcome 16**.

Appendix A

The Commonwealth response to the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Essential Action	Commonwealth Implementation Actions
Recommendation 1: Power needs to be shared	
1.1 Amend the Agreement to clarify the purpose and broaden the scope of Priority Reform One	The Partnership Working Group (PWG) will provide advice to Joint Council on Closing the Gap (Joint Council) regarding proposed amendments and timing in 2025, following the completion of the Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Review and Assembly (Independent Review and Assembly). The Commonwealth will await the outcome of the Review and Assembly and will work with all partners to the National Agreement to provide advice to PWG and Joint Council in 2025. In the interim the Commonwealth will continue to implement commitments to embed formal partnerships and shared decision-making arrangements with First Nations peoples and communities, the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks), Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and all levels of government, to achieve Priority Reform One.
1.2 Governments treating ACCOs as essential partners in program and service design and delivery, not simply as funding recipients	Commonwealth Government agencies are increasingly partnering with First Nations people, communities and ACCOs in the design of strategies, policies, and programs. The Commonwealth recognises further systemic and structural work is required to support agencies to engage with ACCOs and First Nations communities early in the process of designing programs, policies and strategies. To do this, the Commonwealth is continuing to strengthen mechanisms for partnership between Government and ACCOs, prioritising ACCOs in grants processes, embedding the Priority Reforms in grant agreements, and build the cultural capability and knowledge of Closing the Gap commitments across the Australian Public Service. In addition, the Commonwealth continues to be an active player in delivering on the 4 Sector Strengthening Plans that have been developed with all Closing the Gap parties, and developing a further 3, to build strong community-controlled sectors to deliver Closing the Gap services and programs.

Essential Action	Commonwealth Implementation Actions
1.3 Regular meetings between Ministers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies	Bilateral Meetings between Ministers and their portfolio Peaks are held regularly to discuss progress on embedding Priority Reforms, as well as opportunities and barriers to service delivery in the relevant sector. These meetings will be monitored by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.
1.4 Governments adequately resourcing the implementation of the Agreement	The Commonwealth is committed to full implementation of the National Agreement. The Commonwealth recognises new investment is needed to implement all commitments, and further investment is required to continue funding currently implemented commitments. The Commonwealth will work with other jurisdictions to consider shared and flexible resourcing through a proportional model for commitments under the National Agreement to be reviewed periodically.
1.5 Governments writing Closing the Gap implementation plans more strategically, in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	The Commonwealth Government is committed to working in close partnership with First Nations Peaks to develop a strategic and effective Closing the Gap Implementation Plan each year. A dedicated Joint Working Group on Closing the Gap provides a mechanism for Deputy Secretaries across portfolios to engage directly with Peaks in the development of the Implementation Plan. More broadly, the National Indigenous Australians Agency plays a significant role in facilitating agencies across portfolios to engage with First Nations people, communities and Peaks, including to develop the Commonwealth's Implementation Plan. Commonwealth agencies also work with First Nations and peak organisations directly to draft policies and programs in partnership, with clear commitments and timelines as far as possible. As outlined in response to recommendation 1.2, the Commonwealth recognises further systemic and structural work is required to support agencies to engage with ACCOs and First Nations communities early in the process of designing programs, policies and strategies, including the Commonwealth's Implementation Plan. The Commonwealth is continuing to strengthen mechanisms for partnership between Government and ACCOs and building the cultural capability and knowledge of Closing the Gap commitments across the Australian Public Service.

Essential Action	Commonwealth Implementation Actions
Recommendation 2: Indigenous Data Sovereignty needs to be recognised and supported	
2.1 Amend the Agreement to include Indigenous Data Sovereignty under Priority Reform Four	PWG will provide advice to Joint Council regarding proposed amendments and timing in 2025, following the completion of the Independent Review and Assembly. In addition to supporting PWG to undertake this work, the Commonwealth is committed to addressing the objectives of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance through the implementation of the Framework for the Governance of Indigenous Data.
2.2 Establish a Bureau of Indigenous Data	The Joint Council agreed to establish a Data Policy Partnership (DPP) to consider the logistics, scope, roles, responsibilities, and resourcing complexities to support Indigenous Data Governance and Closing the Gap data development, including examining the option of a Bureau of Indigenous Data. The Commonwealth is supporting the establishment of the DPP in 2025 by identifying the appropriate Commonwealth agency to be Co-Chair and identifying the necessary funding.
Recommendation 3: Mainstream government systems and culture need to be fundamentally rethought	
3.1 Government departments develop and execute a transformation strategy for the portfolio	Commonwealth Departments will be supported to develop coordinated transformation strategies by the Chief Operating Officer (COO) Committee in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks. This advisory arm to the Secretaries Board has been established to progress in 2025 a system-level approach to Commonwealth Government transformation under Priority Reform Three.
3.2 Review and update funding and contracting rules so that they explicitly incorporate accountability for funders to abide by the Priority Reforms in commissioning processes	The Commonwealth in collaboration with the Coalition of Peaks, published the Commonwealth Grants Prioritisation Guide in December 2023 to deliver on Clause 55a by providing practical advice on how Commonwealth agencies can apply prioritisation practices for competitive grant rounds.

Essential Action	Commonwealth Implementation Actions
3.3 Review and update Cabinet and Budget processes so that they explicitly promote, support and encourage the Priority Reforms	Updates to the Cabinet Handbook led to the First Nations Impact Assessment being introduced for the 2023-24 Budget. The Budget Process Operational Rules (BPORs) and Cabinet Handbook were updated (effective December 2023) to inform Portfolio Ministers of their obligations under the National Agreement with specific focus on Priority Reforms. In 2025, the First Nations Impacts Framework will continue to uplift capability across the APS and support Departments and agencies to give genuine and meaningful consideration to the impacts of policy on First Nations people, communities and organisations. An Agency Guidance Note was developed in consultation with the Coalition of Peaks to support Commonwealth agencies and policy drafters to understand and align with the Priority Reforms and requirements in the Cabinet Handbook and the BPORs when developing New Policy Proposals. A Clause 55(b) 'meaningful proportion' guidance for agencies has been developed and released to provide Commonwealth agencies with guidance on requirements to provide a meaningful proportion of any new funding that meets one of the socio-economic outcomes in the National Agreement to ACCOs.
3.4 Designate a senior leadership group to drive public sector change in each jurisdiction	Commonwealth responsibility for implementing the Priority Reforms was elevated to the Commonwealth Secretaries Board in 2023. In 2025 the Secretaries Board will consider the Strategic Action Plan for Commonwealth Central Agencies: Driving transformational change under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to further embed policy to advance First Nations commitments systematically. This work will be supported by the Chief Operating Officer Committee (see Commonwealth Implementation Action to 3.1).
3.5 Embed responsibility for improving cultural capability and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into public sector employment requirements	Commonwealth actions and commitments to improve cultural capability and embed relationships with First Nations people into public sector employment requirements are detailed through this Report.

Essential Action	Commonwealth Implementation Actions
Recommendation 4: Stronger accountability is needed to drive behaviour change	
4.1 Establish the independent mechanism in each jurisdiction without further delay	The Commonwealth announced in the 5 July 2024 Joint Council communique that it will establish a Commonwealth Independent Mechanism, in partnership with the Coalition of Peaks. Options for a model are being developed by the Coalition of Peaks in early 2025, for consideration by Government.
4.2 Embed the commitments of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in other inter-governmental Agreements	The Commonwealth supports an enduring approach to embedding the commitments of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in other significant relevant national agreements.
4.3 Include a statement on Closing the Gap in every government organisations' annual report	The Commonwealth Department of Finance will undertake a review of current Closing the Gap reporting practices to assist in the design and potential implementation of a policy for a formalised reporting approach of Closing the Gap targets and outcomes in annual reports of Commonwealth entities and companies.
4.4 Publish all the documents developed under the Agreement	The Joint Council agreed to publish a wider scope of documents under the Closing the Gap Agreement. PWG will progress this work into 2025. The Commonwealth supports the development of publishing guidelines for Joint Council consideration.





Australian Government



CLOSING THE GAP