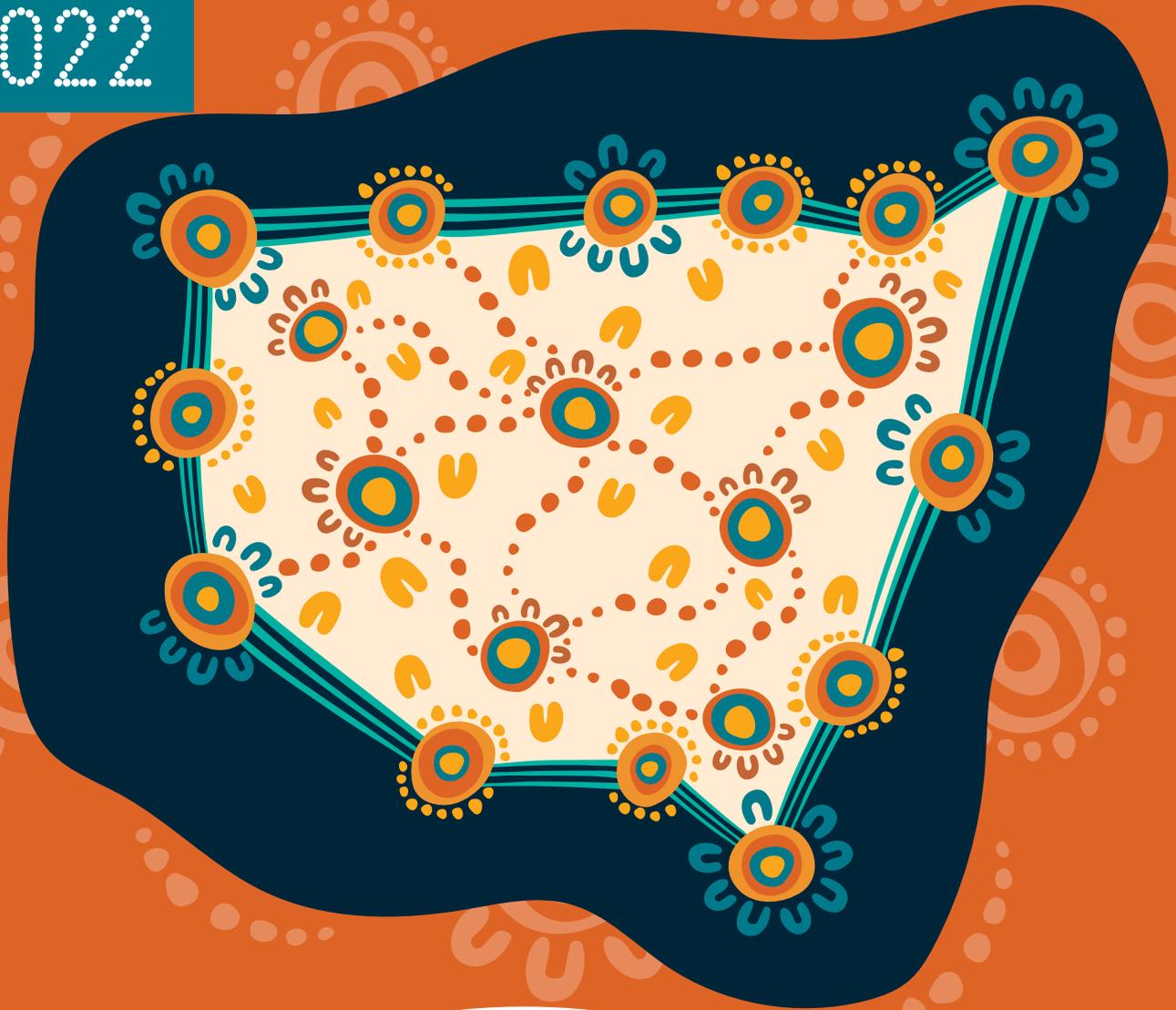
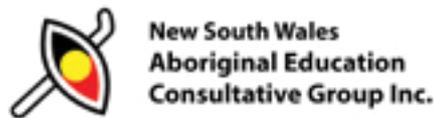


NSW CAPO Closing the Gap Community Engagement Report

2022



NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO)





Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which we work and meet, and the lands that we travel through on our journeys throughout New South Wales to help in Closing the Gap.

We would also like to acknowledge our Elders – Past, Present, and Emerging, and the Stolen Generation People of this state.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the following report may contain images of people who have passed away.

This report has been developed by the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations with the assistance of a grant from the NSW Government.

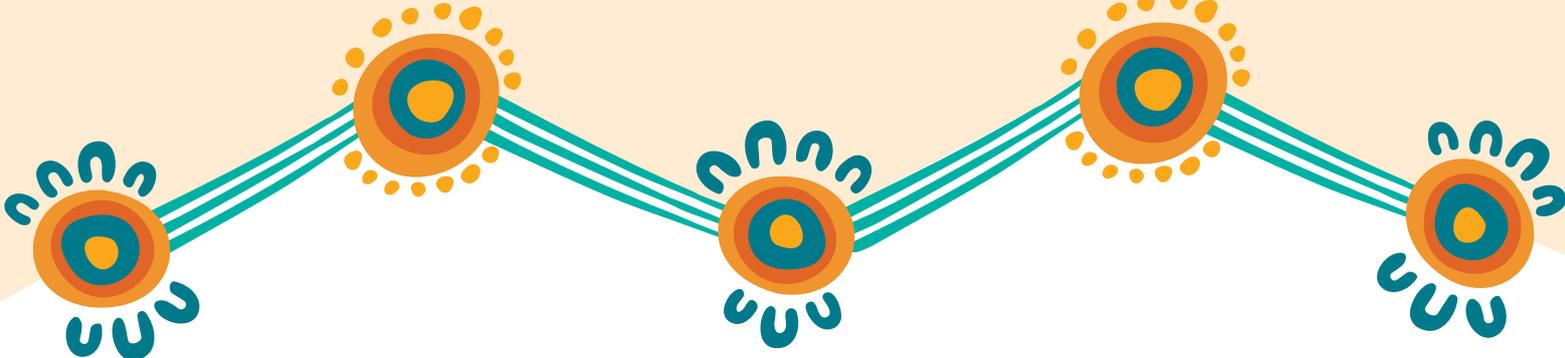
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Contents

<u>Welcome</u>	4
<u>Executive summary</u>	5
<u>Summary of key findings</u>	6
<u>Key findings of focus area</u>	7
<u>Overview</u>	12
<u>Closing the Gap journey 2018 - today</u>	12
<u>Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes</u>	13
<u>Community engagement aims</u>	15
<u>Community engagement approach</u>	16
<u>Who we heard from</u>	18
<u>Challenges and lessons learned</u>	19
<u>What we heard from community</u>	21
<u>Focus Area 1: Partnerships</u>	22
<u>Focus Area 2: Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations</u>	24
<u>Focus Area 3: Transformation</u>	27
<u>Focus Area 4: Data</u>	29
<u>Focus Area 5: Economic Prosperity</u>	32
<u>Focus Area 6: Health</u>	35
<u>Focus Area 7: Education</u>	38
<u>Focus Area 8: Justice</u>	44
<u>Focus Area 9: Families</u>	48
<u>Focus Area 10: Housing</u>	53
<u>Focus Area 11: Land and Waters</u>	56
<u>Focus Area 12: Languages and Culture</u>	59
<u>Focus Area 13: Digital Inclusion</u>	62
<u>Next steps</u>	65
<u>Where to from here?</u>	65
<u>Thank you</u>	66
<u>Appendices</u>	67
<u>Appendix A - About NSW CAPO</u>	67
<u>Appendix B - Closing the Gap Journey</u>	68
<u>Appendix C - Community Companion questions</u>	70
<u>Appendix D - Engagement statistics</u>	75
<u>Glossary of terms</u>	76
<u>Artist Bio</u>	77
<u>Stay connected</u>	78
<u>Useful resources</u>	78



Welcome

Welcome to the Closing the Gap Community Engagement Report 2022.

Throughout March 2022, the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) travelled through communities across NSW, listening to the issues they are tackling and learning from the expertise and knowledge these communities hold.

We took what we heard back to the NSW Government, our partners on Closing the Gap, to inform and direct the work we do together over the next two years. Our work in Closing the Gap is about fundamentally changing the way government works and improving life outcomes for our people.

As a self-determining coalition of peak Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, we know that for any meaningful changes to happen, they need to be community-driven and community-led. This is why we have committed to regularly engaging with communities throughout NSW and working to bring about the changes that we hear are needed.

This report shares what we heard from community during these consultations and what we have been doing since March.



Cr Charles Lynch
Councillor | NSW Aboriginal
Land Council
Co-Chair, NSW CAPO



Robert Skeen
CEO | Aboriginal Health and Medical
Research Council
Co-Chair, NSW CAPO



Executive Summary

In July 2020 NSW CAPO and the NSW Government signed the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This Agreement sets out how governments will work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to support their social, cultural and economic aspirations.

It looks at new ways governments can work with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations. As the first agreement of its kind, it puts Aboriginal people's views and expertise at the centre of decisions around improving life outcomes for their communities.

As part of the National Agreement, each state and territory must develop Implementation Plans with strategies, programs and policy reforms to meet the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes. These plans aim to address what we heard during our community consultations in 2019, 2021 and 2022.

In March 2022, NSW CAPO met with almost 400 people in 28 locations across NSW to talk about Closing the Gap. What we heard from community has been used to develop the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022-2024.

This report's overview outlines the [Closing the Gap Timeline from 2018 to today](#). We also talk about the [Aims of this year's community engagements](#) in NSW, and the [Approach section](#) explains our process for seeking community feedback. We also have a snapshot of who we heard from as well as some of the challenges we faced this year and lessons learnt.

We then outline [what we heard from community](#) across our 13 Focus Areas. Key findings from the consultations are also summarised on the following page.

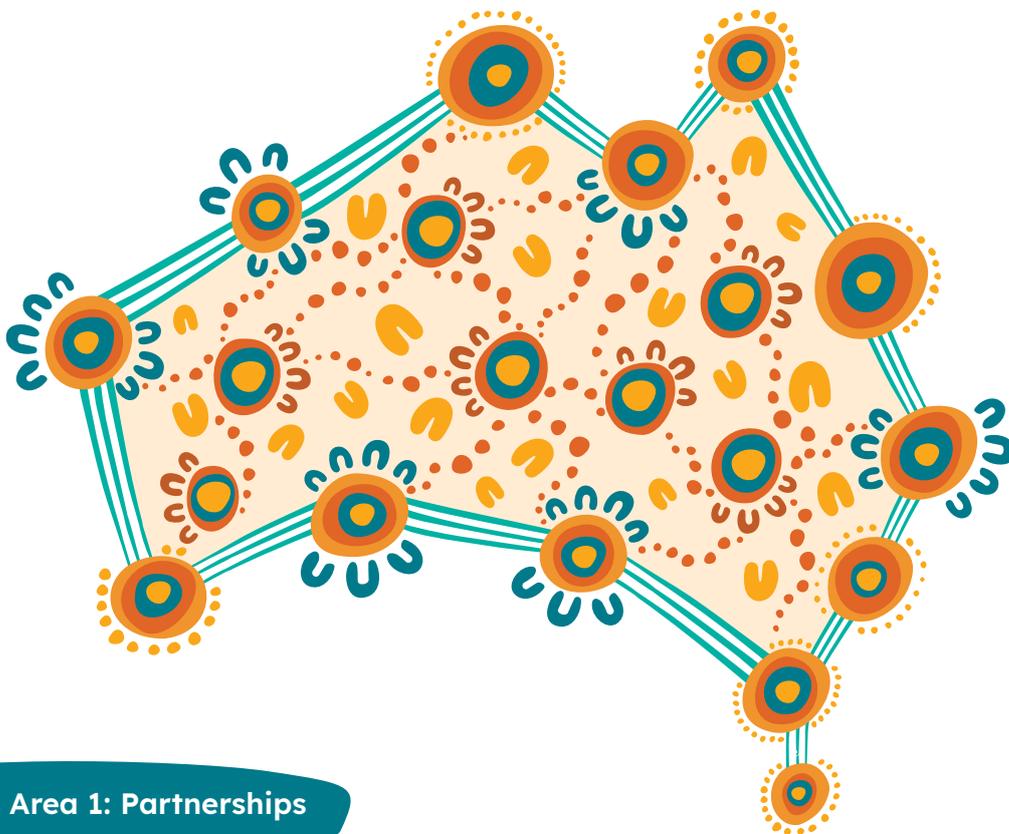
In [Next steps](#) we outline plans for the next two years as we start to action the initiatives laid out in the NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2022-2024. We have also included a useful list of [Resources](#) to access information about Closing the Gap.

In the Appendices we provide detail about:

- [What is NSW CAPO](#)
- [Closing the Gap Journey](#)
- [The questions we asked this year](#)
- [Engagements statistics](#)

Summary of key findings

This Community Engagement Report is the product of [what we heard from community](#) during the 2022 Closing the Gap Community Engagement Sessions across NSW. It provides a greater understanding of community priorities in relation to the social, cultural and economic factors that influence Aboriginal people’s overall wellbeing. In NSW, the [five Priority Reforms and 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes](#) have been grouped into 13 Focus Areas. The [key findings](#) from those areas, many of which were raised in earlier consultations, are summarised below.



Focus Area 1: Partnerships

Focus Area 2: Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

Focus Area 3: Transforming Government

Focus Area 4: Data

Focus Area 5: Economic Prosperity

Focus Area 6: Health

Focus Area 7: Education

Focus Area 8: Justice

Focus Area 9: Families

Focus Area 10: Housing

Focus Area 11: Land & Water

Focus Area 12: Languages & Culture

Focus Area 13: Digital Inclusion



Key findings from focus area

Focus Area

Key Findings



1. Priority Reform 1

Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

- Local partnerships that bring together local community organisations are needed
- Community must take a lead role in creating partnerships to achieve true joint decision-making and self-determination
- Accountability and transparency in partnerships are needed
- Partnerships must be sufficiently and fairly resourced to meet demands
- Coordination across partnerships (NSW CAPO, government and community) must be improved
- Cultural capability in government is needed



2. Priority Reform 2

Building the community controlled sector

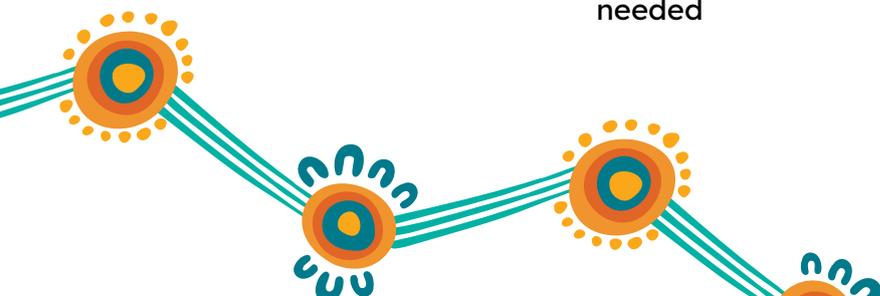
- Transparency is needed around ACCOs' funding
- Funding processes for ACCOs must be improved
- Co-operation between ACCOs needs to be supported
- Procurement and tendering processes needs to be simplified
- There is a need for employee upskilling
- Staff recruitment needs to be supported
- Support for smaller ACCOs is needed
- ACCO governance should be further improved



3. Priority Reform 3

Transforming government organisations

- Meaningful accountability is needed for government decision-making and service provision
- Transparency is needed in the allocation and use of funding
- Government consultation with communities needs to be improved
- Cultural competency needs to improve, and racism must be addressed
- Aboriginal employees in government need more support
- Clarity on who is eligible for identified positions/ services is needed





4. Priority Reform 4

Shared access to data and information at a regional level

- Data should be put into the hands of community
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance must be implemented
- Data literacy and capability must be expanded
- Strengths-based data analysis and reporting is important
- Formal partnerships should be set up to support data needs
- Funding for community data projects will help build the ACCO sector



5. Priority Reform 5

Employment, business growth and economic prosperity (NSW-specific)

- Building economic prosperity in communities
- Aboriginal small businesses need more support
- Improved education pathways are needed
- Employment support needs to be more accessible and culturally safe
- An Aboriginal-run One-Stop Shop would support Economic Prosperity
- Aboriginal procurement processes need to support Aboriginal businesses



6. Health

- Institutional racism and discrimination in mainstream health services and community settings must be addressed
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) must be central to service delivery and well resourced
- More work needs to be done to build the Aboriginal Health Workforce
- Culturally responsive mental health and suicide prevention services are urgently needed, particularly for young people
- Limited access to health services in remote locations is a major barrier to care, with long distance travel cited as a big issue
- Communities need more local Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) programs that are linked with justice and other social services



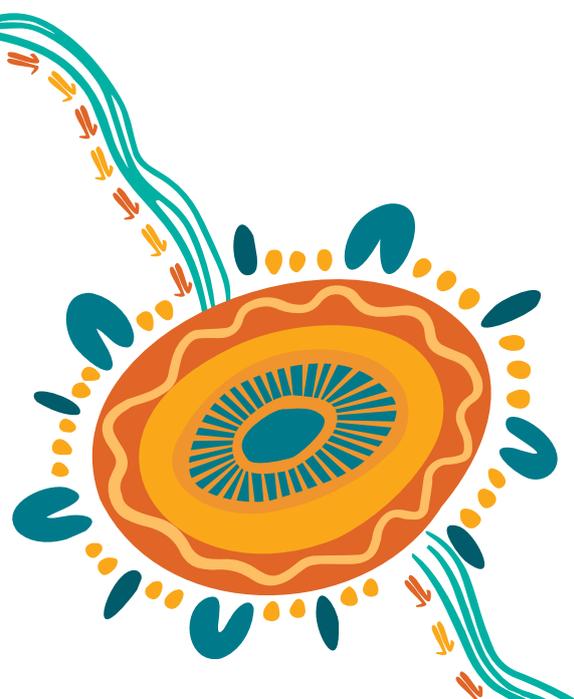
7. Education

- Students face racism and a lack of cultural safety at school
- More support is needed to address barriers faced by Aboriginal students
- Aboriginal staff experience barriers too
- Culturally capable school staff are in short supply
- Aboriginal kids can't be what they can't see
- Successful schools engage with their local Aboriginal community and students
- Curriculum needs to be tailored to the needs of Aboriginal students
- More support is needed for early childhood



8. Justice

- More focus is needed on community-led prevention and early assistance programs
- Systemic racism and discriminatory practices across justice agencies, particularly police, must be addressed
- Need for better access to culturally appropriate legal support and bail
- Greater support is needed for people leaving prison to ensure they don't return
- Holistic approaches are needed to address underlying issues including mental health, disability, unemployment, education and drug and alcohol misuse.
- Keeping children and youth out of the legal system must be prioritised
- Local decision-making and accountability mechanisms, involving Elders and respected community members in the justice system, are needed
- Community-controlled initiatives need support
- Solutions to prevent family and domestic violence must be led by Aboriginal people and communities, with a focus on long-term and generational change





9. Families

- Investment in the strengths and expertise of local communities and Aboriginal culture is needed to make real change
- Holistic and culturally safe support is needed for Aboriginal children and families to thrive
- The child protection system needs fundamental change to stop harming Aboriginal children, families and communities
- Practice and process improvements based in culture will improve the system
- Localised, culturally appropriate services and a skilled Aboriginal workforce are needed



10. Housing

- More housing is urgently needed
- Different groups' housing needs must be catered for
- Housing should suit its environment
- There needs to be a culturally responsive definition of crowding
- Clear pathways to home ownership are needed
- Aboriginal Community Housing Providers are best placed to manage community housing for Aboriginal people
- Applying for community housing needs to be more accessible
- Repairs and maintenance need to be addressed urgently
- Supportive accommodation is needed within every community



11. Land and Waters

- Aboriginal people need to own and manage land and waters
- Cultural management of water must be supported
- A land claims 'One-Stop Shop' is needed
- Consultation and decision-making processes must be improved
- Economic prosperity and land and waters need to be considered together
- Increased accountability around land and waters is needed

Focus Area

Key Findings



12. Languages and Culture

- Aboriginal languages must be taught in schools
- Culture and language go together and need to be taught together
- Language and cultural centres should be owned and run by community, and there should be support for getting back on Country



13. Digital Inclusion

- Access to the internet is important
- Affordability is the biggest barrier to digital inclusion and must be improved
- The shift to doing business online is a barrier
- Digital literacy is needed to improve digital inclusion
- Online safety concerns must be addressed
- There are opportunities to help community connect online



These elements represent the different communities we all come from whilst encompassing the many layers that shape each one

Overview

Closing the Gap Journey 2018 – today



Call for a New Way of Working Together

In 2018, 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations called on the Prime Minister for a new approach to Closing the Gap.



Partnership Agreement

In 2019, 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations formed the Coalition of Peaks. A formal Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap is signed by the Coalition of Peaks and all Australian governments.



Closing the Gap Consultations

In 2019, the Coalition of Peaks ran a national Aboriginal community engagement strategy, including 29 face-to-face sessions in NSW, to decide what this new partnership would focus on and how it would work.



National Agreement

In 2020, the Coalition of Peaks and all national, state, and local governments sign the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This Agreement commits all parties to work in genuine partnership. In NSW, NSW CAPO, the NSW Government and Local Government NSW (LGNSW) are parties to the National Agreement.



Priority Reforms

The National Agreement is built around four Priority Reforms to change how governments work with Aboriginal communities, organisations and people. These Priority Reforms are based on what Aboriginal people have been saying are needed for a long time.



Socio-Economic Outcomes

The National Agreement also has 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes that cover areas including: health, education, justice, families, housing, land and waters, languages and culture, and digital inclusion.



NSW Implementation Plan 2021

Under the National Agreement, each state has to develop an Implementation Plan with actions to achieve the Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes. NSW CAPO carries out community engagements on the Priority Reforms in April and the first NSW Implementation Plan 2021 is released in July.



NSW Implementation Plan 2022-24

NSW CAPO conducts community engagements in March to hear what communities want included in the second, more ambitious Implementation Plan. This plan is released in August and is supported by \$189.6 million.

Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes

Priority Reform 1:
Formal partnerships and
shared decision-making

Priority Reform 2:
Building the community-
controlled sector

Priority Reform 3:
Transforming government
organisations

Priority Reform 4:
Shared access to data and
information at a regional level

Priority Reform 5:
Employment, business growth
and economic prosperity
(NSW-specific)

Socio-Economic Outcome 1:
Aboriginal people enjoy long
and healthy lives

Socio-Economic Outcome 2:
Aboriginal children are born
healthy and strong

Socio-Economic Outcome 3:
Aboriginal children are
engaged in high-quality,
culturally appropriate early
childhood education in their
early years

Socio-Economic Outcome 4:
Aboriginal children thrive in
their early years

Socio-Economic Outcome 5:
Aboriginal students achieve
their full learning potential

Socio-Economic Outcome 6:
Aboriginal students reach
their full potential through
further education pathways

Socio-Economic Outcome 7:
Aboriginal youth are
engaged in employment or
education

Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes

Socio-Economic Outcome 8:
Strong economic participation
and development of Aboriginal
people and their communities

Socio-Economic Outcome 9:
Aboriginal people secure
appropriate, affordable
housing that is aligned with
their priorities and need

Socio-Economic Outcome 10:
Aboriginal adults are not
over-represented in the
criminal justice system

Socio-Economic Outcome 11:
Aboriginal young people are
not over-represented in the
justice system

Socio-Economic Outcome 12:
Aboriginal children are not
over-represented in the child
protection system

Socio-Economic Outcome 13:
Aboriginal families and
households are safe

Socio-Economic Outcome 14:
Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander people enjoy
high levels of social and
emotional wellbeing

Socio-Economic Outcome 15:
Aboriginal people maintain a
distinctive cultural, spiritual,
physical and economic
relationship with their land
and waters

Socio-Economic Outcome 16:
Aboriginal cultures and
languages are strong,
supported and flourishing

Socio-Economic Outcome 17:
Aboriginal people have access
to information and services
enabling participation in
informed decision-making
regarding their own lives

Community engagement aims

The National Agreement is based on recognising that we get far better outcomes when Aboriginal people drive the design and delivery of programs, services and policies. The goal of NSW CAPO is to ensure work to implement the Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes in NSW is based on the views and expertise of Aboriginal people and communities. A series of NSW Implementation Plans (NSW IP) over the next 10 years will outline what this work will involve and will emphasise the need to work with communities about what policies, programs and actions will work best.

The engagement sessions provided a culturally safe forum for community input and allowed people to share their voices with NSW CAPO on what's being done and should be done to achieve the Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes. The sessions were also an opportunity to report back to community on how we've used their feedback and how we're tracking. Community consultations were guided by the ethical principles of our NSW CAPO member organisation, the AH&MRC.

In April 2021, NSW CAPO conducted nine face-to-face engagement sessions across NSW with 344 participants joining in. The sessions focused on the Priority Reforms the National Agreement is built around. The feedback gathered helped shape the NSW Implementation Plan 2021. Please refer to the [Resources](#) on page 78.

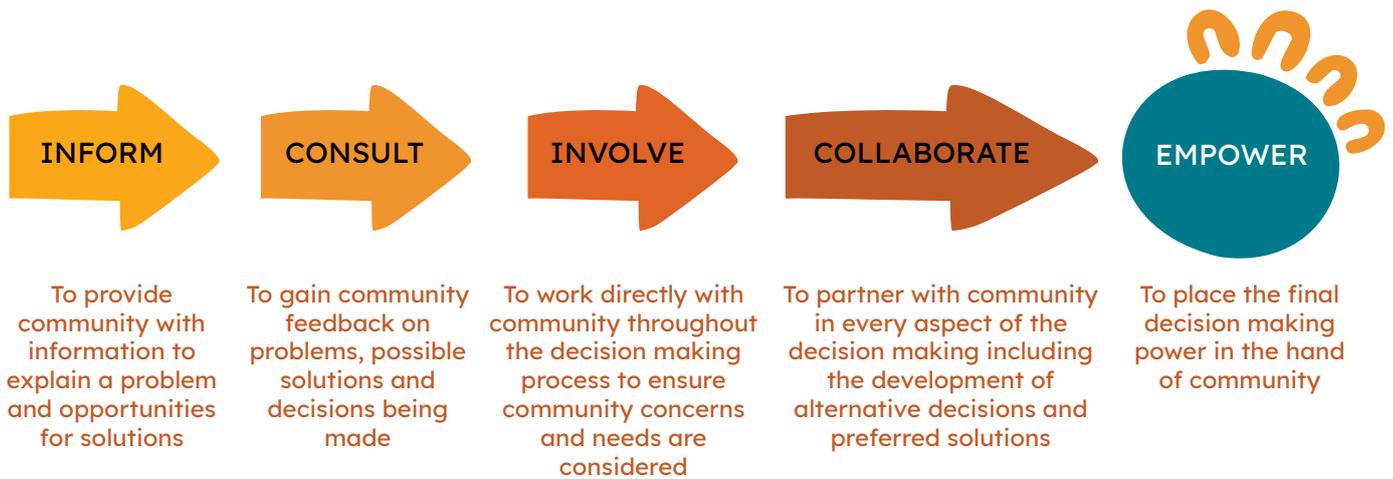
We were hoping to get out to community again in late 2021 but due to COVID lockdowns this wasn't possible. Instead, over 100 people attended online information sessions around our 13 key Focus Areas. While we had some great conversations, these sessions showed us that face-face engagement is the best way to involve community.

In March this year we planned extensive face to face consultation sessions in over 35 communities across NSW. We were able to get to 28 of these, reaching 393 people. These sessions built on what we heard during consultations in 2019 and 2021 and what NSW CAPO organisations have heard from their members.

We want our engagements to be:

1. Meaningful and based on collaboration, participation and empowerment
2. Culturally safe and community-led
3. Creative, flexible and responsive to community needs
4. Inclusive, accessible and open to all Aboriginal community members
5. Safe, supportive and accessible to community members so hidden voices can be heard

Community Engagement Approach



Given face to face engagements weren't possible at the end of 2021, we were excited to get back out into community in 2022. We were keen to report back to community about Closing the Gap developments over the past year and get input for strategies and programs we're developing for the 2022-24 NSW IP. As always, these strategies are based on previous community feedback, so we wanted to know if we were on the right track. We also wanted to hear from community to make sure that future initiatives and approaches are driven by community voices and designed for community interests.

The NSW CAPO Community Engagement Sessions were advertised through:

- social media
- the NSW CAPO mailing list
- the Koori Mail
- radio
- flyers distributed to Aboriginal community organisation offices, land councils and local community venues.

Participants registered their attendance online for the one-day engagement sessions at their preferred locations.

An online Community Companion was made available before the sessions with printed copies on the day. It featured background information on Closing the Gap and included questions for community grouped in 13 focus areas and based on current work by NSW CAPO. The questions aimed to bring this work back to communities to make sure it aligned with their priorities, aspirations and needs. Appendix C lists the questions asked.

Every community has its own priorities, so we ensured discussions were driven by attendees, and each community chose its focus areas for discussion. For larger sessions, breakout groups were formed covering different focus areas. In sessions with lower attendance, the whole group talked about what focus areas mattered to their community.

For those who could not attend face-to-face, we set up a hotline, a dedicated email address and an online survey allowing people to provide feedback on focus areas.

NSW CAPO is committed to ensuring our work meets inclusivity and accessibility needs. We worked to ensure community engagements were culturally and physically safe, inclusive and enjoyable for all by:

- Developing an accessible Community Companion
- Designing an online survey using accessible themes, colours and fonts that can be used in conjunction with accessibility software
- Prioritising accessible venues for face-to-face engagements.

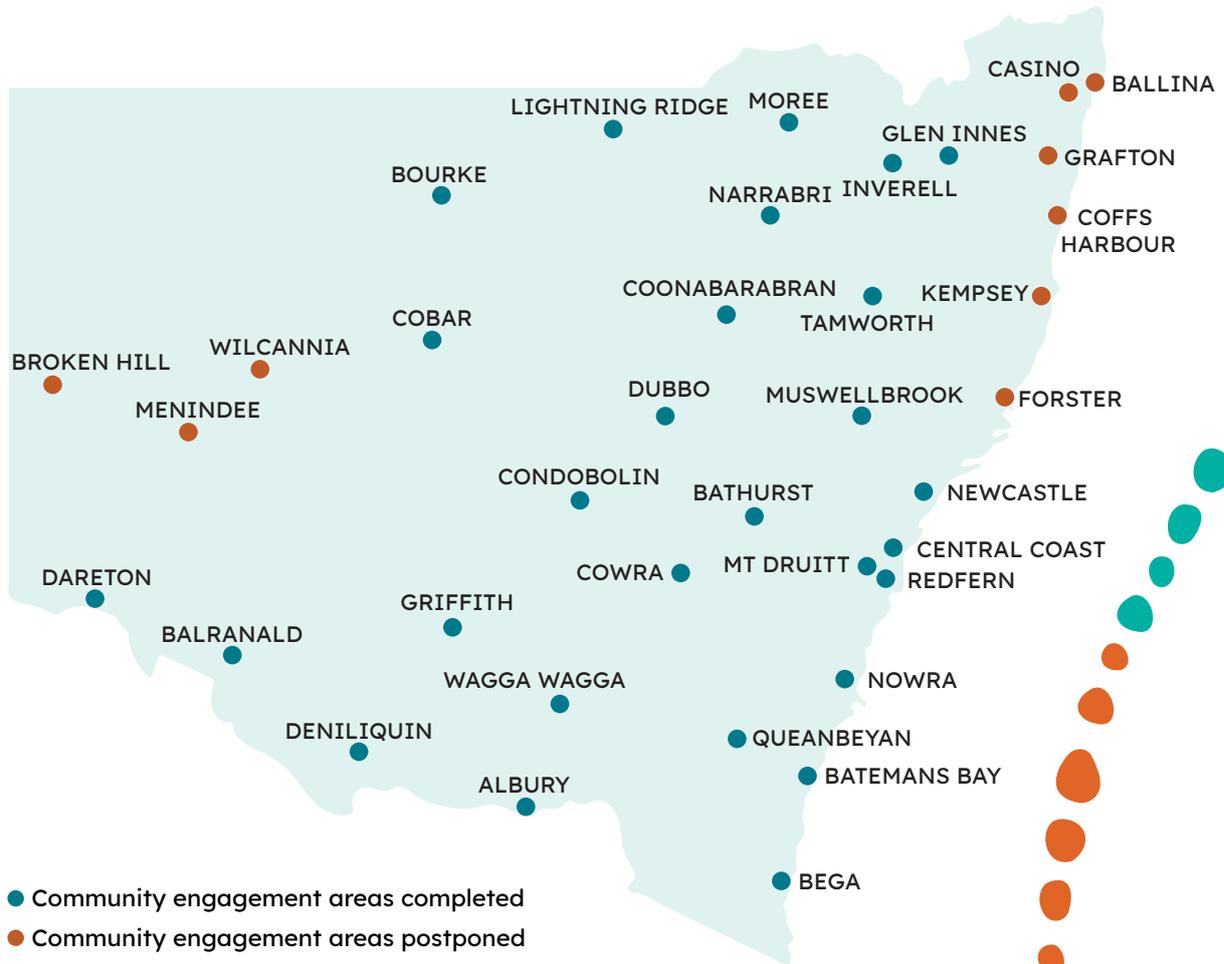
In all our work, we consider the unique circumstances, strengths, and needs of:

- People living in regional and remote areas
- Elderly Aboriginal people
- People living with disability
- Stolen Generation
- LGBTIQ+ people
- Women
- Young people



Who we heard from

In March 2022, we planned consultation sessions in over 35 communities across NSW. Despite bad weather and COVID, we managed to get to 28 communities and reach 393 people. It was wonderful to be back out in community, and we are grateful to everyone who took part.



Challenges experienced and lessons learned

We experienced multiple challenges and learned important lessons from the community engagement sessions. We asked for feedback during discussions and afterwards through short evaluation forms distributed at the end of each session. NSW CAPO is committed to continually improving our engagement with community, and we welcome further feedback. The main challenges and lessons learned from our engagement sessions are below.

Time

The consultations occurred on weekdays in March 2022, a time when some COVID restrictions and related health advice still applied. These health considerations may have influenced some people's decisions on whether to participate or not.

Our weekday sessions may also have been problematic for some people with weekday work, childcare or family commitments.

COVID-19

Despite implementing COVID-safe measures and providing rapid antigen tests, face masks and sanitiser for participants, the potential risk of infection for people living with or supporting kin with impacted health or chronic health conditions may have discouraged some from attending engagement session. As far as we know, there was no transmission of COVID at any of our consultations.

Severe weather

Unfortunately, we had to postpone consultations on the north coast and mid-north coast due to severe weather. NSW CAPO is planning to reschedule visits to these communities during our next round of community engagements. For areas dealing with ongoing flood recovery, dates will be decided in consultation with the community.

Sorry Business

Consultations planned for Broken Hill, Menindee and Wilcannia were postponed due to Sorry Business. NSW CAPO is committed to returning to these communities and will reschedule dates in consultation with community.

Venues and transport

NSW CAPO worked hard to reach as many communities as possible, including choosing locations that would allow travel from nearby towns. However, we understand that transport can be a major barrier for community, and this may have impacted attendance at sessions. For future engagements, we will work with community partners on transport options. We also acknowledge that some venues may not have been suitable for some members of community. We have been seeking advice about preferred venues for future consultations to enable greater participation.

Community engagement materials and information

We aim to provide community with useful information before and during consultation sessions. Although we provided resource material such as the Community Companion online ahead of the March 2022 sessions, there were challenges with providing these in an accessible and useful format ahead of the sessions. In future we will try to ensure that our presentations and supplementary materials are more visual and use simpler language, and that the questions asked are less complicated and more open ended.

Session format

We heard many suggestions about how to improve the consultation format, including longer sessions over multiple days, dedicated sessions for specific groups, and different structures. We will work to incorporate as many of these suggestions as practical.

Online survey

For those unable to attend face-to-face consultation sessions, we designed an online survey that replicates the list of questions. Unfortunately, the survey's length potentially put some people off completing it. For future consultations, the online survey will be shorter, while still covering all issues.

“It was a great day, I feel we were able to express our worries about service provision generally in our town, in a safe environment. This was an important day for us to be able to advocate for our community.”

“Due to the rain, representation wasn't high but conversations were informative.”

“I hate rushing subjects. We could have spent more time on some subjects. I think the facilitators were very good and knowledgeable.”

“Be nice to see some of our recommendations carried out.”

“Quite an informative day to gain knowledge into community input on a big cross section of CtG initiatives. There were many conversations which related to the questions posed, but some didn't.”

“Collaboration at all levels is key. We spent far too much precious resource(s) reinventing the wheel.”

“Have information sessions over a few days, bring back information to community, look at different hours. Eg: working mob or school hours. Transport for mob to attend.”

“More community consultations to capture all voices from across our region, making sure government listens to our Aboriginal voices. To make the changes for the betterment of our people moving forward into the future.”

What we heard from community

The next section of this report provides an overview of the feedback we heard at the community engagement sessions covering the 13 Focus Areas.

Focus Area 1: Partnerships

Focus Area 2: Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

Focus Area 3: Transforming Government

Focus Area 4: Data

Focus Area 5: Economic Prosperity

Focus Area 6: Health

Focus Area 7: Education

Focus Area 8: Justice

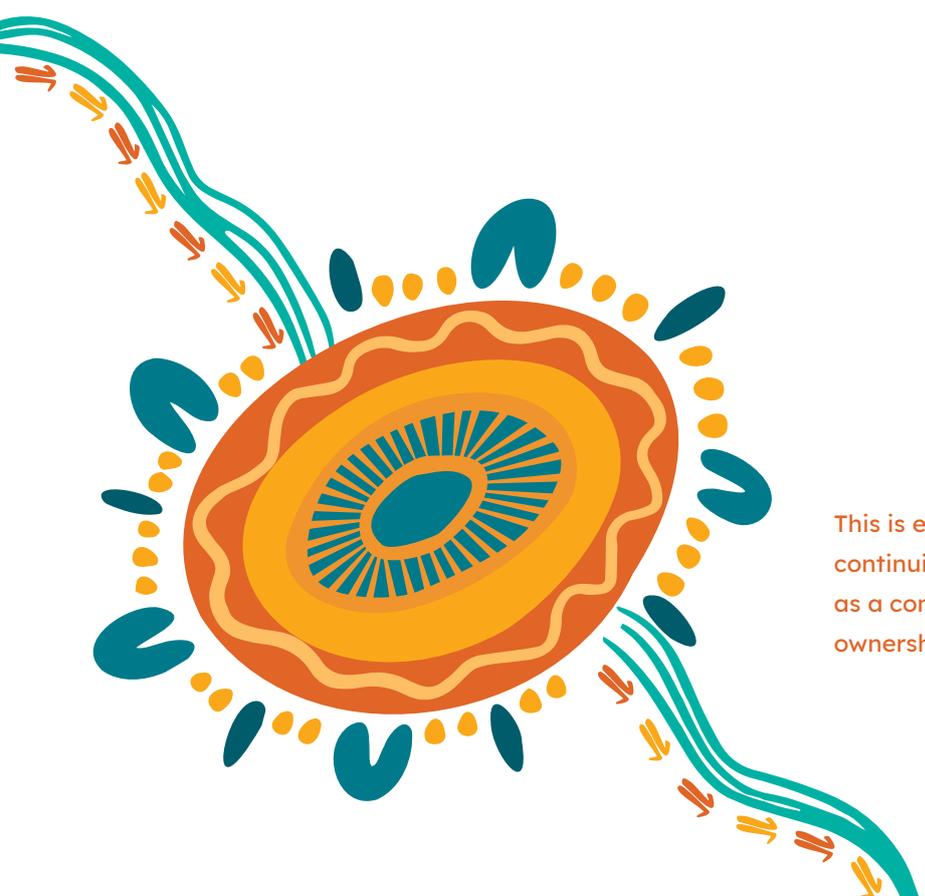
Focus Area 9: Families

Focus Area 10: Housing

Focus Area 11: Land & Water

Focus Area 12: Languages & Culture

Focus Area 13: Digital Inclusion



This element is about continuing to move forward as a community and taking ownership our own journey



Focus Area 1 - Partnerships

Priority Reform One: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

Building and strengthening structures to empower Aboriginal people to share decision-making with governments

Local partnerships that bring together local community organisations are needed

- There is a strong desire to see more place-based partnerships that operate using a similar model to NSW CAPO.
- Partnerships need to be based locally in individual communities, rather than regionally.
- Organisations should come together as consortiums of ACCOs working in partnership with government to further community priorities.
- Organisations involved in local partnerships must be community-controlled and actively involved in the community.

“Need to have our own CAPO body to get the things we want in our community.”

“We need to drop down these walls and work together to deliver the same outcomes.”

Community must take a lead role in creating partnerships to achieve true joint decision-making and self-determination

- Rather than having community representatives appointed by government, communities must lead.
- Partnerships need to be led “from the grassroots up, not the other way around”
- Decision-making for initial agenda-setting and establishing of partnership structures must be shared.
- Government organisations should not be using partnerships as a box-ticking exercise.
- Equal power sharing is essential for all decision-making involving partnerships.

“There’s people voicing their opinions and they don’t know us.”

“Partnerships need to be real, true and in balance.”

Accountability and transparency in partnerships is needed

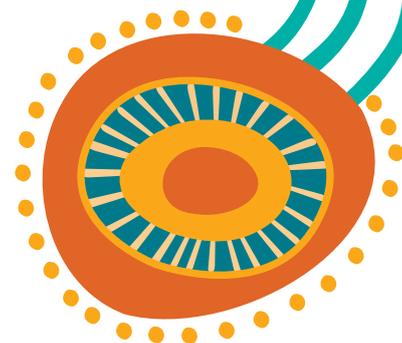
- Information must be shared equally with partners to ensure meaningful decision-making.
- Community must be informed and stay informed to make conscious decisions.
- More effective reporting back to community is needed about what is being done through partnerships.
- Some communities lack knowledge about what services partnerships are delivering, in some cases reflecting a lack of transparency.
- Communities want access to more information about how partnerships operate.
- There were concerns about a lack of accountability.

Partnerships must be sufficiently and fairly resourced to meet demands

- Funding arrangements should be designed collaboratively with partners to support equal power sharing.
- Funding must be spent appropriately in line with community interests.
- Positions in organisations should be adequately resourced to support partnerships on the ground.

Coordination across partnerships (NSW CAPO, government and community) must be improved

- Interaction between communities, government departments and organisations must be more cohesive and coordinated, avoiding duplication. Resources should be directed to existing structures that work for communities.
- An Aboriginal framework is needed to guide actions that will suit individual communities.
- Better interaction is needed between local partnerships and state-based policy or sector partnerships, with a greater emphasis on local partnerships.
- Partnerships need real power behind them, not just goodwill.



“Accountability and transparency in partnerships are needed”

“Funding is a big gap as well.”

“Making sure that funding that is spent is spent efficiently, rather than getting more funding.”

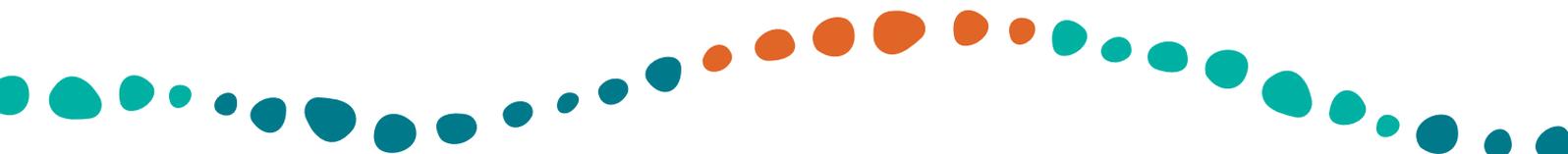
“Can’t get stuff done because people don’t talk to each other.”

“Partnerships need to have legislation or statutory authority behind it.”





Cultural capability in government is needed

- Many participants suggested that changes in government structures and processes were needed to ensure equality in partnerships and to demonstrate understanding of Aboriginal culture and the need for self-determination.
 - Cultural training and education for people in government could help increase their cultural competence. This issue is discussed further in Focus Area 3.
- 

Focus Area 2 – Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations

Priority Reform Two: Building the community-controlled sector

Building formal Aboriginal community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap



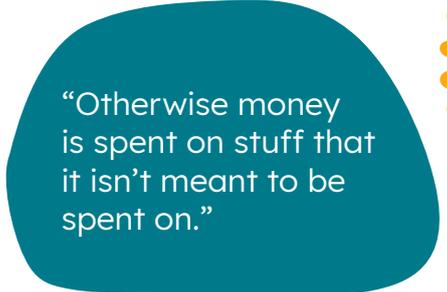
Transparency is needed around ACCOs' funding

- Concerns about non-Aboriginal services being funded, rather than ACCOs, were consistently raised.
- Government needs to be more accountable and transparent about the allocation of funding, particularly the funding of non-ACCOs to provide services to Aboriginal communities.
- There was strong support for service mapping to assist with increasing transparency about the allocation of funding.



Funding processes for ACCOs must be improved

- There was strong support for longer term funding contracts for ACCOs (minimum two years) to allow evidence gathering to support continued funding.
- ACCOs should be prioritised to have access to all Aboriginal funding.
- More community involvement is needed in designing funding contracts and services.



“Otherwise money is spent on stuff that it isn’t meant to be spent on.”



“We get grant funding but when it expires it expires and we must restart again. Nothing is consistent.”

Funding processes for ACCOs must be improved (continued)

- Strong support was expressed for a community role in redesigning key performance indicators (KPIs) for contracts, with less emphasis on KPIs and more on storytelling.

“[There] are KPIs put in that are quite hard to meet.”

- There was strong support for a centralised commissioning agency for ACCOs that was local and community-controlled.
- Government contracts need to recognise that ACCO-provided services are more holistic and therefore have higher costs, including the cost of having ACCO workers available to community members at all hours.
- Funding contracts need to be more flexible to allow service provision to community members who don't meet current eligibility requirements.
- ACCOs are often constrained by funding with “strings attached” for what they can and can't spend money on.
- Reporting burdens need to be reduced, in part through more consistent data requirements across government.

“Making sure that funding that is spent is spent efficiently, rather than getting more funding.”

“You clock on, you're there for everyone.”

Co-operation between ACCOs needs to be supported

- ACCOs working in isolation is an ongoing issue that could be addressed by the introduction of inter-agency meetings within areas.
- Competitive funding processes should be removed, allowing more cooperation between community organisations in service delivery.
- Communities need localised information about services.

“It is about creating a space, a forum where we can talk.”

“Government funding creates competition between people, as opposed to coming together for the good of everybody.”

Procurement and tendering process needs to be simplified

- The government procurement process could be simplified by removing ambiguity in application requirements.
- Support and sufficient resources should be provided to support needed for tender applications.
- Needs to be more government trust in the capabilities of ACCOs to deliver services.

“Not everyone out there is cluey to do these submissions or has the time...the process needs to be simpler.”

There is a need for employee upskilling

- Government should provide additional resourcing and targeted training to ACCO staff on how to navigate government processes and maximise efficiency.
- Specific skills need to be further developed across the ACCO sector, including data analysis, mental health first aid, and governance and finance.

Staff recruitment needs to be supported

- ACCO staff salaries and benefits need to be competitive with those in mainstream NGO and government sectors to encourage people to join and stay in ACCOs.
- Qualified Aboriginal staff end up applying for higher paying jobs in mainstream NGOs and government after receiving training in ACCOs.
- It was suggested that Enterprise Agreements for ACCOs should have award rates of pay on par with mainstream NGOs and government.

Support for smaller ACCOs is needed

- Consultative groups should be created to help smaller ACCOs obtain funding.
- More focus and support are needed for Aboriginal services.
- Contracts with ACCOs should include ways for ACCOs to build their capacity.

ACCO governance should be further improved

- While there was strong community support for ACCOs to deliver services, ACCOs also needed to:
 - Be open and transparent
 - Actively engage community
 - Ensure full community control
 - Have open membership

This element represents the many opportunities to come in our communities from the learnings shared in the key focus areas

“Expecting more and more with less and less.”

Focus Area 3 – Transformation

Priority Reform Three: Transforming government organisations

Systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve accountability and better respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Meaningful accountability is needed for government decision-making and service provision

- The strongest callout was for more accountability for government back to community:
 - A local and community-led mechanism is needed to hold government departments and agencies to account – rather than government holding themselves accountable.

“Accountability for Aboriginal organisations is a big thing, but attitudes from the mainstream government have to change too... we should be seeing that accountability from mainstream organisations.”

- Accountability is needed in everyday interactions. Complaints by Aboriginal people are being ignored, or not taken seriously. A more effective and independent system for raising issues is needed.

Transparency is needed in the allocation and use of funding

- More transparency is needed around how mainstream services receive and spend funding, and how the outcomes align with community needs.
- Organisations that provide Aboriginal services should have to tell ACCOs what funding they received.
- The need for clear ‘mapping’ of organisations that are funded, and what services they are meant to provide, was a recurring issue in consultation sessions

Government consultation with communities needs to be improved

- Consultation with communities must be meaningful – involving genuine listening rather than pre-determining outcomes.
- The consultation process must include reporting back to communities – ideally in person, not through an online report.

“No transparency or accountability with community.”

“Lots of people who don’t complain because no one is listening.”

“All the services need to be audited to check they are doing their job.”

Government consultation with communities needs to be improved (continued)

- There is a need to show how previous consultation has meaningfully influenced outcomes.
- Community should be well informed and empowered to drive the design of programs from the start – not just comment at the end.
- Work must be driven by what communities want, not by the government agenda.
- However, consultation is not a substitute for service delivery in full partnership.

“If you don’t consult properly, it’s nothing but tokenism.”

“Engagement has to be genuine and have a meaningful connection to the local community.”

Cultural competency needs to improve, and racism must be addressed

- When government agencies talk about Reconciliation Action Plans, these are just statements of goodwill – they don’t achieve outcomes.
- Changes are needed both in government organisations and the services they fund.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations delivering Aboriginal services are not culturally safe.
- Funding of mainstream organisations and institutions should be contingent on demonstrating cultural competency and safety.
- To be effective, cultural capability training must:
 - Involve mandatory and meaningful participation by all employees and staff, not just attendance
 - Be culturally immersive, tailored to local Aboriginal culture and delivered on Country include truth telling about Australia’s history and the impacts of colonisation
 - Include training about institutional racism
 - Build understanding of the issues affecting Aboriginal communities
 - Include communication skills, cross-cultural skills and cultural mentoring
 - Address structural racism in agencies, not just by individuals

“Same document with seven words reprocessed every year.”

Aboriginal employees in government need more support

- Government must ensure Aboriginal people are in positions of leadership and influence. It must also invest in young leaders.
- More local people should be employed in identified roles.
- The public service must be made culturally safe for Aboriginal employees.
- Cultural safety in recruitment processes should be increased through culturally accessible applications, training staff on the job, and more emphasis on lived experience.
- Improvements are needed in professional development, cultural support and cultural safety. This can be partly achieved with appropriate ways for staff to raise issues, and appropriate understanding of cultural considerations.
- Short 6-12-month contracts are a barrier.

“Maritime trained me, ticked the box, then got rid of me!”

Clarity on who is eligible for identified positions/services is needed

- Governments need to be clearer on the purposes of identified roles.
- Candidates for identified positions need appropriate cultural skills, knowledge and connections, not just identification as Aboriginal.
- Newly identified Aboriginal people are not suitable to give cultural guidance to young Aboriginal people.

“Heritage is not culture.”

Focus Area 4 – Data, Reporting and Evaluation

Priority Reform Four: Shared access to data and information in regions

Enable shared access to location-specific data and information to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to achieve the first three Priority Reforms

Data should be put into the hands of community

- Community needs access to data that is relevant to them.

“We have been asking for years for government to provide data about Walgett – service mapping, where the money is going so that we can analyse and put together arguments for reallocation of funds.”

- Community are hesitant to share data with government due to a lack of access and sharing.

“What we are dealing with is a gatekeeper mentality. That mission manager syndrome.”

- Community want access to data to help improve service delivery and empower their people.
- Community ownership of community data is a priority.
- Institutional racism and the legacy of colonialism are constraining data access and fuelling mistrust of government.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance must be implemented

- There was strong support in community for Indigenous Data Sovereignty and control and ownership of data about Aboriginal people. This includes access to government-held data as well as creation of community data, and sharing data with communities so Aboriginal people own and control how data is used.
- Data collected should reflect the interests of the community it relates to, rather than the interests of government. Aboriginal people’s rights to collect their own data and their custodianship of that data should be recognised, as well as access to and control over the use of government-held data.



“Data has been weaponised and used against us.”

“Data put into the hands of the community. They are the custodians.”

“More control over what our people’s needs are through data.”



Data literacy and capability must be expanded

- Simpler language is needed to explain data concepts.

“Could we explain them in a simpler way – use simpler words – (not) words like ecosystem and disaggregation.”

- Community needs resources to provide data education and specialist training.

“You need good data people – good quality data analysts in our organisations to analyse our own data. There also needs to be a huge effort to change the way government collects data.”

- More local employment opportunities are needed.
- Community want to set the standards for community data projects.

Strengths-based data analysis and reporting is important

- Community want data that is culturally responsive and protective, respecting individual and collective interests.
- Community want to see data that doesn't compare to the non-Indigenous community and data that isn't deficit-based.
- Community need data that provides a holistic narrative of their lived experience.

Formal partnerships should be set up to support data needs

- Communities need formal partnerships with government agencies that reciprocate data sharing.
- Partnerships need to be place-based.
- Smaller towns are disadvantaged on data access due to their remoteness.
- Data that reflects and recognises the diverse and distinct needs of individual communities is needed.

“That is where the gap is – sharing.”

“Retain science that our culture has had for 60,000 years.”

“Data is always focused on the negative. Be good to focus on the strengths – like this principle as well as it is about protection of our data.”

“There are some occasions – Regional Assemblies – where we are reporting on activities with certain providers where data would be shared with community but this is rare.”

Formal partnerships should be set up to support data needs (continued)

- Government staff should be trained to support Aboriginal and ACCOs to meet community data needs.
- Formal partnerships between Aboriginal peak bodies and local ACCOs are needed to support data access.

Funding for community data projects will help build the ACCO sector

- ACCOs need sufficient resourcing for data projects.
- Current competitive funding models can be problematic.

“Not always fair as applying for grants is competitive.”

- Local communities need local data.
- ACCOs need their own data analysts.
- ACCOs need adequate databases that collect, capture and report on live data.

“If we were to have more data experts in government, it would be to change the system and to support Aboriginal people and ACCOs in their data needs and their resourcing bodies... not to have more gatekeepers.”

“Need to recognise that a big investment is needed to ensure data is fit for purpose – our purpose as ACCOs is not governments.”

Focus Area 5 – Economic Prosperity

Priority Reform Five: Employment, business growth and economic prosperity

Socio-Economic Outcome 8 – strong economic participation and development

Building economic prosperity in communities

- Economic prosperity needs to be approached holistically, from the individual level through to the whole community.
- Communities need a coordinated approach, with a Community Plan for future development including employment opportunities.

Building economic prosperity in communities (continued)

- Businesses need to work with communities when making decisions that impact Aboriginal people, including listening to the needs and aspirations of community and relinquishing decision-making control to work in genuine partnership.
- Building economic knowledge and financial literacy within communities is critical to ensuring intergenerational wealth and economic prosperity.
- Home ownership is a key indicator of economic prosperity.

Aboriginal small businesses need more support

- Aboriginal small businesses need greater opportunities, including opportunities to be on government provider and supplier lists.
- Greater access to resources is needed to support Aboriginal small businesses to apply for contracts, including breaking down larger contracts for multiple small businesses.
- Fees for services provided, including sharing cultural knowledge, should continue to be normalised and encouraged.
- Small businesses need greater access to services, information sharing and resources, including assistance with navigating contracts, agreements and policies.
- More support and resources are needed for Aboriginal people starting businesses.

Improved education pathways are needed

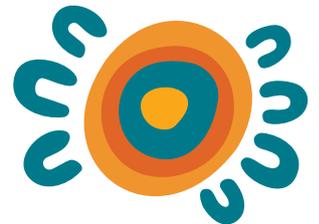
- Participants said targeted training programs and employment pathways need to be included in the curriculum for Year 11 and 12 students.
- A culturally safe pathway between high school and TAFE or university is needed for Aboriginal students.
- Training and upskilling programs need to lead to ongoing and sustainable employment outcomes.
- TAFE Connected Learning Centres support students to remain in community while studying and can support employment based on local job demand. This should be encouraged and readily available across the state.



“Financial literacy should be the heart of that [economic prosperity].”

“No one can prosper unless they have somewhere safe to live.”

“If they have to apply for the same criteria, it has to be broken down... [for] the small Aboriginal-based businesses – so they can have a bite of the same cherry as the metro and regionals...”



“We can have localised solutions.”

Employment support needs to be more accessible and culturally safe

- Application processes should be culturally safe, with Aboriginal-specific support for job applications, including supporting those with barriers – such as having no identification.
- More targeted and clearly identified positions are needed in businesses and organisations to support increased Aboriginal participation.
- Individuals and businesses need capacity-building options including support services, tax guides and salary sacrifice options, while support that is already available needs to be more accessible.
- Local Aboriginal workers should get priority for jobs in communities.
- Businesses and organisations need cultural protocols to make workplaces safe and supportive of Aboriginal employees' needs and aspirations.
- Individuals need training and upskilling for jobs available in their communities; this includes pathways to formal accreditations and licences

“I don't think people are aware of how much assistance and help they can get.”

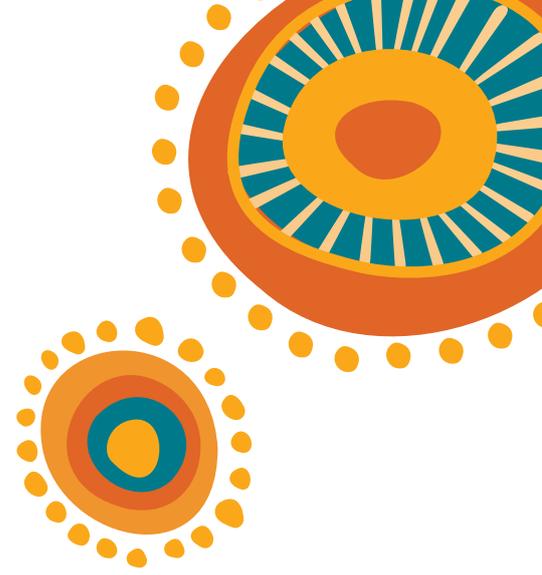
“Need to be supported in a culturally safe space.”

An Aboriginal-run One-Stop Shop would support Economic Prosperity

- Consultation participants expressed support for an Aboriginal one-stop-shop that:
 - Provides the Aboriginal community with local decision-making authority and the capacity for local solutions.
 - Is based in regional and remote areas, with employment support, Centrelink or welfare services, childcare, and health support.
 - Connects existing services and promotes access to culturally safe, Aboriginal businesses, organisations, and service providers, including through service mapping.
 - Evaluates existing services and initiatives, enabling less duplication of services and redirection of funding to appropriate providers.

Aboriginal procurement processes need to support Aboriginal businesses

- Procurement processes need to support Aboriginal businesses by:
 - Ensuring large contracts are culturally safe and can be split to allow access for smaller businesses, while requiring a greater percentage allocation to Aboriginal businesses.
 - Ensuring tenders are culturally appropriate, and that tender panels have Aboriginal representation.
 - Regularly evaluating government tendering and procurement processes to ensure they are supporting Aboriginal people, businesses, and communities.
 - Assessing Aboriginal employment percentages over time to guarantee genuine accountability. Aboriginal employment percentages need to require a local ratio to support local Aboriginal employment.



Focus Area 6 - Health

Socio-Economic Outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 14

1. People enjoy long and healthy lives
2. Children are born strong and healthy
4. Children thrive in their early years
14. Social and emotional wellbeing

Institutional racism and discrimination in mainstream health services and community settings must be addressed

- Many Aboriginal people face racism and discrimination when accessing mainstream health services. Communities said mainstream service providers needed to accept and address unconscious bias and cultural incompetence.
- Services do not have to be Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) to be culturally safe; mainstream services can provide culturally appropriate care by developing good relationships with communities and demonstrating integrity and respect.
- Mainstream services also need to be culturally safe to attract and retain more Aboriginal health workers.



Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) must be central to service delivery and well resourced

- Communities identified community-controlled services as their preferred primary care providers.
- Current funding models are too prescriptive, with commissioning bodies dictating how Aboriginal services run their programs when ACCHOs are best placed to determine community needs.
- The absence of long-term funding for services makes them unsustainable in remote areas. While local AMSs or ACCHOs may be in high demand, they are not sufficiently resourced to meet the needs of large service areas.
- Aboriginal-specific funding should be going directly to ACCHOs and not mainstream services. It should also be long-term, not piecemeal.
- ACCHOs should be leading conversations around Aboriginal health, including with government services in other sectors such as justice, to support holistic care.
- ACCHOs need resources and training for workforce development and support with governance.

More work needs to be done to build the Aboriginal Health Workforce

- ACCHOs face significant challenges in attracting and retaining Aboriginal health workers, particularly in regional and remote areas. Specialists tend to be difficult to find locally (particularly specialists in child health, optical, and drug and alcohol). ACCHOs also must compete for specialists against mainstream services that provide competitive wages and accommodation subsidies.
- ACCHOs need more skilled workers to enable better service delivery, particularly in the social and emotional wellbeing field.
- Aboriginal people are under-represented among employees of mainstream health providers delivering services to community. A skills audit of community organisations and NGOs should be undertaken.

“As a general principal, health services for Aboriginal people should be delivered by AMSs.”



Culturally responsive mental health and suicide prevention services are urgently needed, particularly for young people

- More mental health services are needed in communities across NSW. Participants emphasised the need for suicide prevention, amid increasing suicide rates in many communities.
- Culturally safe social and emotional wellbeing programs are needed, particularly for our young people, people living with disability and people living with addiction.

“Our young people are lost and isolated suffering from mental health issues and need to be educated, empowered and provided with a sense of belonging.”

Limited access to health services in remote locations is a major barrier to care, with long distance travel cited as a big issue

- Health services in many regional and remote Aboriginal communities are limited. This requires long distance travel to larger regional centres for medical appointments.
- For many community members, the costs of travelling for medical appointments – petrol, bus tickets and in some cases accommodation – prevent access to good health care. Many serious illnesses are not diagnosed until it’s too late.
- Transport solutions are urgently needed for people without local access to health care. Vouchers for transport and accommodation could be a helpful option.

Communities need more local Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) programs that are linked with justice and other social services

- Aboriginal people are being incarcerated rather than given the mental health or AOD support that they need.
- Participants cited a shortage of local, culturally safe AOD programs and facilities. There were long wait times to access rehab services, and many had to seek treatment off Country.



Communities need more local Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) programs that are linked with justice and other social services (continued)

- Rehab services need to be holistic and support successful transition back into community. Access to 'wrap-around support' is essential and can help reduce risks associated with reoffending.
- Additional support directed through local AMS providers can provide culturally safe support to Aboriginal people experiencing drug addiction. Simple interventions, such as staff from a local AMS attending court and alternative magistrate programs, have been effective and should be expanded to other locations.
- Holistic AOD services are needed for expecting mothers, including skilled clinicians to diagnose fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD).

“When someone goes to rehab, they come back out again into the same environment with no work and no housing, so nothing changes for them.”

Focus Area 7 - Education

Socio-Economic Outcomes 3, 5, 6 and 7

3. Early childhood education is high quality and culturally appropriate
5. Students achieve their full learning potential
6. Students reach further education pathways
7. Youth are engaged in education or employment

“All the stories and comments have been said before...”

“There are umpteen examples from nearly every family, they need to be acted on.”

Students face racism and a lack of cultural safety at school

- Racism was highlighted at most locations as a major reason why Aboriginal students remain disadvantaged in school education. Racism is systemic, institutionalised and direct. Aboriginal students are bullied, segregated and harassed by other students, staff and, often, the principal.

“There is rising racism, it is very hard to reverse racism.”

“[They] put all the Koori kids in the lowest class.”

“Found notes in classrooms saying, ‘don’t let the Aboriginal kids use these.’”

- Students have been pigeon-holed for generations

“I taught your father; I taught your mother; I know what you’re like.”

“My kid’s trauma comes from school, same stuff that we had to put up with in school.”

- Students are not attending school because they feel unsafe.

“[Students have] no sense of connection or feeling culturally safe in school environment.”

“Teachers telling them to act white to fit into a white world.”

- Communities say racist principals are being protected and moved between schools, creating a vicious cycle that fails to address racist behaviour.

“I don’t want the principal to change my life and worry about what I am doing... I want you to cater to my kid when they walk through that gate.”

“The principals are a protected species.”

“The problem is the power imbalance between principals and families because of DOCs and the threat of child removal...”

More support is needed to address barriers faced by Aboriginal students

- The education system does not cater for the needs of Aboriginal students.

“You look at the system and it is not designed for the needs of our kids.”

“The system is deliberately made to fail our Aboriginal kids.”

“I’d love to see in school suspension”

- Many teachers who try alternative methods to teach Aboriginal students face repercussions.
- Students living with disability are not adequately supported or catered for.
- Long distances between remote communities and schools, the lack of affordable transport options, and the cost of living present significant barriers to school education for many children.
- Many families do not have digital devices or internet at home, and parents lack the digital skills to support their children when schools deliver learning online or require students to bring their own devices.

“There’s a lot of good ones [teachers] but they can’t do what they want to do.”

“What do you have to cut out in order to run the car to get to and from work”.

“Everything is in a digital world now.”

“Expecting families to support the young ones to use these resources but they were never given the upskills to do so.”

Aboriginal staff experience barriers too

- Aboriginal staff in schools are targeted, bullied and harassed. In several communities, principals were seen as the main barrier.
- Aboriginal workers in some schools have been let go for trying to do things differently.

“Because we weren’t the yes people, they got rid of us and the next minute they got white people doing our jobs. Said we were too friendly with the kids.”

Aboriginal staff experience barriers too (continued)

- Aboriginal teachers are time poor, overworked and burnt out.

“AEOs do more work than some teachers and aren’t rewarded. These roles provide connections with Aboriginal families and encourage students to stay in schools. AEOs don’t get offered housing – they work out of school hours, on the weekend, supporting families.”

- Aboriginal staff are threatened with losing their jobs and sometimes struggle to juggle community expectations and working within the school.

“People don’t want to lose their job and they can’t lose their job”

“Nothing has changed, basically, the principal owns the school.”

Culturally capable school staff are in short supply

- Some communities indicated that teaching staff lacked the cultural capabilities to successfully teach and engage Aboriginal students.
- Staff cannot be trained in cultural capability with a ‘box ticking’ one-size-fits-all approach. Each school community has its own cultural protocols.
- Staff seeking promotions should have to undergo additional cultural training and be able to demonstrate cultural knowledge.

“Got to have someone with experience, patience and knowledge of the community.”

- Cultural capability training should be compulsory for all staff and should be ongoing and monitored.

“Keeping people accountable – it is not just about us doing it all.”

“If governments don’t change the way they work, then there is never going to be any change.”



Culturally capable school staff are in short supply (continued)

- Some Aboriginal school staff lack the cultural knowledge to teach culture.

“How are they able to culturally teach our kids? I thought that is how we are identified... that we say that.”

“We’re not born with culture, we are grown up with it.”

- Rural/remote areas need experienced teachers, not new scheme teachers.

Aboriginal kids can’t be what they can’t see

- Aboriginal teachers are underrepresented in schools.

“Aboriginal kids can’t be what they can’t see.”

- Schools need more Aboriginal front office staff as the ‘face of the school’, as well as Aboriginal counsellors.
- In some schools, students say the Aboriginal teachers are not ‘there for them’ but stick with the system.

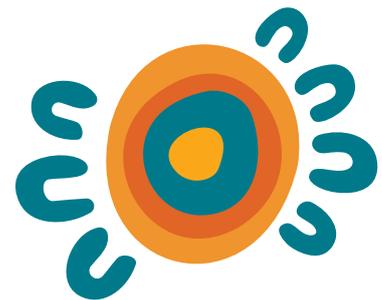
Successful schools engage with their local Aboriginal community and students

- Teachers need to immerse themselves in community, taking more time getting to know and building a rapport with students and their families.

“That’s the problem at the schools. The teachers don’t know the dynamics of the families where the children are coming from.”

“We want teachers out here who want to be out here, not to tick a box.”

“What are you doing... ticking boxes? Or engaging with our children?” – “They need the most help.”



“A lot of staff just walk through the gate and worry about ticking those boxes.”

Successful schools engage with their local Aboriginal community and students (continued)

- Parents need to be informed when children do positive things. Good schools are engaged with community.
- Schools are associated with many bad memories. Aboriginal families are scared to go into schools, particularly principals' offices.
- Government departments are failing to learn and utilise cultural protocols in each community.
- There must be local involvement in Aboriginal education policy design.
- Principals should be accountable to local communities.

“Aboriginal parents, they have the power if they all come together to hold that school to account, they are the ones who can say that to the principals.”

Curriculum needs to be tailored to the needs of Aboriginal students

- Aboriginal children need to see themselves in the curriculum, identify with it and see the relevance.

“When I was a kid, we didn't have any images of Aboriginal people - we need to start looking at how we represent the diversity of Aboriginal people.”

“Every single school should have a cultural immersion program - to become a natural design within the curriculum.”

“Gorokan High School - they have introduced language - could be a model that is followed in other places.”

- Mainstream learning doesn't support the students - there is no cultural component.

“It doesn't suit what is happening in this day and age.”

“You look at the system and it is not designed for the needs of our kids.”

- Aboriginal children need more outdoor learning.

“Listening to community, providing a supportive environment, with rapport between families, children, and school.”

“We didn't have a say in that.”



“They need to learn outside.”

Curriculum needs to be tailored to the needs of Aboriginal students (continued)

- Resources in schools need to be more culturally appropriate.
- The Personal Learning Plan (PLP) process is not being followed up throughout the year.
- Stronger pathways are needed for students' ongoing education and employment.

More support is needed for early childhood

- Mainstream pre-schools are problematic. More Aboriginal owned and run pre-schools are needed. However, cost is an issue.
- Resources in mainstream pre-schools are too western and do not cater for Aboriginal children. We need customisation of cultural programs and Aboriginal people implementing them. Aboriginal-run centres can embed language, community members and culture into everyday practice.
- Aboriginal pre-schools don't have enough places to meet demand, and don't offer as many services as they used to (such as transport, meals, subsidies with no means testing).
- Disability and neuro-divergence among children are not being picked up, leading some children to be already behind by the time they enter school.
- The 1-10 ratio of teachers to students in departmental pre-schools is insufficient, especially when some children live with disability. More funding is needed.
- Support around transition to school for children with a diagnosis is lacking, and levels of support between schools are inconsistent.
- Pre-schoolers arrive full of enthusiasm and culture. But in the first five years of school, many kids are turned off and are no longer learning. They end up graduating from primary school, behind by 3-4 years relative to mainstream learning.

"They are so western-centric, they are not framed for our kids."

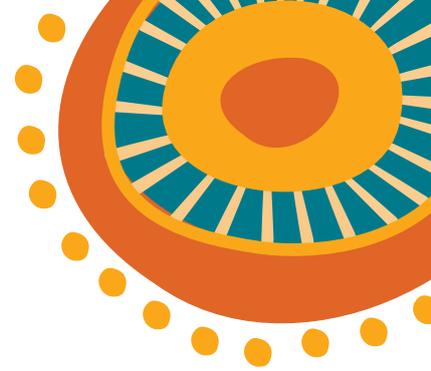
"To be able to be given opportunities to study things that might interest them."

"People say it's because you're Aboriginal, not because there might be underlying issues."

Focus Area 8 – Justice

Socio-Economic Outcomes 10, 11 and 13

10. Adults are not overrepresented in the justice system
11. Young people are not overrepresented in the justice system
13. Families and households are safe



More focus is needed on community-led prevention and early assistance programs

- Prevention needs to be prioritised – we need to make sure people aren't forced into the criminal justice system in the first place.
- There are great local programs, but they lack long-term funding.
- Programs that integrate connection to culture and Country are effective and require additional support.
- More support is needed for families and youth to help address issues before kids get locked up.
- Schools should be better equipped to identify at-risk young people so they can access support services early.

“Prevention needs to be prioritised – sick of funding going to corrections.”

Systemic racism and discriminatory practices across justice agencies, particularly police, must be addressed

- Police discrimination and harassment, including racial profiling, aggressive and antagonistic practices, and over-policing, are serious issues that are impacting communities.
- People are reluctant to call police because they're worried they'll be targeted or not listened to.
- Police and justice agencies need much better ongoing training, including on cultural awareness, mental health, disability and understanding trauma.
- Need to strengthen the role of Police Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers, including 24/7 availability and a presence in more locations.
- Accountability needs improvement at all levels – there might be goodwill at the top but not on the ground. Police shouldn't be investigating police.

“[You] can't walk up the street without the coppers pulling you over and asking you who you are, where you're going and what you are doing.”

“If I can't rely on the police to do anything who is going to do something?”

“There is still endemic racism in all government institutions.”

Need for better access to culturally appropriate legal support and bail

- There is a lack of trust in mainstream legal services.
- Aboriginal people need culturally appropriate and safe legal advocacy support.
- Gaps in services in many areas prevent access to appropriate legal and related support.
- Many people aren't getting bail or have difficult bail conditions that set them up to be breached.
- More support is needed to help people access bail and avoid remand.

“We don't have services in our community designed for Aboriginal people.”

“Bail conditions setting them up to fail – kid can't associate with his cousin.”



Greater support is needed for people leaving prison to ensure they don't return

- Many people leaving prison have little or no support for mental health, employment, and access to services, education and training.
- Not providing support for people leaving prison sets them up to fail.
- Community-led programs promoting culture and connection to Country need to be more widely available.
- Young people leaving detention need more support.

Holistic approaches are needed to address underlying issues including mental health, disability, unemployment, education and drug and alcohol misuse

- The current system is disconnected and needs to be more holistic and integrated.
- Mental health problems impact many people interacting with the criminal justice system. Support options need to be better integrated.
- Disability must be better considered and supported throughout all parts of the justice system.
- Services need a greater focus on trauma and its impacts.
- There is a lack of culturally appropriate alcohol and other drug treatment programs.
- People leaving prison require greater support to enter employment, education and training.

Keeping children and youth out of the legal system must be prioritised

- The youth justice system is failing Aboriginal young people and needs a complete overhaul.
- Once young people are caught up in the youth justice system, it's hard to break out of.
- Detention doesn't address social and economic issues – it amplifies them.
- Children shouldn't be locked up; they should be supported and cared for.
- More is needed to address the complex needs of young people, including mental health, disability, trauma and educational inclusion.

“These are the sorts of men and women that come through my door. Connect them to a doctor, get them those wrap-around services, support them with their mental health – the main issue is, they don't have a home...”

“[There] needs to be a more holistic approach – people can get referred but the access is limited.”

“[Government] can't get stuff done because people don't talk to each other.”

“Kids will be branded as having behavioural problems but no one addresses this or asks why.”

“What is the point of that program if these young people and adults are still getting incarcerated?”

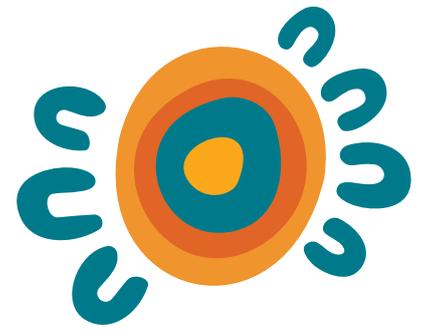
Local decision-making and accountability mechanisms, involving Elders and respected community members in the justice system, are needed

- Communities need decision-making power at the local level.
- Proper platforms for people with lived experience of the justice system must have input into laws and programs.
- Stronger mechanisms are needed to hold government and service providers accountable.
- Initiatives that involve the community in court processes, such as Circle Sentencing and the Youth Koori Court, are highly effective and should be expanded.

“Circle sentences...is working...they should be brought to our area.”

“[We] need a consistent voice to advocate on our issues.”

“You’re not telling us what works, we’re telling you what works.”



Community-controlled initiatives need support

- Community-controlled organisations are more trusted by Aboriginal people and often deliver better services.
- Local programs and groups are doing great work, but struggle to compete with larger organisations for funding.
- Funding must be long term to give organisations certainty.
- Don’t reinvent the wheel - we should better support programs that are already working.
- Community organisations can’t compete with the salaries of government or mainstream services, making it hard to retain staff.

“Where community is doing work to address justice issues by addressing the underlying factors...the savings need to be redirected to support the positive work.”

Solutions to prevent family and domestic violence must be led by Aboriginal people and communities, with a focus on long-term and generational change

- Priority must be given to preventative initiatives to stop violence ever occurring, or to address it early.
- We need a more integrated service system that better supports recovery, healing and positive outcomes for Aboriginal people.
- Solutions need to be focused on women, and led by Aboriginal communities.
- There aren’t enough programs to support young men in harmful or cyclical environments.

“When you look at funding you can only get short term - 2-3 years and then all of a sudden that program is not there anymore. That is disheartening and puts our mob backwards...”

“[Because of] our history here...our women don’t report [to police].”



Focus Area 9 – Families

Socio-Economic Outcome 2

Aboriginal children are not over-represented in the child protection system

Investment in the strengths and expertise of local communities and Aboriginal culture is needed to make real change

- Local communities are experts. Change needs to be designed by them and for them, with a focus on communities and Aboriginal culture.

“[We need to] go back to our traditional way of caring and rearing.”

“The investment in our community is what’s needed.”

- Local community knowledge and expertise can be better utilised to keep children safe. Communities are doing this but are being undermined by the child protection system.
- Self-determination and community control of child protection processes are needed. Government and non-government organisations must be accountable to communities.
- Communities understand the gaps, weaknesses and issues in local services and supports. They are passionate about using their knowledge to make improvements.

“[When a child is unsafe] it shouldn’t be DOCS’ decision, it should be made by a cultural, inclusive family decision.”

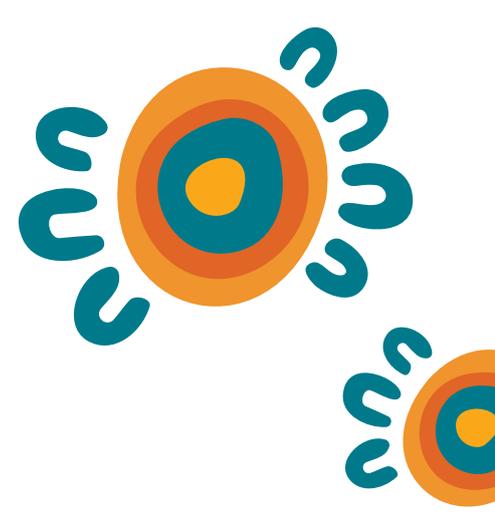
“As a community, if we know a child is going to be removed – if we know that the child is in danger, we can support that family. But right now what is really apparent is the undermining of community. Our voices are falling on deaf ears.”

Holistic and culturally safe support is needed for Aboriginal children and families to thrive

- Communities need a new model of Aboriginal child protection. Its focus should be on holistic, culturally safe, and appropriate family support, early intervention, restoration and kinship care. It should avoid permanently removing Aboriginal children through guardianship and adoption.



“Empower the community to holistically take care of our own mob.”



Holistic and culturally safe support is needed for Aboriginal children and families to thrive (continued)

- Greater focus is needed on supporting families with culturally embedded, strengths-based approaches to child protection. Parents and carers should not have to be on the books of the child protection system to access support.

“The focus is at the bottom when people are falling off the cliff, why isn’t it at the start? Why isn’t the aim strengthening our families?”

- An emphasis on holistic support is needed. Services for families are lacking, and there are significant barriers to accessing those available. More funding for family support and early intervention can save spending – for example, in criminal justice.
- Aboriginal families face child protection issues because of entrenched and intergenerational challenges such as family and personal trauma, poverty, and socio-economic disadvantage. But families are not supported to deal with these challenges. One participant cited eradication of poverty as an important goal.
- Aboriginal families are punished for their resilience. For example, some face issues with housing and Centrelink when family members share their homes to support each other and manage their finances, in breach of ‘arbitrary rules’.

“Families are more worried about staying afloat, ensuring kids are looked after.”

- All Aboriginal children and young people need access to culturally appropriate supports.
- Aboriginal children in care need more supports to help them with mental health issues and trauma, and to avoid them ending up in the criminal justice system after they emerge from care.
- We need more coordination between services, teams of Aboriginal experts to respond to the needs of Aboriginal children and families, and better funding for local services to work proactively with families.



“All our mob not living in poverty. Progressing as a family unit.”

“Not let them fall through the cracks.”

“God forbid they have any mental health issues when they get to teenage years as there is no support there.”

“Are they really in a position to deal with a world full of trauma and cultural disconnection?”

Holistic and culturally safe support is needed for Aboriginal children and families to thrive (continued)

- Children removed from their families have high rates of fetal alcohol syndrome and disabilities.
- Families need holistic supports to prevent and respond to child protection involvement, including:
 - Advocacy on cultural identity, social and emotional wellbeing, early intervention, drugs and alcohol, life and parenting skills.
 - Support for parents and children living with domestic violence, education and employment opportunities for children, young people and parents.
 - Housing, and transitional and emergency accommodation.
 - Culturally appropriate health services
 - Intensive family support services available for longer timeframes than current models
 - Transport to access services
 - Culturally safe antenatal, birth, post-natal and parenting care and support.
 - Refuges, retreats and other empowering cultural, holistic support for Aboriginal men.

[Men's emotional and psychological struggles are sometimes] "coming out in an unhealthy way [through domestic violence] and then that stays and follows them through the generations."

The child protection system needs fundamental change to stop harming Aboriginal children, families and communities

- Fundamental problems with the child protection system have not been changed by past initiatives. High rates of removals of Aboriginal children from their families perpetuate the Stolen Generations tragedy. Many families are afraid to seek support because of historical and ongoing removals.
- The child protection system is not accountable for its continual failures. Caseworkers face no consequences for bad decisions, and Aboriginal children are often abused in out-of-home care. Some people want a Royal Commission.

"We can't do good case management and take care of families if they don't have a roof over their head."

"It's got to start at the antenatal support [to empower Aboriginal parents] to have healthy babies and establish healthy families."

"Current models are set up to fail – fail our kids and our communities."

The child protection system needs fundamental change to stop harming Aboriginal children, families and communities (continued)

- the Stolen Generations. It is easier for non-Aboriginal carers to get guardianship orders than Aboriginal carers.
- Aboriginal guardians lack support
“So [Aboriginal children] go back into the system or become homeless – the cycle continues.”
- Cultural, community-led solutions are needed, such as Aboriginal community-controlled advisory committees, Elder advisory groups, and Aboriginal staff. While the Department of Communities and Justice claims to have Aboriginal staff, this is not reflected in how the system works. Instead, ‘government decides culture’ when it comes to removal of Aboriginal children.
- The Department of Communities and Justice needs to change. Racism and bias lead to child protection intervention. Instead of respecting and honouring the strengths of Aboriginal cultures, the system discriminates against Aboriginal people and expects them to assimilate.

Practice and process improvements based in culture will improve the system

- Practice and process changes could improve the child protection system and better honour the strengths of Aboriginal people, communities and cultures.
- Aboriginal children in care need to maintain connection to family, community and culture. The Aboriginal Child Placement Principle needs to be better implemented.
- Investment is needed in family finding, kinship care, and recruitment and support for Aboriginal carers.
- There is little support for family and community-led decision-making regarding the safety and placement of Aboriginal children.
- The system needs to proactively support families from the moment a report is made. It also needs to honour cultural processes.

“That’s not right... another word for Stolen Generations.”

“[Community] culture should sit over everything.”

“As an Aboriginal person, do we start to get a label straight away?”

“It should be the primary goal of every child when they are placed in care.”

“They’re on our country. We need to be consulted.”

Practice and process improvements based in culture will improve the system (continued)

- Lack of coordination among service providers and caseworkers means children and families often miss out. Workers threaten to remove children without working with the parents.
- Better case management is needed. For example, some children are left in unsafe placements, and cultural plans are ineffective in non-Aboriginal placements. Cultural plans could be audited to help overcome such issues.
- Caseworkers often fail to understand kinship and community processes.
- Other process and practice issues cited by participants included:
 - No recognition that parents can change
 - De-identification of children
 - Separating siblings
 - Policy changes and inconsistency in what parents and carers are told about court orders
 - Too much money for carers leading to vexatious reports
 - Lack of support for restoration
 - Inappropriate use of payments.
- There's 'no rhyme or reason' why some children are removed, and others are not.
- Some community members had good working relationships with the Department of Communities and

Localised, culturally appropriate services and a skilled Aboriginal workforce are needed

- ACCOs and Aboriginal workers are important – but there is also a role for non-Aboriginal organisations and staff.
- Communities want ACCOs, not mainstream organisations, delivering child and family services, including early intervention and out-of-home care.
- ACCOs need to be better resourced and listened to. Aboriginal units in non-Aboriginal organisations secure funding more easily.

“Our mob puts all the mattresses out on the ground, but they come in and freak out.”

“They don't take into consideration the wider community that are still considered part of the family.”

“How can we stop our kids coming into the child protection when those services aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing?”

Localised, culturally appropriate services and a skilled Aboriginal workforce are needed (continued)

- Funding restrictions mean that ACCOs go above and beyond their contracts to support families and advocate for change.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations that provide key services to Aboriginal communities could improve their standards and outcomes by having more Aboriginal staff and training Aboriginal workers. Key services to many communities currently have very few or no Aboriginal workers.
- Aboriginal staff are over-worked and under-supported. Often there are not enough Aboriginal workers for available positions. Investment is needed in upskilling and capacity building local Aboriginal child and family workforces through, for example, traineeships, scholarships and university programs.

“Not our local services who have been running on the smell of an oily rag for thirty years.”

“[We] need more people from our community.”

Focus Area 10 – Housing

Socio-Economic Outcome 9

Aboriginal people can secure appropriate and affordable housing

More housing is urgently needed

- New dedicated Aboriginal housing should be accompanied by the transfer of government housing to Aboriginal Community Housing Providers (ACHPs).
- Homelessness needs to be addressed through more housing, including transitional housing and refuge accommodation within local communities.



Different groups' housing needs must be catered for

- Adaptable spaces are needed to support seasonal mobility. Examples include flexible sleeping spaces, outdoor living and cooking spaces or learning spaces for children and students.
- Specific housing types are needed for:
 - Single people
 - Young families
 - Elders (with culturally-responsive wraparound services)
 - Multiple generations living together (with accessible secondary dwellings for Elders)
- House design needs to support accessibility by considering:
 - Mobility, e.g., lower benchtops and shelves, wider doorframes, ramps
 - Health needs, e.g., areas for dialysis and oxygen therapy
 - Mental health, e.g. provision for privacy, safety, therapy.

Housing should suit its environment

- Building standards and housing designs need to suit local conditions (e.g., elevated housing in flood-prone areas).
- Housing must incorporate greater sustainability standards.

There needs to be a culturally responsive definition of crowding

- The definition of crowding should consider Aboriginal kinship, cultural and familial responsibility and seasonal mobility. It should be flexible and consider protection of tenants.

Clear pathways to home ownership are needed

- Home ownership demonstrates economic independence and supports intergenerational wealth.



“[The] majority of social housing in this state has three bedrooms, which for most Aboriginal families is not enough... decisions are made from someone else, not from our perspective.”

“We need solar, we need there to be sustainable adaptations to houses to reduce cost to run.”



“Let’s start talking about mobility and culture... Aboriginal people don’t see it as overcrowding, we see it as housing mob.”

Aboriginal Community Housing Providers are best placed to manage community housing for Aboriginal people

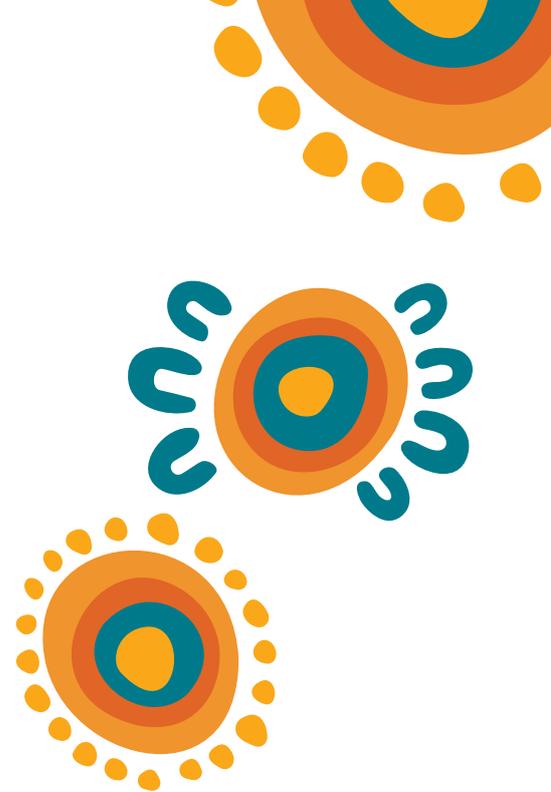
- More accountability is needed in Aboriginal housing organisations, including on how funds are allocated and spent.
- More NSW Government housing should be transferred to ACHPs, which are best placed to manage housing for Aboriginal people.
- ACHPs need more resources for effective management of community housing.

Applying for community housing needs to be more accessible

- The Housing Pathways process is overly complicated for tenants and resource-intensive for ACHPs. This process needs re-evaluation.
- Tenants need greater support in housing application processes and tenancy agreements to improve accessibility. The process is too long, requires access to technology and is not culturally appropriate.
- The Housing Pathways system doesn't reflect region-specific demand.
- Ongoing systemic racism in the rental market must be addressed, and support provided for people navigating the housing market.

Repairs and maintenance need to be addressed urgently

- More transparency and accountability is needed from housing providers in relation to repairs and maintenance.
- Housing providers should train and employ community members to do repairs and maintenance.
- Repairs and maintenance need to be greatly improved to ensure housing can support fluctuating household sizes and user needs.
- The relationship between housing and health outcomes is significant and should be considered in repairs and maintenance decisions.



“Government needs a better data source than just the Housing Pathways waiting list.”

“[It] needs to include conversations with community about health.”



Supportive accommodation is needed within every community

- Every community needs supportive accommodation such as:
 - Women’s refuges
 - Men’s refuges
 - Transitional housing, including for people leaving custody or rehabilitation
 - Safety houses for children and youth accommodation
- Aboriginal-specific refuge accommodation provides a culturally safe way to support people experiencing homelessness or domestic violence. The accommodation should be managed by ACCOs and supported by consistent investment.
- Refuge accommodation needs to be accessible for people living with disability.

“We have a real housing crisis, particularly for the homeless, single people and couples.”

Focus Area 11 – Land and Waters

Socio-Economic Outcome 15

Aboriginal people maintain distinctive relationships with land and waters

Aboriginal people need to own and manage land and waters

- Aboriginal communities need ownership over lands and waters prior to addressing management arrangements with government.
- Government needs to relinquish control over land and waters for Aboriginal people to have control and ownership.
- Co-management approaches need to include clear definitions of roles and responsibilities.
- Treaty is necessary for true ownership of land and waters.

Aboriginal people need to own and manage land and waters (continued)

- Ownership is not just about control and management; it is also about custodianship, practising traditional culture, and caring and protecting land and waters.
- Unallocated water, including groundwaters, should come under the jurisdiction of the local Aboriginal people of that Country.
- Aboriginal communities need to have input and control over the selling and trading of waters.
- Access to land and waters needs to be safeguarded.

“It is our basic human right to have clean water and clean land.”

Cultural management of water must be supported

- Cultural flows are crucial for Aboriginal people, but must come with legal entitlement to ownership and management.
- Water quality and the health of rivers and groundwaters is an essential part of Aboriginal culture and wellbeing.
- Cultural management of waters should be driven by local communities.
- Aboriginal communities need to have input and control over the construction of dams and weirs.
- Aboriginal people need access to their waterways and water rights for cultural, social and economic prosperity.
- Access to water and water access licences needs more regulation.
- Water is spiritual and an essential part of Aboriginal culture.

“Our culture comes first but our human rights sit within this as that is where the Government can be held accountable.”

“It’s not just about access to water, it’s about cultural rights to manage and access water without regulations. It’s also about the rights to culturally manage the water.”

A land claims ‘One-Stop Shop’ is needed

- The land claims process needs to be accessible and should cover how land can be activated effectively.
- The process should be grounded in the aspirations of community and include local decision-makers to ensure local knowledge is respected.
- Increase support of systems for land claim applications to work together more effectively.
- More resources are needed to clear a backlog of land claims that need processing.



Consultation and decision-making processes must be improved

- Consultations must be regular and ongoing, and happen before decisions are made over land and waters.
- Any plans relating to land and waters need to be developed in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities.
- Consultations need to be more open and transparent, so that government can understand community needs.

“A one-stop shop needs to happen, but the local decision-makers need to be put in the decision-making process.”

Economic prosperity and land and waters need to be considered together

- Support for effective land activation needs to be available and accessible.
- Opportunities for economic prosperity and connection to culture, that are specific to the community, should be based around a consistent approach that can be adapted for use in communities.
- Revenue from water profits and land activation needs to come back to community – for community.
- Culture and economic prosperity are not mutually exclusive, and Aboriginal culture should be showcased in a positive way, e.g., Brewarrina fish traps.

Increased accountability around land and waters is needed

- Enforcing accountability and transparency through independent evaluation processes, carried out by Aboriginal organisations, is crucial. Findings and recommendations must be provided to Aboriginal communities.
- Increased accountability and repercussion are needed for the misuse of land and waters.
- A formalised protocol or escalation process in relation to conflict resolution is needed. This should include an accountability framework.
- An Aboriginal advisory mechanism for land and waters is needed.
- Government must show commitment and for genuine partnership by ensuring appropriate resources are provided to the initiatives and processes they are offering.

Focus Area 12 – Languages and Culture

Socio-Economic Outcome 16

Aboriginal cultures and languages are strong

Aboriginal languages must be taught in schools

- Aboriginal languages need to be part of the curriculum in all schools over the long term – pre-schools, primary schools and high schools.
- Participants wanted funding to support compulsory language in schools.
- Communities need to be engaged in a genuine partnership to get more Elders and community into schools.
- Teaching languages in school is complex. Sometimes languages are taught in schools to kids who are not on Country.
- Every community is different. Some communities do not have access to language or suitable Elders to teach the language.

“It is not easy and there is not many of us can speak traditional language, some can speak words but not the whole language.”

- Many protocols around learning the language and using it appropriately must be considered.
- Some teachers are afraid to teach language or culture because they don't want to get it wrong or don't feel comfortable teaching it.
- For languages to thrive, stronger resourcing is needed to support language teaching positions and to make them a real career opportunity.

“Language teachers need to be able to make a career/proper job out of teaching language. We keep losing teachers because they need to pay bills and need a stable steady income, they love teaching, but bills have to be paid.”

“Language needs to be taught at all levels of school.”

“A lot of our kids are off Country.” – Awabakal



“You could develop a curriculum for here, but you would have to have input from so many more people, it would take twice as long...”

Culture and language go together and need to be taught together

- Embedding Aboriginal culture is about engaging in genuine partnerships - no more tokenistic approaches. Some schools are not engaging with local communities to bring culture into the school.
- Culture must go with the language teaching, and teachers must be strong in culture.
- We need the people with the knowledge to come into schools and tell the stories.

“We need more of our people to go into our schools and tell our stories and put it into the back of our kids’ brain like our Elders did when we were growing up.”

“Telling the stories – keep it in that cultural way, kids they are amazing listeners.”

“These kids cement it. They put it in the back of their brain.”

“Keeping people accountable - it is not just about us doing it all. How do we get them excited about it, how do we get them to look after the land?” “Through stories...”

- Non-Aboriginal teachers cannot teach culture. They can teach about culture.

“Non-Aboriginal people can’t provide cultural stuff in school.”

- Community want more cultural opportunities in schools.

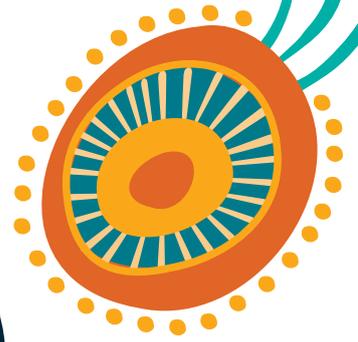
“Every kid goes to Canberra – why can’t they have visiting to cultural sites and Country”.

Language and cultural centres should be owned and run by community, and there should be support for getting back on Country

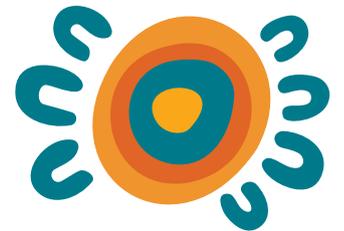
- Many communities called for language and culture hubs, revitalisation programs, Aboriginal-run schools and digital language apps.

“Language centre is a good idea but needs to be driven by community.”

“Language programs need to be owned by community, not by the Department of Education. It’s great for schools to teach, but the funding should sit with Aboriginal language centres or the Aboriginal Languages Trust.”



“Language centres need to be open to everyone of all ages, not just school kids - need for parents and kids to be able to learn at the same time if they want to. The language won’t be strong while we don’t make it easily available for people to learn.”



- Community need more resourcing and fewer barriers to access to Country and cultural sites to teach and learn languages.

“We can’t preserve and protect the cultural heritage if we don’t have the funding for it.”

“There’s no place for old ones to do that. If we want to go out on Country, there’s nowhere to go. If they want to go out on Country it’s not comfortable because anyone can just drive in there. Where do we go?”

“We’ve lost ourselves, there’s so much that we need to remember. To be whole I need to know that stuff and that makes me stronger as a person and that rubs off on my kids and my community. Having an opportunity to learn my language, meeting family, knowing and having relationship with Elders who are sharing their story - I transformed into who I am now. That is instilled in my kids now and it makes them strong.”

“We need a place that is gazetted for Aboriginal identified cultural needs.”

Focus Area 13 – Digital Inclusion

Socio-Economic Outcome 17

Aboriginal people have access to information and services

Access to the internet is important

- Some remote communities have no internet access, and others have very poor connections.
- Some communities need new towers in town to achieve stable internet access.
- Reliability and coverage of 4G/5G networks is poor in some areas.
- NBN connections in community are not always reliable.
- Some communities have gone up to three months with no internet connection.
- Some communities experience connectivity issues during storms.
- Libraries with WIFI are inaccessible for community without transport.



“We are getting left behind in the technology world.”

Affordability is the biggest barrier to digital inclusion and must be improved

- The costs of internet, computer software and mobile phone data are major barriers to digital inclusion for community.
- Participants said they shouldn't have to pay to access government services or to do business online.
- Students want to take computers home but lack the digital facilities (like internet and printers) to use them.
- Outdated technology in many Aboriginal households is holding back the education of their children.
- Technology maintenance costs are a burden for many people.
- Participants proposed 'digital vouchers' to help households connect their children to student IT.



“The cost is prohibitive.”

The shift to doing business online is a barrier

- Governments are moving to digital methods of delivering services on the false assumption that everyone's got a smartphone.
- Some older people in communities do not or cannot use smartphones to access online government services.
- Some government agencies no longer offer face-to-face supports, which is a barrier for community.
- Many people still prefer to do business face-to-face.
- Inability to access and participate in online services can sometimes impact payment or funding in community.
- Delivering services online, such as teaching, can be inappropriate for people living with disability.

Digital literacy is needed to improve digital inclusion

- Lack of digital literacy is adding to problems for many people in Aboriginal communities trying to access online government services, especially those who live with disability.
- Having someone to talk to about accessing online services is helpful.
- Community can experience language barriers when seeking help to access the internet or online services.
- Online learning is counterproductive if community don't know how to use digital devices.
- Communities with limited internet access don't use computers often and are not always tech savvy.
- Community feel pressure to keep up with technological change.

"Feels like it has been made more difficult to apply for social or public housing."

"Expecting families to support the young ones to use the resources but they were never given the upskills to do so."

Online safety concerns must be addressed

- Digital technology doesn't always make things easier.
- Online bullying on social media apps is an issue for youth and the wider community.
- Community want more educational campaigns on cultural safety and online bullying.

There are opportunities to help community connect online

- The COVID-19 pandemic has shown new ways of interacting online, including remote learning.
- Digital participation offers new opportunities for community if it is done right.
- Community computer labs allow youth to access technology.
- Some older people are not interested in technology, but opportunities exist for the young ones to help them connect online.
- Community hubs and organisations are relied on by communities to help them engage online.
- Community in rural and remote areas have different digital experiences and needs to community in the cities.

This is element represents connection to land and Country

Next Steps

Where to from here?

The 2022 Community Engagement Report will be shared with consultation participants and NSW CAPO networks and will be publicly available on our websites.

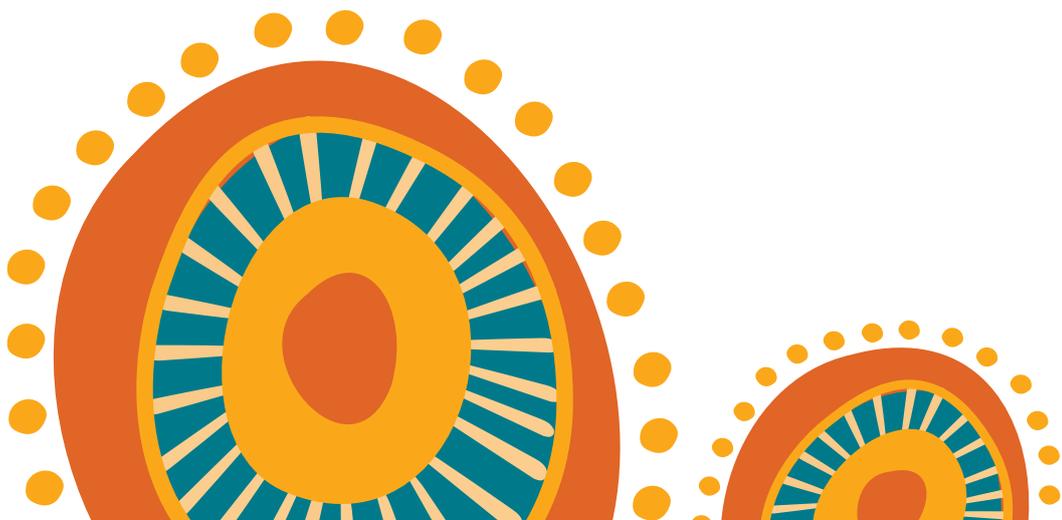
Having reviewed what we heard in the 2022 Community Engagements, and in previous engagements, NSW CAPO has worked in partnership with the NSW Government to develop the NSW Implementation Plan 2022-2024, which sets out ambitious actions and initiatives for the next two years. This year we have also designed an accessible summary version of the Implementation Plan for community.

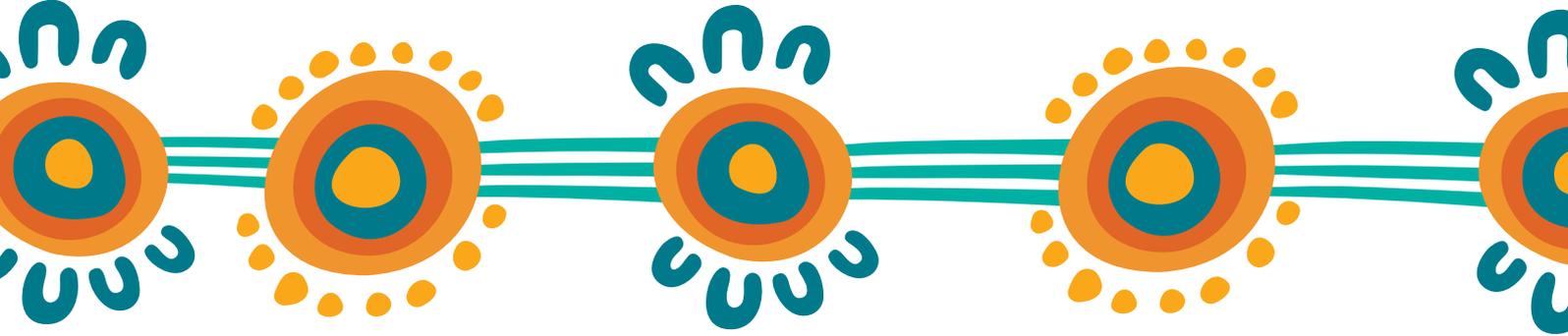
You can find the NSW Implementation Plan 2022-24 here as well as a summary of the Plan.

Almost 150 initiatives are listed in the Plan, including programs, services, strategies and policy reforms, that aim to address what we have heard from you. New initiatives will be delivered over the next two years, while existing initiatives noted in this plan will be improved. The projects will be backed by \$189.6 million of funding announced by the NSW Government in June 2022.

NSW CAPO and government partners will be seeking more feedback from community on some of the initiatives over the next two years. Consultation formats will vary, and may include face to face, focus groups and surveys. We will work carefully to avoid 'over-consulting' community during this time.

NSW CAPO will also hold regular Closing the Gap Community Engagements, where we will report back on how Closing the Gap is going overall, and discuss issues you want to raise with us.





Thank You

We would like to thank everyone who has been involved in this process, and who continue to be involved. We would particularly like to mention those who engaged with the supporting documentation, including the Community Companion, and who attended our Community Engagement Sessions, completed the online survey and shared your voices with NSW CAPO.

Your involvement, feedback and ideas will help make positive changes for our people's future.



Appendices

Appendix A: About NSW CAPO

The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) advocates for the interests of Aboriginal peoples of NSW. We provide a strong, independent and coordinated voice to address issues affecting Aboriginal people, including the social determinants of health and wellbeing.

NSW CAPO member organisations are non-government Aboriginal peak bodies with boards elected by Aboriginal communities and/or organisations that are accountable to their membership.

NSW CAPO and the NSW Government are the signatories to the Closing the Gap National Partnership agreement for NSW and work in partnership with other organisations and agencies on Closing the Gap in NSW.

NSW CAPO led the 29 consultations that were held across NSW in 2019 to deliver the report A New Way of Working. This report raised the voices of Aboriginal people in NSW and contributed to the details in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Our member organisations are advocates for Aboriginal peoples throughout NSW. NSW CAPO is currently made up of:

- **NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec)**
<https://absec.org.au/>
- **NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)**
<https://alc.org.au/>
- **Link-Up NSW**
<https://www.linkupnsw.org.au/>
- **Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)**
<https://www.aecg.nsw.edu.au/>
- **Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC)**
<https://www.ahmrc.org.au/>
- **First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)**
<https://fpdn.org.au/>
- **Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS NSW/ACT)**
<https://www.alsnswact.org.au/>
- **BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation**
<https://www.blaq.org.au/>

We are an open and inclusive group and any organisation that has elected officials and a membership are welcome to join. The more voices we have coming together the stronger we will be.

Appendix B: Closing the Gap journey

In 2018, 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations wrote a letter to the Prime Minister calling for a new strategy for Closing the Gap in full partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Coalition of Peaks was formed in early 2019, with almost 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations from across Australia. Today, the Coalition has more than 70 members.

In March 2019, the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) replaced previous agreements around Closing the Gap with the new Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap. This agreement sets out how the Coalition of Peaks and Australian governments work together to decide on the:

- Design, implementation, monitoring and review of Closing the Gap programs
- Strategies and policies for the next ten years.

The Coalition of Peaks also wanted a National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which was built on shared decision-making and what community felt was important to improve their lives. This is Aboriginal people making decisions for Aboriginal people in action.

In 2019, the Coalition of Peaks began a national Aboriginal community engagement strategy, including 29 face-to-face sessions in NSW, to inform the National Agreement. The Agreement – the first of its kind, and the first based on a genuine partnership with Aboriginal people – was signed by the Coalition of Peaks, all Australian governments and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) in July 2020.

In NSW, NSW CAPO, the NSW Government and Local Government NSW (LGNSW) are signatories to the National Agreement, and also work in partnership with other organisations and agencies.

The National Agreement is built around four Priority Reforms to change how governments work with Aboriginal communities, organisations and people, and accelerate improvements on Closing the Gap. These are based on what Aboriginal people have been saying for a long time to improve Aboriginal peoples' lives. In NSW, a fifth Priority Reform focused on Economic Prosperity, Business Growth and Employment was added.

Closing the Gap journey (continued)

Within the National Agreement, 17 Socio-Economic Targets measure Closing the Gap progress experienced by Aboriginal people. The 17 targets cover areas including:



Under the National Agreement, each state has to develop a Jurisdictional Implementation Plan with actions to achieve the Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes. These are shaped by what matters most to community and include:

- Funding information
- Who's accountable for what
- When results will be delivered

NSW delivered its first NSW Implementation Plan (NSW IP) in 2021. The NSW IP 2022-2024 sets out what we'll do over the next two years towards achieving positive Closing the Gap outcomes.



This element is about sharing knowledge and learnings from our past to help improve and shape our future

Appendix C: Community Companion questions

Focus Area 1 - Partnerships

1. How would your community like to be involved with transparent reporting about how partnerships are working and what they are doing?
2. What would help in your community to set up strong local partnerships and/or improve existing local partnerships?
3. How would you want local partnerships to work with state or nation-wide partnerships on policy issues?
4. How would you like funding for partnerships to be made more accessible? How would this support and strengthen partnerships in your community?

Focus Area 2 - Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)

1. How can we support Aboriginal self-determination and community involvement in funding decisions and the disbursement of funding?
2. Are there ACCOs in your community that need longer term funding contracts and/or pooled funding for different services?
3. What are the major barriers for ACCOs to deliver more services and more effective services in your community? What are the best ways to support smaller ACCOs in particular?
4. What are the most important areas to build key skills of staff in ACCOs in your community? How should ACCO staff be supported to work with all members of the community, including LGBTQIA+ community members and people with disability?
5. What are your thoughts on having one central community-controlled agency that coordinates all funding for ACCOs in your community, rather than ACCOs applying for funding from multiple different government agencies?

Focus Area 3 - Transforming Government Organisations

1. How do you want to improve the process for reporting racism and cultural safety issues with government services? What areas of government need to make it easier for you to report issues or complaints?
2. What will make the most difference for Aboriginal employees in government, especially to reach senior and executive leadership positions?
3. What most needs to be improved in how government engages with community, collaborates with community to design and implement policies and programs, and then reports back to community? What does good practice for this look like?
4. How would you want government departments and the work they do to be held accountable to communities?

Focus Area 4 - Data

1. Aboriginal Communities have been clear on the need for more control and say over Aboriginal Community Data (what people call Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance - see appendix for more information). What does Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance mean to you? What do you think of the Maïam nayri Wingara principles below?

Indigenous people have the right to:

- a. Exercise control of the data ecosystem
- b. Data that is contextual and disaggregated
- c. Data that is relevant and empowers sustainable self-determination and effective self-governance
- d. Data structures that are accountable to Indigenous peoples
- e. Data that is protective and respects individual and collective interests.

How would you like to see these principles implemented?

2. How do you want to be involved in the ongoing work around Indigenous Data Sovereignty?
3. Are there any existing data projects or people doing work with data in your community? What type of support would be useful for these projects?
4. What data does your community or organisation need access to and could they be met through the development of a data project?
5. What needs to change to give Aboriginal organisations and communities access to government data about Aboriginal peoples? Do you think having more data experts in government will help with improving access to data?

Focus Area 5 - Economic Prosperity

1. What are the most important barriers to address for Aboriginal businesses in your community? What do you think of a one-stop shop that would provide support in one place for businesses and jobseekers to access?
2. What does economic prosperity and a flourishing Aboriginal business sector mean to you?
3. What would make the biggest difference for Aboriginal people to get jobs that they want to do? Should there be specific strategies for Aboriginal youth in particular? Aboriginal women?
4. What do you think of current NSW government procurement processes? What is working and what should change?

5. What do you think of providing specific support for Aboriginal tourism businesses, reforms to provide more affordable insurance for businesses, and incentives to hire Aboriginal employees in the private sector? Are these the right areas to be addressing?

Focus Area 6 - Health

1. What are the most important health issues to address in your community? Would you like Aboriginal Community- Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHO) to deliver services in these areas?
2. Is there easy access to appropriate healthcare services in your community? If not, what are the biggest challenges for access?
3. What do you think of ACCHOs providing social and emotional wellbeing programs to encourage pro-living actions and reduce suicides?
4. What support can be provided to your community to help with prevention and early diagnosis of cancer? What do you think of having a dedicated worker in your Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) to provide these cancer screening services?
5. Does your community have Aboriginal-specific education classes during pregnancy? How can we support pregnant Aboriginal people to regularly visit their doctor or midwife during pregnancy? Would you want to see these services delivered through AMSs?

Focus Area 7 - Education

1. What would a successful school experience look like for your child/children in your community? What would be the ideal outcomes or goals for your child/ children in your community?
2. Can you tell me about a time when you got involved with your community's pre-school/school? How did you come to be involved and did you feel welcomed/ like you belonged?
3. Can you tell me about a time when your child (or you as a child) went to school every day for a few weeks and what was happening in their lives? Can you remember a time they/you didn't go and what was going on?
4. Have you or others in your family ever wanted to work in the school system? What would help you or your family to get a job in education?
5. How well do you think your child/you settled in at pre-school, primary, secondary school, and tertiary education? What helped them/ you settle into the new school or what would have helped?

Focus Area 8 - Justice

1. Are there any local community groups or networks that work to address justice issues?
2. How could your community be more involved in decision-making on justice issues?

3. What services in your community provide support in the justice space?
4. How could Government justice agencies (Police, Courts, Corrections etc.) improve the way they work for your community?
5. What could be done to improve accountability of Government justice agencies and programs?

Focus Area 9 - Families

1. Are there initiatives or programs in your community around child protection or in another area that encourage decision making through community control? Does your community want more control over child protection decision making and what would that look like for your community? One idea is Aboriginal Community Controlled Mechanisms that oversee how the system works with Aboriginal children and families in communities.
2. Currently, the child protection system can reduce the number of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care by either preventing child removals, restoring children to their families if they have been removed, or permanently removing children from their families using guardianship and adoption court orders. What do you think of these options and which should be prioritised for reaching Outcome 12?
3. Are there programs or initiatives that you feel work in supporting strong and thriving children and families in your community? How could these be improved, expanded or changed?
4. Are there any Aboriginal organisations delivering child and family services or programs in your community? If so, what are the organisation/s and are they successful? If no, would you support them being established?
5. Does the government need to partner with communities to make changes to the system, like implementing the recommendations from Family is Culture? If so, how should these partnerships work?

Focus Area 10 - Housing

1. Do you think an Australian definition of crowding (that accounts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship obligations and mobility of Aboriginal peoples) is needed? What should be included in this definition?
2. How could the inside or outdoor spaces be changed to better suit how you and your family use your house?
3. Do the following initiatives effectively respond to the needs of your community and are we on the right track in our approach? A routine repairs and maintenance system to support Aboriginal Community Housing Providers in the management of assets

4. Transferring ownership of public and community housing properties to Aboriginal Community Housing Providers
5. Providing flexible asset responses through culturally responsive tenancies and housing designs

Focus Area 11 - Land and Waters

1. What can be done to facilitate the return of land and water to Aboriginal communities? Do you like the idea of a one-stop shop that would coordinate all relevant land and water government agencies in one place?
2. What does ownership and legal interests over water mean for you? What does your community expect ownership to be?
3. How are Governments demonstrating knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people's distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters? How can this be improved?
4. What do you think of co-management and joint management arrangements of public lands and national parks with government?

Focus Area 12 - Languages and Culture

1. What does fluency and strength of language mean to you and look like in your community?
2. What is needed in your community to make languages stronger and what is needed to increase the number of languages being spoken across the state?
3. What do you think of increasing access to language materials and records in the archives as a way of supporting language? How would you want to access and use these and are there issues with this initiative?
4. What do you think of language centres that support language revitalisation in communities? How would you want these to work?

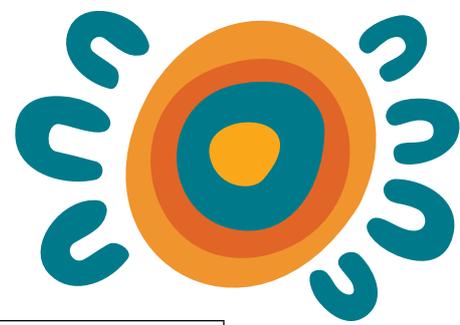
Focus Area 13 - Digital Inclusion

There is no current, accurate baseline data about the level of digital inclusion for the Aboriginal community across NSW.

To inform how we address issues like internet accessibility, affordability, and cultural safety online we first need to understand how these issues currently impact communities.

To determine this baseline of where we stand now, we will ask questions in this session about current access to the internet, how you use the internet, what kind of barriers exist and how you overcome them.

Appendix D: 2022 Community Engagement statistics



Location	Date	Attendance (no.)
Bega	8 March 2022	7
Batemans Bay	9 March 2022	15
Queanbeyan	10 March 2022	5
Nowra	11 March 2022	21
Dubbo	7 March 2022	38
Cobar	8 March 2022	3
Bourke	9 March 2022	9
Lightning Ridge	10 March 2022	3
Wagga Wagga	14 March 2022	6
Griffith	15 March 2022	7
Deniliquin	16 March 2022	8
Albury	17 March 2022	8
Coonabarabran	14 March 2022	9
Narrabri	15 March 2022	10
Moree	16 March 2022	10
Inverell	17 March 2022	8
Mt Druitt	21 March 2022	14
Redfern	22 March 2022	17
Wyong	23 March 2023	66
Newcastle	24 March 2022	24
Glen Innes	22 March 2022	7
Tamworth	23 March 2023	23
Muswellbrook	24 March 2022	25
Condobolin	29 March 2022	20
Cowra	30 March 2022	1
Bathurst	31 March 2022	12
Balranald	29 March 2022	4
Dareton	30 March 2022	13
TOTAL	28	393





Glossary of terms

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACHP	Aboriginal Community Housing Provider
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
ALGA	Australia Local Government Association
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
Coalition of Peaks	Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Peak Organisations
LGNSW	Local Government NSW
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NSW CAPO	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
NSW IP	NSW Implementation Plan
Partnership Agreement	Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap
PR	Priority Reform



Artist Bio

The cultural illustrations shared throughout this report were created by Aboriginal artist & designer, Leticia Quince from Leticia Anne Design & Co.

Leticia is a proud Wiradyuri Yinaa ‘woman’ from Narrandera. Leticia grew up in Western NSW and embraced Dubbo as her home for many years. She uses her resilience built from childhood trauma and growing up in foster care to transform not only her own life, but the lives of other children and young people. With being a Youth Worker and consultant for over 6 years, Leticia explored a new career direction as a brand & graphic designer in March 2020. Leticia relocated to Newcastle in early 2021 to embrace her business full-time and now resides on beautiful Darkinjung Country on the Central Coast. You can learn more about Leticia at: <https://leticiaannedesigns.com.au>

Leticia Anne Designs & Co. brings together a diverse team of deadly creatives and mentors to support, embrace and empower First Nations businesses, young entrepreneurs and organisations focused on community growth and development.

Story behind the illustrations:

The story behind the New South Wales and Australia map shares the importance of closing the gap for First Nations people from our many Nations, statewide and nationally. It acknowledges the movement and diversity of First Nations people from different locations and how we must work as a broader community for social, cultural and economic growth. When we come together, we can implement improvements and harness our strength. 13 focus areas are represented by the larger community circles on the outside, creating the map borders of Australia and New South Wales.

The illustrations throughout the report draw upon the many voices, experiences, backgrounds and connections that helped develop this report – considering community engagement, passing on knowledge, providing opportunities, continuing to move forward and social, cultural and economic growth.



Stay connected

You can sign up to NSW CAPO's mailing list at:

<https://www.nswcapoclosingthegap.org.au/>

or via email: closingthegap@alc.org.au

We will keep you updated on the work of NSW CAPO and Closing the Gap and other opportunities to be involved in the self-determination of Aboriginal people.

Useful resources

More information about Closing the Gap is available on the following websites:

NSW CAPO: <https://www.nswcapoclosingthegap.org.au/>

- Information about NSW CAPO and our upcoming engagements
- The 2021 NSW CAPO Community Engagement Report
- NSW Implementation Plans

Coalition of Peaks: <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/>

- Information about the National Coalition of Peaks
- Excellent resources about Closing the Gap including videos and reports such as A New Way of Working, The National Agreement on a Page, The National Agreement (plain English) and the Guide to Reading the National Agreement

Closing the Gap: <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

- Information about Closing the Gap at a national level
- The National Agreement and links to Implementation Plans that have been developed across Australia

Productivity Commission Closing the Gap Dashboard:

<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard>

- Data on the targets agreed to as part of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

NSW Aboriginal Affairs: <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/closingthegap/>

- Information on the NSW Closing the Gap partnership
- NSW Implementation Plans