



Australian Government  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

# CLOSING THE GAP

PRIME MINISTER'S REPORT 2018





**FOR TEN YEARS CLOSING THE GAP HAS LIFTED THE EXPECTATIONS OF WHAT WE CAN ACHIEVE. IT HAS HARNESSSED OUR RESOLVE AND FOCUSED OUR EFFORTS, AND ENABLED US EACH TO PLAY A ROLE IN CREATING OUR SHARED FUTURE. OUR TASK IS NOT DONE, BUT WE TURN TO THE FUTURE WITH HOPE, OPTIMISM AND PURPOSE.**

## Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2018

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Please be aware that this report may contain images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have passed away.

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**Original campaigners and their family representatives of the successful 1967 referendum gather on the steps of Old Parliament House in Canberra to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.**



**Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull addresses a lunch hosted by the AFL and Reconciliation Australia to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the successful 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.**

# PRIME MINISTER'S INTRODUCTION AN ONGOING JOURNEY

The rich history of Australia's First Peoples stretches back at least 65,000 years – and is celebrated as one of the longest living civilisations on earth.

It is a history based on the extraordinary strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and communities. This endurance of human life and caring for country is both profound and inspiring.

The cultural strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to play a significant role in creating pathways for healing and addressing the trauma inflicted upon Australia's First Peoples through past policies.

Over the past year we have spent time acknowledging significant moments in Australia's modern history that brought us closer together as a nation: the 50th anniversary of the successful 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.

The 1967 referendum and Mabo High Court decision were momentous occasions that followed Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians standing side by side – campaigning for recognition of what has always been true; that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have cared for this country for tens of thousands of years. That their songs have been sung since time out of mind and these songs have held and passed on the knowledge of customs and traditions for 65,000 years.

These anniversaries are humbling reminders that enduring reform and change only occur when we bring all Australians along; that the continued march of reconciliation in this country is not an inexorable one and requires the leadership and relentless pragmatism of those campaigners we honoured in 2017.

We have a unique opportunity in 2018 – a decade after Australia committed to a new framework called Closing the Gap – to reflect, and recommit and renew our collective efforts and focus on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



**“We are guided by a relationship of high expectations, mutual respect, and genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Our shared commitment to closing the gap is a natural extension of the dream this Government has for every Australian—safety, security and prosperity, and a fair go for all.”**

As we look back on the 10 years that the Closing the Gap framework has been in place, there is much to celebrate.

- Today, the annual growth rate of Supply Nation registered Indigenous businesses is an average of 12.5 per cent – the envy of all other sectors of the Australian economy.
- Today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, on average, are living longer than ever before – and factors contributing to the gap such as death from circulatory disease (heart attack and stroke) are going down.
- Today, around 14,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are enrolled in early childhood education the year before full-time school, and there have been improvements in literacy and numeracy.
- And today, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are staying in school through to Year 12. While closing the employment gap is challenging, we know educational attainment opens pathways to greater economic opportunity and can make an important difference in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This reflects the efforts of successive governments – but more importantly, the efforts of First Australians to reach their full potential and live lives that they value. Importantly, it is something we should all be proud of.

The Closing the Gap framework has provided the architecture for Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a holistic way to improve outcomes.

Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, as well as governments, need to nurture honest, transparent, robust relationships based on mutual respect. It is a journey all Australians are walking.

Although much progress has been made, we know we have a continuing journey ahead of us to truly Close the Gap. Like any great journey, we must ensure we continually review and realign our collective efforts based on what the data, the outcomes, and the people are telling us.

What is clear is we must continue to maintain a long-term vision of what success looks like, and importantly how success is defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves.

In this 10th Closing the Gap report, the Australian Government commits to staying the course with our First Australians – and working to help deliver a prosperous future.

**The Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP  
Prime Minister of Australia**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Introduction

In 2018, Closing the Gap remains a shared commitment. It is the story of a shared journey to continue to work together and enable and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live healthy and prosperous lives.

This journey continues to draw on the enduring wisdom, strength and resilience learned over thousands of years of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civilisation. The past 10 years of Closing the Gap have also provided governments with valuable lessons.

One of the key lessons we have learned is that effective programs and services need to be designed, developed and implemented in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Governments have also recognised the importance of taking a far more holistic approach involving agencies from across government to develop policies and deliver services to First Australians.

The Closing the Gap framework was established in 2008 to address Indigenous disadvantage. Ten years on, the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have improved but more gains need to be made.

It is clear that continued effort and action is required.

The Closing the Gap framework provides an annual national snapshot of progress made against the targets – and helps maintain our collective focus.

While acknowledging this, it is important to recognise the success and achievements of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, demonstrating that when equal opportunities are provided, disadvantage can be overcome.

The chapters in this report detail the progress made against the seven Closing the Gap targets – and focus on health, education, employment and community safety. They also showcase a range of Indigenous success stories – from inspiring individuals, to growing businesses and organisations making a positive difference to their communities.

All of the Closing the Gap targets are interconnected. Progress in one area helps progress to be made in others.

For instance, improving education standards helps to increase employment rates and levels of health. And community safety is fundamental to ensuring children attend school and adults maintain employment.

## Progress against the targets

The latest data indicate that three of the seven Closing the Gap targets are on track to be met.<sup>1</sup> The last year in which at least three targets were on track was in 2011.

- The target to **halve the gap in child mortality by 2018** is on track. Over the long term (1998 to 2016) the Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by 35 per cent, and there has been a narrowing of the gap (by 32 per cent). Improvements in key drivers of child and maternal health over the past few years suggest there are further gains to be made.
- The target to have **95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education by 2025** is on track. In 2016, around 14,700 Indigenous children (91 per cent) were enrolled in early childhood programs.

<sup>1</sup> The latest target data presented in this report is for 2016, with the exception of the school attendance and the literacy and numeracy targets (which relate to 2017).



**Members of the Gumatj Clan, Traditional Owners of the site where the Garma Festival is held in East Arnhem Land, with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion.**

- The target to **close the gap in school attendance by 2018** is not on track. In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students.
- The target to **halve the gap in reading and numeracy by 2018** is not on track. In 2017, the proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN<sup>2</sup> is on track in only one (Year 9 numeracy) of the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9). However, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has narrowed since 2008 across all the NAPLAN areas, particularly reading in Years 3 and 5, and numeracy in Years 5 and 9.
- The target to **halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020** is on track. Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20-24 year-olds who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent increased from 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 65.3 per cent in 2016. While the attainment rates for non-Indigenous Australians also improved, the gap has narrowed by 12.6 percentage points over the past decade (from 36.4 percentage points in 2006 to 23.8 percentage points in 2016).
- The target to **halve the gap in employment by 2018** is not on track, with Indigenous employment rates falling slightly over the past decade. However, progress is being masked by a change in remote employment programs during this period. If this effect is removed, the employment rate has improved by 4.2 percentage points over the past 10 years. In 2016, the Indigenous employment rate was 46.6 per cent, compared with 71.8 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians.
- The target to **close the gap in life expectancy by 2031** is not on track. Between the periods 2005-2007 and 2010-2012 there was a small reduction in the gap of 0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females. Over the longer term, Indigenous mortality rates have declined by 14 per cent since 1998.

<sup>2</sup> National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN).

## Progress across states and territories

Progress against the targets for each state and territory varies and is summarised in Table 1, which indicates where targets are on track. More detailed analysis of progress in each of the target areas is found in the chapters of this report.

**Table 1: Progress against the targets<sup>a</sup>**

Target	NSW	VIC	QLD	SA	WA	TAS	NT	ACT	Aust/Total
Child mortality <sup>b</sup>									✓
Early childhood education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓
School attendance									
Reading and numeracy <sup>c</sup>						✓		✓	
Year 12 or equivalent attainment <sup>d</sup>				✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Employment <sup>e</sup>	✓								
Life expectancy (proxy: mortality) <sup>f</sup>									

a A tick indicates the target is on track. Grey shading indicates the data is either not published or there is no agreed trajectory. Remaining targets are not on track.

b Due to the small numbers involved, state and territory trajectories were not developed for the child mortality target. The national target reflects results for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory combined, which are the jurisdictions considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish.

c For the purposes of this summary table, states and territories are considered on track if more than half of the eight NAPLAN measures are on track in each jurisdiction (in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 reading and numeracy).

d Although New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland and Tasmania were below their trajectory points for 2016, New South Wales and Tasmania were very close (within one percentage point).

e Progress against trajectories for the employment target was assessed using the ABS 2014-15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey data, published in last year's report. While the 2016 Census employment data is published in this year's report, it is not the agreed data source for the trajectories.

f Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy are published every five years with the next update due to be published by the ABS in 2018. As an annual proxy, overall mortality data are reported for New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory only, which are considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish. However, as indicated in the table, only four jurisdictions have agreed mortality trajectories to support this target.



The National Gallery of Victoria commissioned the Centre for Appropriate Technology to fabricate the Designer Dome, a three dimensional sculpture is covered with handwoven fabric panels representing the Australian landscape. The project brings together world class design and local Aboriginal art, made into reality by the skill and commitment of the Aboriginal workers at a competitive Aboriginal business.

## Closing the gap – the 10-year story

In March 2008, Australian governments agreed to work together to achieve equality in health and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) implemented the Closing the Gap strategy, setting six ambitious targets across the areas of health, education and employment to drive progress.

The strategy recognised that closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage would require long-term, generational commitment, with effort to be directed across a range of priority areas: early childhood, schooling, health, economic participation, healthy homes, safe communities and governance and leadership.

The approach was designed to be holistic, with the building blocks fitting together through the integration of policy ideas and implementation strategies.

## What have we achieved?

The sustained effort over the past 10 years to close the gap in the areas of health, education and employment has delivered better outcomes.

For instance, Indigenous child mortality rates have fallen significantly over the longer term – down 35 per cent between 1998 and 2016. And smoking rates fell 9 percentage points between 2002 and 2014-15 and, as reported last year, drinking during pregnancy halved between 2008 and 2014-15.

The target to halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment by 2020 is on track to be met – and there has been a surge in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students going on to higher education.

The Australian Government is implementing a range of measures to encourage Indigenous students to complete their university studies – because of the wider range of opportunities it provides to participate in the economy and contribute to community life.

Indigenous businesses are thriving – and the Government is supporting them to be even more successful through measures such as the Indigenous Procurement Policy and the Indigenous Business Sector Strategy.

## What have we learned?

The Australian Government is committed to continuing to build the evidence base to show what works and what does not. This is critical to ensuring investment is focused in areas that make the biggest difference.

Research undertaken over the past 10 years has shown us that keys to successful outcomes include:

- holistic approaches that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ways that take into account the full cultural, social, emotional and economic context of Indigenous people's lives – including an awareness of the ongoing legacy of trauma, grief and loss associated with colonisation;
- active involvement of Indigenous communities in every stage of program development and delivery in order to build genuine, collaborative and sustainable partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and build capacity within Indigenous communities;
- collaborative working relationships between government agencies and other relevant organisations in delivering services and programs, acknowledging the interrelatedness of key social and economic determinants across multiple life domains for Indigenous Australians;

- valuing Indigenous knowledge and cultural beliefs and practices that are important for promoting positive cultural identity and social and emotional wellbeing for Indigenous Australians;
- clear leadership and governance for programs, initiatives and interventions. This includes commitment from high-level leadership of relevant organisations and agencies to the aims of reducing Indigenous disadvantage and addressing determinants of health and wellbeing;
- employing Indigenous staff and involving them fully in program design, delivery and evaluation, and providing adequate training, where necessary, to build capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
- developing committed, skilled staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) and providing diversity and cultural awareness training;
- adopting a strengths-based perspective that builds and develops the existing strengths, skills and capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and
- clear plans for research and evaluation to identify successful aspects of programs, provide a basis to amend and improve, demonstrate success and build an evidence base to justify allocation of ongoing resources.

## Next steps in our journey

With four of the existing Closing the Gap targets expiring in 2018, the Australian Government is working with the states and territories and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda.

In December 2016, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed to working together, and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to refresh the agenda with a renewed focus on collaborative effort, evaluation and building on what works in each jurisdiction. In June 2017, COAG welcomed a strengths-based approach that supported Indigenous advancement.

There is a shared view among governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the wider community that we need to do better. But more than this, there is a view we need to move beyond addressing inequalities in education, employment and health and ask what needs to be done to create a thriving and prosperous environment in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can choose to pursue the lives they value for themselves, their families and their communities.

Australian governments are committed to working with Indigenous Australians to develop an agenda that reflects their diverse needs, strengths and aspirations. Importantly, there is a recognition governments do not hold all the levers for change and that the refreshed agenda can only succeed through genuine collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, governments, and the non-government and private sectors.



Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull with Yolngu Elder, Djapirri Mununggirritj, and Lucy Turnbull at the 2017 Garma Festival in East Arnhem Land.

# WORKING TOGETHER



From left, Ngunnawal Elder Tina Brown and her daughter, Justine Brown with Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

**“I believe we can get the settings right if advice and counsel from Aboriginal and Torres Strait people, many who are subject matter experts, are given proper consideration. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders know how their communities work, they know what investments will lead to improvements as well as changes to avoid because of the possible harm they may cause. Clearly we need everybody listening and engaged to not only respond, but also comprehend the advice being given from subject matter experts.”**

Indigenous Advisory Council Co-Chair, Andrea Mason

## **An ongoing journey**

Our country’s shared journey – that of Australia’s First Peoples and non-Indigenous population – is relatively young. It is a journey that has great potential, grounded in a history that has been challenging and, at times, painful.

Successive governments – Commonwealth, state and territory – have acknowledged the legacy of trauma and grief in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a result of colonisation, forced removals and other past government policies.

They have sought to redress this legacy, in part by strengthening the relationship between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and finding common ground based on a shared desire for a better tomorrow and knowledge that it is possible.

The continued commitment remains an ongoing journey – one that has at times tested the resilience and perseverance of Australia’s First Peoples.

But it is a shared understanding that the forward journey can only be walked together that has kept both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and government at the table.

We remain committed to a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported to live the lives they choose and reach their full potential. Realising this will require us all to build relationships based on trust and mutual respect, and to draw on the examples of resilience and perseverance demonstrated by Australia’s Indigenous people throughout history.

This relationship is not just about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders thriving, but about all Australians thriving.

## **The past 10 years**

The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, governments and the wider community has strengthened over the past decade – largely as a result of grassroots campaigns led by Indigenous Australians who fought for better outcomes for their people and a greater recognition of their place as Australia’s First Peoples.

The National Apology to the Stolen Generations and the creation of the Closing the Gap framework in 2008 followed sustained campaigning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These actions created an opening for a new relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians.

Through the Council of Australian Governments, Australia’s political leaders agreed to work with Australia’s First Peoples to improve Indigenous outcomes in the areas of health, education and employment. Six Closing the Gap targets were established, and a seventh target on school attendance was added in 2014.

This commitment to work together with First Australians was further reinforced by the Government’s statement of support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2009.

Over the past 10 years, successive governments have implemented measures under the Closing the Gap framework to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Commonwealth, state and territory governments have recognised that working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is critical to improving outcomes for First Australians.

The Closing the Gap strategy has been underpinned by trust, respect and goodwill between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The relationship between Australia's First Peoples and governments today is significantly deeper than it was 10 years ago.

The key to moving further along this journey is honest, open and respectful dialogue between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, from peak organisations to grassroots campaigners, underpinned by mechanisms that hold all parties to account.

## What have we learned?

Today, we have a far better idea of what works and what does not compared to a decade ago. Reviews on Closing the Gap engagement initiatives over the past 10 years have informed government thinking. Studies from the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse have shown:

- significant gains have been made to reset the relationship between Australia's First Peoples, governments and mainstream Australia;
- a productive working relationship must have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at its core, with First Australians involved in decision-making processes; and
- for Indigenous engagement to be most effective, it needs to be based on the aspirations and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and conducted within an Indigenous-driven process.

## What have we achieved?

In 2018, the Australian Government remains resolute in its commitment to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

From engagement at the local level through local organisations and communities, to engagement with peak organisations on the national stage, significant steps have been taken to ensure the views, aspirations and priorities of First Peoples influence the development of policies, programs and services that affect them and enable them to reach their full potential.

### Local engagement and service delivery

The Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's Regional Network, continues to work with local Indigenous communities and organisations across the country to help create opportunities for them to deliver services that support people living in their communities.

The Regional Network has more than 500 staff, of which 254 identify as Indigenous, on the ground in more than 100 locations across urban, regional and remote Australia. These staff work alongside communities and stakeholders to develop local solutions to address local issues. The Regional Network facilitates a strong relationship between the Government and communities to enable local aspirations to be fulfilled.

## Regional engagement

Through the community-led Empowered Communities initiative and arrangements with regional authorities such as Murdi Paaki, joint decision-making processes are being co-designed and implemented, placing communities at the centre of decision-making. While still in early stages, the process will ensure funding decisions are strongly guided by input from communities and solutions to address local issues are developed at the local level.

For example, Inner Sydney Empowered Communities led the design of the joint decision-making process which

involves community panels. Service providers were asked to self-assess their existing services delivered to the Aboriginal community and how their service may align with the region's Pathway of Empowerment. The community panels assessment provides direct and up to date input, from differing demographics from within the Aboriginal community, into the formal recommendations from EC leaders to the Government when they are considering Indigenous funding and services required within the region. This new way of doing business with the Aboriginal communities within Inner Sydney has the support and endorsement of the Government.

### Box 1: A new journey for the people of Cape York

With approximately 45 per cent of the land in Cape York determined and the remaining land under claim, Cape York people have been looking to the next stage of their future – including how to ensure their land can provide a foundation for their children to enjoy the same level of prosperity and financial independence as other Australians.

After a 27-year journey for land rights, the people of Cape York are looking to start a new journey based on empowerment, land and economic development – one where they will work with government on decisions around the future direction of their communities to better deliver opportunities around jobs and growing businesses. However, the Cape York region is a huge area of more than 280,000 square kilometres with a large number of clan groups each with its own cultural authority and rights over its lands. This journey would only work if they could move forward together.

With the support of the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, the Aboriginal leaders in the region have undertaken an intensive process

over four months covering two Cape York summits, three regional workshops (each involving four sub-regions) and 12 visits to sub-regions to discuss whether there was support for this new way forward and how it could be done. Community facilitators, usually local Aboriginal people, play an important role by working with their communities and clan groups to ensure there was broad input to the design of these new arrangements. There was also support from Indigenous Business Australia and the Indigenous Land Corporation as well as a significant voluntary contribution from corporate partner, Boston Consulting Group.

This work culminated in the final summit in December attended by more than 400 people, including 330 registered Traditional Owners from across Cape York. There was broad support for this new approach and to put a proposal to government in January 2018. While there is still much work to be done, there has been clear support for Aboriginal people to work together at the sub-regional level and deal with governments in a more empowered way. This approach puts local people at the heart of decision making in their communities.

## Working with state and territory governments

State and territory governments, in keeping with their commitment to Closing the Gap, are working with First Peoples to design and implement programs that make a difference to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Each state and territory has developed mechanisms and governance structures such as Indigenous advisory bodies, or in the case of the Australian Capital Territory, the ACT Elected Body, that provide avenues for First Peoples to influence, guide and hold decision-makers to account.

## At the national level

The Australian Government is taking a whole-of-government approach to policy and program development, and service delivery to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This approach means ministers, departments and agencies – from health, to education, environment, and community services – are working closely with each other, Indigenous communities and peak bodies to ensure policies and programs are as effective as possible and services are targeted, accessible and culturally appropriate.

Examples of this include the Department of Health working with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services sector over many years to develop policies to improve outcomes for First Australians.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-23 sets out the Australian Government's vision, principles, priorities and strategies to deliver better health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. An implementation plan outlines the actions to be undertaken by the Government, the Aboriginal community controlled health sector, and other key stakeholders under the Health Plan.

Another example is the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22 – being jointly administered by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Social Services. The Government is co-designing with Indigenous organisations the initiatives being rolled out as part of the \$25 million Indigenous-focused package under the Third Action Plan.

The Australian Government is also working with the commercial sector to provide further business and employment opportunities for First Peoples. For instance, the Government's Indigenous Procurement Policy and investment in major infrastructure projects have unlocked vast new opportunities for Indigenous businesses that create jobs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The ensuing chapters detail how government departments are working with each other and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve Indigenous outcomes.

## Reflections on 2017

The past year has been one of significant milestones – in the way First Australians have worked with and provided advice to the Australian Government, and in the way important and historic occasions in Australia's modern history have been celebrated. Engagement through the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council and the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples working with the Redfern Statement Alliance are two examples – but numerous other examples are showcased throughout this report.

## The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council

The Indigenous Advisory Council has ensured First Australians have been appropriately involved in policy development and decision-making.



**The Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council. From left, Ms Andrea Mason, Mr Djumbulwar Marawili AM, Professor Ngiare Brown, Professor Chris Sarra, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, Cr Roy Ah-See, Ms Susan Murphy, and Minister for Indigenous Health Ken Wyatt AM. Not present: Cr Ted Fraser.**

The Council's advice has extended to the very heart of the Government: the Cabinet. This occurred through a committee of Cabinet chaired by the Prime Minister and attended by Ministers whose portfolio responsibilities directly impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In providing its advice to the Government about policies of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Council focuses its attention in four key areas:

- strengthening the relationship;
- using strengths-based approaches;
- enabling and embracing local leadership and decision making; and
- developing better lines of accountability and decision making for expenditure in Indigenous Affairs and beyond.

### **National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and the Redfern Statement Alliance**

Working with the leaders of the Redfern Statement, the Government has worked in partnership with the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and peak Indigenous organisations through a series of workshops over the past year that have focused on improving outcomes in areas such as childhood development, health, community safety, and housing.

On 17 August 2017, Redfern Statement Alliance leaders met with key Cabinet ministers at the Redfern Statement Ministerial Forum to discuss outcomes from the series of Redfern Statement workshops and identify next steps to implement recommendations.

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, through its Co-Chairs, Dr Jackie Huggins and Mr Rod Little, also had a seat at the table at the Council of Australian Governments' Ministerial Council on Indigenous Affairs' historic first meeting held to discuss refreshing the Closing the Gap agenda to one based on Indigenous strengths.

Since Congress was established, the Australian Government has provided funding of \$32.1 million to support its engagement and advocacy on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The relationship between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has strengthened over the past 10 years – but we must continue to strengthen the relationship. Trusted, respectful and accountable relationships are key to the effective development of policies and delivery of services that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**WORKING TOGETHER**  
**OUTSTANDING**  
**LOCAL**  
**SOLUTIONS**  
**DELIVERING**  
**EXCITING**  
**OUTCOMES**

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**Kornar Winmil Yunti  
Aboriginal Corporation  
working with communities  
to reduce domestic  
violence**

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Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation (KWY) is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to reduce family violence in South Australia.

KWY received \$2.76 million under the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-22 to co-design and deliver culturally safe projects. Prior to receiving this funding, KWY was specifically delivering services to Indigenous male perpetrators.

KWY has been working with local communities and the Australian Government to design services aimed at reducing family violence, improving the safety of women and children at home, and breaking the cycle of harm stemming from violence associated with intergenerational trauma.



The co-design project has led to the development of an integrated and holistic model that offers trauma-informed therapeutic services for children, intensive counselling support for women, services for perpetrators of violence, and family-focused case management.

KWY Chief Executive Officer, Craig Rigney, says he is proud to lead the project.

“The co-design project started with the Government listening to Aboriginal communities and organisations about how to design family violence services,” Mr Rigney says.



**Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation team members, back row from left, Tod Stokes, Stephanie McGarrigan, Brad Hart, Prue Adamson and Teri Di Salvo. Front row from left, Jenni Greenhill, Craig Rigney, and Dianne Martin. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, announced a \$25 million investment in frontline Indigenous organisations and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services.**

“KWY is proud to be establishing a new family violence service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Adelaide and Riverland regions.”

The service is recruiting at least 10 staff and will operate in three communities across outer northern Adelaide, southern Adelaide, and the Riverland region.

“We look forward to seeing positive and sustainable outcomes for families by supporting Aboriginal women, children and men in South Australia to reduce family violence. The safety of women and children is at the heart of everything we do,” Mr Rigney says.

# CHAPTER 1 CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS CULTURES

A history stretching back 65,000 years



Indigenous representatives of the Royal Australian Air Force and people of Wiradjuri country, Leading Aircraftmen Brent Irvine, left, and Jackson Saddler, right, proudly display the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags with Flight Sergeant Luke Walker during NAIDOC Week 2017 at the main air operating base in the Middle East region.



**“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are complex and diverse. The Indigenous cultures of Australia are the oldest living cultural history in the world – they go back at least 65,000 years. Indigenous communities keep their cultural heritage alive by passing their knowledge, arts, ceremonies and performances from one generation to another, speaking and teaching languages, protecting cultural materials, sacred and significant sites, and objects. For Indigenous Australians, the land is the core of all spirituality and this relationship and the spirit of ‘Country’ is central to the issues that are important to Indigenous people today.”**

Ngunnawal Elder, Tina Brown

## A growing awareness: the 10-year story

Over the past 10 years since the Closing the Gap targets were set, awareness and recognition of Indigenous cultures and the rich history of First Peoples civilisation has grown considerably. Importantly, the value placed on culture by Indigenous Australians has extended to non-Indigenous Australians, across governments, businesses and the non-profit sector.

As respect for and appreciation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultures have deepened, practices that acknowledge Indigenous cultures have become far more a part of everyday life. Good practice has become far more common practice – the acknowledgement of Traditional Owners and “Welcome to Country” ceremonies at the start of functions and the flying of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags outside buildings such as council chambers. Appreciation and use of Indigenous languages among non-Indigenous Australians have also grown over the past 10 years – and in 2015, the Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework was added to the Australian Curriculum to support the teaching and learning of the languages indigenous to this country.

Reconciliation Action Plans are an important start for Australian organisations – corporate, non-government and government – to increasingly demonstrate their commitment to reconciliation and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

And in a more public way, Australia's leading sporting codes – including the Australian Football League and national Rugby League – have demonstrated their commitment to recognising the cultures of First Australians through dedicated Indigenous rounds.

All of these practices have combined over the past decade to help increase our nation's awareness and appreciation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and civilisation remain critical to the story of our nation, a story enriched by a history going back at least 65,000 years.

Governments and Australia's wider society have heard the call from First Peoples to invest more heavily in the preservation, maintenance and revitalisation of Indigenous cultures. An example of this has been the Government's \$10 million commitment in 2017 to protect, preserve and celebrate Indigenous languages. This amount was in addition to the ongoing funds of around \$20 million already provided annually through the Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) programme. The new measure supports community-led initiatives that help revive, maintain and nurture Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Government will consult with stakeholders over the life of the measure, including sector peak bodies, Indigenous language centres and communities, and advisory bodies such as the Indigenous Advisory Council.

As part of the commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous communities, a National Indigenous Languages Convention will be held on 22-23 February 2018 to continue consultations, facilitate partnerships, and underpin a collaborative approach to the investment. Discussions will address:

- how digital innovation can enhance opportunities for language protection, preservation, and celebration;
- how those working in the community can come together to revive and maintain languages with government and others, such as thought leaders, to inform policy direction; and
- how to bring community languages workers together with industry stakeholders to explore opportunities for innovation and potential partnerships.

Indigenous interpreter services are critical to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are effectively engaged with and have equal access to government services and opportunities. The Government committed \$6.96 million in 2016-17 and \$5.17 million in 2017-18 to improve access to Indigenous interpreting services and to support an ongoing supply of a well-trained workforce through training and accreditation of Indigenous interpreters in the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and Queensland.

It is important to respect, recognise and invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have told us repeatedly that it is central to their lives, and identified

culture as a key factor in improving and maintaining wellbeing. It shapes Indigenous identity, linking people to their community and country, and importantly is a contributing factor to health and wellbeing.

The Australian Government is working towards a nation where the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as First Peoples is recognised and respected and the many dynamic aspects of Indigenous cultures are preserved, celebrated and embraced for the benefit of all.

Australia is continuing along a journey to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's founding document, the Constitution. Achieving constitutional recognition remains a shared commitment between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Building an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures within the broader population is crucial to Indigenous people's health, social, economic and emotional wellbeing, and the overall unity and pride of our nation. The Prime Minister speaking in Ngunawal language is just one of many ways in which the Government is demonstrating its respect for Indigenous languages and cultures on a national platform.

The Government is supporting Indigenous culture in a variety of ways, from National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) Week grants, to investing in the preservation of Indigenous languages and nurturing of Indigenous art.

The Government is also providing support for Indigenous rangers who work to improve environmental outcomes on country. Indigenous rangers are able to combine the traditional knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with modern science to protect and manage their land, sea and culture.

## Supporting Indigenous cultures

Through the Australian Government's \$5 billion Indigenous Advancement Strategy and other initiatives, the Government is investing significantly in Indigenous cultures and language in recognition of the central role of culture in the lives of First Australians.

Each year, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement and culture is celebrated through the National NAIDOC Awards Ceremony. The Government supports communities throughout Australia to hold NAIDOC Week celebrations through a local grant round.

In 2017, more than \$1.4 million in grants supported more than 550 local and regional NAIDOC Week events. The 2017 NAIDOC Week theme, *Our Languages Matter*, saw a nationwide focus on the importance of the preservation and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.



**Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull escorts Ms Bonita Mabo AO, the widow of the late Eddie Mabo, through Parliament House during celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.**

The 2018 NAIDOC Week theme, *Because of Her, We Can!*, will celebrate the vital role Indigenous women have played – and continue to play – in Australian society.

In 2017, the nation also celebrated several highly significant anniversaries: the 20th anniversary of the *Bringing Them Home* report, the 50th anniversary of 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the historic Mabo High Court decision. The Government invested \$1.76 million to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1967 “yes” vote and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision during last year’s National Reconciliation Week. The Government also announced the 1967 Referendum 50th Anniversary \$138 million Indigenous Education Package.

The 1967 referendum and Mabo High Court decision are two of the most important moments in Australia’s modern history. The 1967 referendum expanded Commonwealth powers to make laws relating to Indigenous Australians and meant that all First Australians were counted as part of the official population, while the Mabo High Court decision overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius* and paved the way for recognition of native title across many parts of Australia.

Activities to celebrate the anniversaries included a lunch in Canberra hosted by the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, \$5,000 grants to local councils to help celebrate National Reconciliation Week, a gala lunch in Melbourne hosted by Reconciliation Australia and the Australian Football League, awareness-raising activities broadcasted by National Indigenous Television (NITV), community activities held in Townsville and Brisbane and a dinner in Sydney hosted by Reconciliation Australia.

In addition to these celebrations, a new stamp and 50-cent coin are now in circulation to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the “yes” vote. The coin also celebrates the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) also partnered with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and National State Libraries Australasia to create the *Right Wrongs* online exhibition which explores the lead-up, events and legacy of the 1967 referendum.

Through the Government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy, around \$21.1 million is provided every year to the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector. More than 45 organisations and 120 licensed broadcasting services are supported, including remote, regional and urban radio stations, and Indigenous Community Television in remote Australia.

The sector strengthens opportunities for First Australians to share their cultures and languages, as well as access culturally relevant information and entertainment, including traditional and contemporary Indigenous music.

Another way the Australian Government recognises, respects and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is by investing in the cultural capability

and competency of its staff through a wide range of training and development opportunities. A foundational component of this is the ‘Core Cultural Learning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia’ (Core) online interactive course developed by AIATSIS in partnership with the Australian Government to strengthen the cultural capability of Commonwealth employees. ‘Core’ is available to all Australian Public Service employees and has surpassed 5,000 enrolments from more than 40 Commonwealth agencies.

The Government also celebrates and preserves culture by funding cultural festivals, cultural exchange camps and programs, culture centres and hubs, heritage trails and the preservation and archiving of community collections. One of the most significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander festivals supported by the Australian Government is the Garma festival, attracting more than 2,500 people from across Australia and overseas. Garma is organised by the Yothu Yindi Foundation and has been instrumental in leading national conversations and debates about the rights, interests and cultural recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for 19 years. The Australian Government has invested approximately \$2.7 million in Garma since 2012-13.

## Learning centre recognises two Indigenous Defence members

In 2017, the Department of Defence created a state-of-the-art Learning Centre in Canberra aimed at providing an inclusive learning environment. During NAIDOC Week, Defence recognised the contribution of past Indigenous Defence members by naming two training rooms in the centre after Lance Sergeant William Charles Westbury and Private William Allan Irwin. Both men served in the Australian Army and saw active service in World War I, with Private Irwin making the ultimate sacrifice to his country with his life.

Defence also recognised Indigenous culture on operations overseas during NAIDOC Week in 2017. Indigenous military members raised the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at Defence’s main air base in the Middle East region and conducted presentations on Indigenous culture to their Defence colleagues.

## Preserving and strengthening Indigenous knowledge

AIATSIS continued its commitment to preserving and strengthening Indigenous knowledge, heritage and culture through the national collection, research and publishing. The ongoing development and access to the collection was augmented by the Preserve Strengthen and Renew in Communities project that seeks to engage communities in the return and management of collection materials into the future. The Kiwikurra and Karajarri people participated in the project in 2017.



**Torres Strait dance and music group Eip Karem Beizam performing at celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of the 1967 referendum and the 25th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.**

AIATSIS also provided opportunities for Indigenous communities, research and public policy practitioners to engage with each other and move debates and practice forward. In March 2017, the AIATSIS National Indigenous Research Conference, co-convened with the University of Canberra, focused on “impact, engagement and transformation” and investigated the capacity of research, policy and community to achieve change. Similarly, the National Native Title Conference, co-convened with the North Queensland Land Council, looked at the achievements and challenges of the past 25 years since the recognition of native title and included a strong focus on the maturing of governance of native title organisations and young people in the engagement in native title.

## Supporting Indigenous art and languages

The Government recognises that Indigenous arts and languages are essential to the wellbeing and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and play an integral role in ensuring the sustainability, vitality and strength of Indigenous communities.

Around \$40 million is invested annually through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) and the Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) programs. These programs promote the sharing of language and culture between generations and the ongoing viability of Indigenous-owned enterprises, including investing in around 80 Indigenous owned art centres. They enrich the social, cultural and economic life of Indigenous

communities and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to generate income, gain employment, develop professional skills and participate in the nation’s economy, while maintaining a continued connection to country and culture.

In addition, the Government committed a further \$10 million over four years from 2016-17 to protect, preserve and celebrate Indigenous languages. As part of this, the Government is undertaking extensive consultations with Indigenous stakeholders on how to best deliver digital solutions and partnerships for ongoing capture and teaching of language, and developing career pathways for Indigenous language workers and linguists.

### Showcasing Indigenous art overseas

The Australian Government supports initiatives that expose global audiences to Indigenous artists and performers. For example, the Pormpuraaw Art and Culture Centre exhibition, ‘Ghostnets: Australian Indigenous Art, Culture and Sustainability’, was on display at the Palais des Nations Building in Geneva, Switzerland, to coincide with the 36th session of the Human Rights Council in September 2017.

Additionally, the exhibition, ‘Taba Naba – Australia, Oceania, Art of the Sea People’, is the largest exhibition of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art ever shown in continental Europe. The exhibition was displayed at the Oceanographic Museum, Monaco, and explored the relationship between Australia’s Indigenous people and their environment. It was



**Sebastian Creek, Kalan Land Management Officer, implementing mosaic burning on Kaantju traditional lands north of Coen, Queensland.**

extremely successful, with 410,000 people from more than 78 countries visiting the exhibition. The exhibition also toured Paris, Geneva and Greenwich.

### **Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas**

The Government has committed \$550 million for Indigenous rangers over seven years to 2020, including \$30 million provided through the Capacity Building for Indigenous Rangers Strategy. More than \$180 million has been committed for Indigenous Protected Areas over 10 years to 2023, including \$15 million for new Indigenous Protected Areas.

Together, the Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas programs have created more than 2,500 jobs for First Australians through full-time, part-time and casual employment, as well as delivering important economic, social, cultural and environmental outcomes. About one-third of all ranger jobs are held by women.

As at 16 January 2018, funding was being provided to 66 organisations to support 118 ranger groups.

The Government's Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous Rangers programs empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to manage their country in accordance with their priorities and to develop and strengthen their governance and management capacity. The programs also provide nationally accredited training and career pathways for Indigenous rangers in land and sea management. Through these

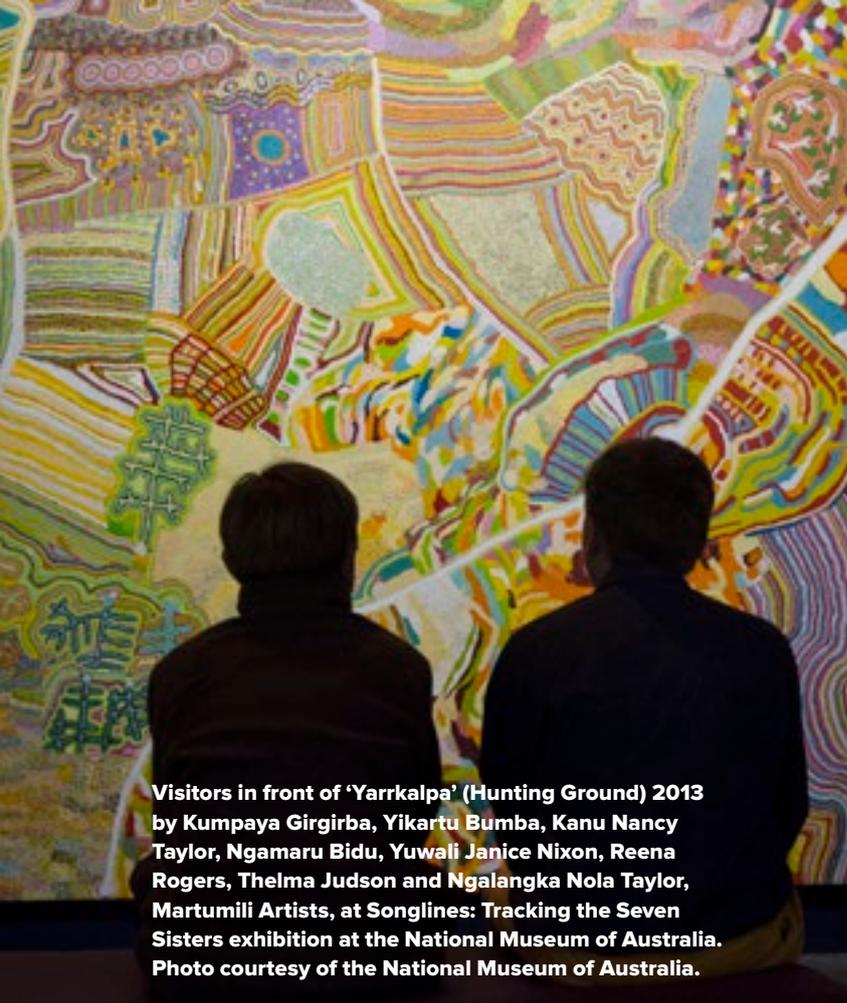
programs, the Government helps to safeguard and promote the rights of future generations to enjoy and use their land in accordance with cultural obligations while providing a catalyst for economic development and employment opportunities into the future.

### **Australian Institute of Marine Science**

In 2016, the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS) developed and adopted an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement strategy in close consultation with a number of Indigenous people and groups with an interest in sea country management.

The strategy builds on strong historical partnerships and relationships that AIMS has had with Traditional Owners, and provides a strategic corporate approach to Indigenous engagement. The Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders in Marine Science program provides Indigenous secondary students in North Queensland with opportunities to explore career options in marine science.

Since the program was established by Dr Joseph Pollock in 2013, 199 students have participated in the immersive hands-on curriculum which blends traditional ecological knowledge with western science. Students experience life as an Indigenous ranger alongside rangers from Giringun and Gudjuda. They also experience life as a marine scientist alongside researchers from AIMS and James Cook University.



Visitors in front of 'Yarrkalpa' (Hunting Ground) 2013 by Kumpaya Girgirba, Yikartu Bumba, Kanu Nancy Taylor, Ngamaru Bidu, Yuwali Janice Nixon, Reena Rogers, Thelma Judson and Ngalangka Nola Taylor, Martumili Artists, at Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters exhibition at the National Museum of Australia. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Australia.



Eddie Mabo's granddaughter, Boneta-Marie Mabo, pictured here with the commemorative coin she designed to mark the 50th anniversary of the Mabo High Court decision.

## Constitutional Recognition

The Australian Government is committed to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia's founding document – our Constitution.

Constitutional recognition would acknowledge our shared history and the value we place on our country's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.

To facilitate progress towards constitutional recognition, Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and the Leader of the Opposition Bill Shorten, jointly appointed a Referendum Council in December 2015 to advise them on next steps towards a successful referendum.

The Referendum Council delivered its final report to the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition on 30 June 2017. It recommended amending the Constitution to enshrine a First Nations representative body to provide a voice to the Australian Parliament, and a legislative Declaration of Recognition to acknowledge our Indigenous, multicultural and British heritage.

The Australian Government thoroughly considered the Referendum Council's recommendations. Although the Government remains committed to constitutional change, and to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are properly involved in decision-making over their own affairs, it does not support a constitutional amendment to enshrine an Indigenous representative body that would inevitably be seen as a third chamber of parliament.

Constitutional change in Australia requires a high threshold of support – a majority of people in the majority of states – at a referendum and no controversial proposal has succeeded at a referendum since 1946. Only eight of 44 referendums have succeeded – the last in 1977. The Government believes this proposal would not gain this level of support, and that a failed referendum would be a huge setback in Australia's reconciliation journey.

The Government remains committed to recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian Constitution. On 26 October 2017, the Prime Minister wrote to the Leader of the Opposition proposing the establishment of a Joint Select Committee to consider the recommendations of all of the existing bodies of work developed by the Expert Panel on Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the Constitution (2012), the Joint Select Committee on Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (2015) and the Referendum Council (2017).

## CELEBRATING INDIGENOUS CULTURE

# OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, with Ms Gail Mabo, the daughter of the late Eddie Mabo. Photo courtesy of Kym Smith, The Australian newspaper.



### Celebrations for 25th anniversary of landmark Mabo High Court decision

Last year marked the 25th anniversary of the landmark Mabo High Court decision that overturned the doctrine of *terra nullius*.

The High Court decision recognised that a group of Meriam people of the Mer Island Group in the Torres Strait, led by the late Eddie Mabo, held ownership of the island of Mer and surrounding island groups.

The historic court decision and the 50th anniversary of the successful 1967 referendum were celebrated through the launch of a commemorative coin and stamp to acknowledge the efforts of the referendum campaigners and the plaintiffs in the Mabo case.

The local Community Development Programme provider, My Pathway, worked with Gail Mabo, the daughter of the late Mr Mabo, his widow, Bonita Mabo AO, the Meriam people and the Traditional Owners of the land on the restoration of the site of Mr Mabo's grave.

The project involved a huge local effort from the volunteers from the Meriam community. Hundreds of people travelled to Mer Island to pay their respects.

The restoration was unveiled during week-long celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the decision.



Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, Greg McIntyre SC Legal Counsel of the Mabo Case, TSIRC Councillor Bob Kaigey (Mer Division), Mer Elder Alo Tapim, TSRA Board Member (Iama) Getano Lui Jnr and TSRA Chairperson Pedro Stephen at the restored grave site for Eddie Mabo on Mer Island in the Torres Strait.



**Gurindji Elders unveiling a sign to the Wave Hill Walk-Off Walking Track at the Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation.**

### Showcasing historic Wave Hill Walk-Off site a boost for tourism

The Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation and Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation, in partnership with the University of Melbourne Bower Studio, have revitalised the historic 1966 Wave Hill Walk Off track in the Northern Territory.

The track was heritage listed 10 years ago, and with funding from the Australian and Territory governments, interpretive signage and rest areas have been constructed. The track begins at Jinparrak (Old Wave Hill Station) and ends at the gravesite of leader Vincent Lingiari.

The work to upgrade and maintain the facility has been undertaken by Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation and Karungkarni Art staff, Community Development Programme participants and students from Bower Studio.

Thousands attended the grand opening which took place at the Freedom Day Festival in 2016, held to honour the 50th anniversary of the Wave Hill Walk-off and the birth of Aboriginal land rights.

Vincent Lingiari’s granddaughter, Selma Smiler, says restoring the track has fostered strength in community spirit.

“We want to keep the Gurindji alive for future generations. We’re proud to tell the story along the Walk-Off track. My grandfather would be proud too,” Selma says.

Since its opening, the track has attracted increasing interest from visitors including schools, international tourists and leadership groups – all keen to learn about the iconic Gurindji story.

The three bough shelters along the track have been recognised for their innovative design, winning an award from the Australian Institute of Architects in 2017.



**Dhimirru Ranger, Rakrakpuy Marika.**  
Photo courtesy of Kerry Trapnell.

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### **Dhimirru Aboriginal Corporation's Rangers working 'both ways'**

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Dhimirru Rangers embrace a “both ways learning” philosophy to combine ngapaki (non-Indigenous) best practice land management techniques and Yolngu traditional knowledge and expertise. This aims to create the best future possible for the Yolngu people in the management of the Dhimirru Indigenous Protected Area (IPA).

The Dhimirru IPA is the first IPA in the Northern Territory to include both terrestrial and marine areas. It includes numerous sites of cultural significance and conservation and a number of threatened species of flora and fauna.

The Dhimirru Rangers consist of nine full-time Indigenous rangers and three full-time Indigenous cultural support staff. Their role includes biodiversity monitoring, cultural heritage surveys, fire management, weed and feral animal control, visitor management activities and sea country management.

The rangers also play a significant role in reinforcing cultural practices, such as ensuring that turtle hunting is undertaken within cultural protocols.

Putting “both ways” into practice involves Dhimirru Rangers partnering with a range of bodies including the Northern Land Council, Australian Border Force, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the Northern Territory Seafood Council, and the mining giant, Rio Tinto.

This “both ways” approach also applies to gender and cultural balance, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff being employed as well as a focus on maintaining gender diversity. It also values an balanced representation of the two dominant clans, Gumatj and Rirratjingu.

This “both ways” approach also applies to gender and cultural balance, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff being employed as well as a focus on maintaining gender diversity. There is also a conscious approach to maintaining a balance of the

two dominant clans, Gumatj and Rirratjingu, so that they are evenly and fairly represented.

“Getting a job with the Dhimirru Rangers is highly valued among the Yolngu and many local kids aspire to being a ranger,” says Sea Country Facilitator, Luke Playford, who works closely with the rangers in his mentoring role.

“We also have the Learning on Country (LOC) program that operates in partnership with Yirrkala school. It involves weekly lessons and events out on country with Elders, rangers, teachers and students. The program combines important cultural learning with mainstream curriculum. LOC students are also given the opportunity to work with the rangers in their school holidays, with some finding direct employment with Dhimirru after they graduate.”

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## Mungo Man returned to Country

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In February 1974, archaeologist Dr Jim Bowler discovered the remains of Mungo Man at Lake Mungo in the Willandra Lakes region of south-western New South Wales.

The remains, believed to be 42,000 years old, were discovered in a traditional ochre burial pit. After the discovery, the remains were removed from Lake Mungo and relocated to the Australian National University in Canberra.

The Traditional Owners of the Willandra Lakes region, the Mutthi, Paakantji and Ngyiampaa people, had long sought the return of Mungo Man and other ancestral remains back to their Country.

Mungo Man has been instrumental in increasing people's understanding of how long First Australians have lived on the continent.

As one of the oldest remains ever found anywhere in the world, Mungo Man also represents one of the most important contributions to our knowledge of human history on earth. It is significant, not only to Australia but the world.

In November 2017, their years of tireless work and persistent lobbying became reality when the ANU released the remains of Mungo Man and 104 other people, and started their journey back to country.

The return of Mungo Man to his country was an opportunity to celebrate First Australians as the world's oldest continuous culture. The Australian Government was pleased to support the return of Mungo Man to Country.



**Mungo Man returns to Country. Photo courtesy of the National Museum of Australia.**



**Ngadju Conservation Aboriginal Corporation Chairman, Les Shultz, and Program Manager, Peter Price.**

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### **Ngadju Conservation – for the importance, resilience and richness of culture**

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The Great Western Woodlands in WA's Goldfields region is larger than the size of Tasmania. In 2017, the Traditional Owners, the Ngadju people were recognised as native title holders in the Federal Court.

In the years since their native title was recognised, the Ngadju people have worked with Rangelands NRM and Gondwana Link. Small grants helped Ngadju to build their capacity to take on bigger projects to manage their country and maintain their culture.

In 2015, Ngadju Conservation developed a Healthy Country Plan with the vision that “Ngadju are connected to our country and our culture, and are keeping places, animals, plants and knowledge healthy for future generations”.

The Healthy Country Plan maps out how the Ngadju will build their capacity and skills, working across traditional Ngadju knowledge and culture within a modern outback society. They will care for Ngadju country and work with both modern scientific knowledge and the wisdom of their ancestors.

After the native title claim was finalised in 2017, Ngadju Conservation received a grant of almost \$700,000 through the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy to establish

a community ranger program to employ and train local Ngadju young people “on country”.

Chairperson of Ngadju Conservation Aboriginal Corporation, Les Schultz, says the grant funding has opened up employment opportunities, helping to address local long-term unemployment issues.

“Our long-term vision is that the skills level will be raised, we can reconnect to country, take care of our culture and instil the core identity of Ngadju,” Les says.

# CHAPTER 2 INFANCY AND EARLY CHILDHOOD

A platform for success





Young Harmony Cranston Destiny Frail pictured playing in Dubbo.

**“Early childhood education not only works to create a strong and stable foundation in formal education for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, but also provides an opportunity for those children to grow in, and share their sense of pride in their connection to culture, language, community and country.”**

Biripi early childhood teacher, Adam Duncan

## **Introduction: A good start in life**

A healthy and safe start to life gives our children the greatest chance of succeeding at school and going on to make the most of their opportunities later in life.

Investing in children’s early years builds on the strengths of culture and care, and sets the course for a future of prosperity and opportunity. It supports strong foundations and underpins better health and social outcomes across the life course by:

- focusing on parents and families before, during, and after pregnancy; and
- embedding respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages in early learning settings.

## **Child mortality**

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**Target: Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018)**

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### **Key points**

- The 2016 Indigenous child mortality rate is on track to halve the gap by 2018.
- Over the long term (1998-2016) the Indigenous child mortality rate has declined significantly and the gap has narrowed. However, progress has slowed since the 2008 target baseline.
- Improvements in recent years in Indigenous child and maternal health outcomes indicate further potential reductions in child mortality rates in coming years.

**Figure 1: Child mortality rates, 0–4 years\***



\* Child mortality rates for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory only.  
 \*\* The non-Indigenous trajectory is based on the non-Indigenous trend between 1998 and 2012, from which the Indigenous trajectory was derived.  
 Sources: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

## What the data tells us

### National

The 2016 Indigenous child (0-4 year-old) mortality rate was within the range to meet the target by 2018 and is therefore on track (**Figure 1**). Progress against this target is measured using the ABS mortality data for 0-4 year-olds.<sup>3</sup>

In last year’s Closing the Gap report, a sudden increase in Indigenous child deaths in 2015 (mainly due to improvement in data collection methodology in Queensland) was noted.<sup>4</sup> The 2016 Indigenous child mortality rate has returned to being within the range required to meet the target.

Over the period 1998 to 2016, the Indigenous child mortality rate declined from 217 deaths per 100,000 to 146 deaths per 100,000, a reduction of around 35 per cent. There was also a significant narrowing of the child mortality gap, by 32 per cent.

More recently, from 2008, progress has slowed, with a decline in Indigenous child mortality rates by 11.5 per cent. Volatility in Indigenous child mortality rates in recent years has contributed to uncertainty

around this shorter term estimate.<sup>5</sup> Over this period, the non-Indigenous child mortality rate has declined by 33 per cent, so the gap has not changed significantly.

Over the period 2012 to 2016,<sup>6</sup> around 82 per cent of Indigenous child deaths (0-4 year-olds) were infant deaths (less than one year old). The Indigenous infant mortality rate was about double (1.9 times) the non-Indigenous rate over the period 2012 to 2016. More than half of deaths (53 per cent) in this group were caused by ‘perinatal conditions’ (such as, birth trauma, foetal growth disorders, complications of pregnancy, and respiratory and cardiovascular disorders).<sup>7</sup>

Between 1998 and 2016, the Indigenous infant mortality rate declined significantly by around 66.7 per cent (from 13.5 deaths per 1,000 live births in 1998 to 6 in 2016), and the gap has narrowed by 84.5 per cent. There has been a decline in Indigenous infant mortality rates by about 10 per cent (not statistically significant) from 2008.

3 ABS Death Registrations collection is the source for the data. Data are reported for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory only, which are the jurisdictions considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish.

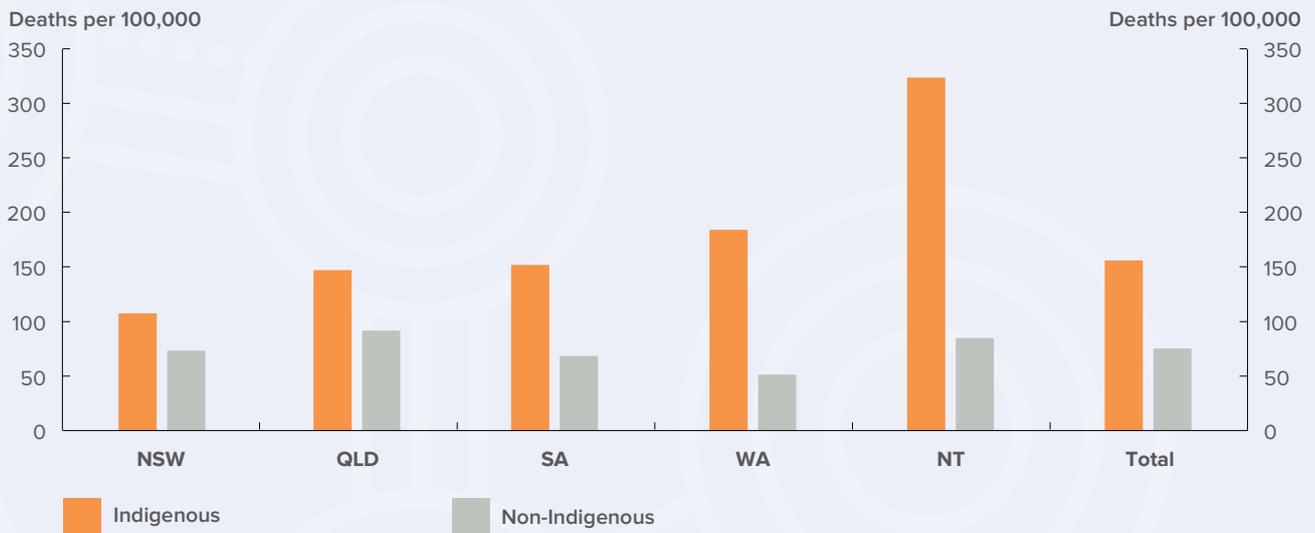
4 From 2015, deaths data provided by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages includes Medical Certificate of Cause of Death information, resulting in an increase in the number of deaths identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in Queensland.

5 There is a long time-lag between policy and program implementation, and the impact on mortality. In addition, short-term Indigenous mortality data can be quite volatile due to the small numbers involved. For these reasons, long-term data is used to give the fuller picture.

6 Five years of deaths data are combined for more detailed reporting of Indigenous child mortality to overcome the volatility in rates associated with the small numbers involved.

7 The perinatal period commences at 20 completed weeks (140 days) of gestation and ends 28 completed days after birth.

**Figure 2: Child (0-4 years) mortality rates by jurisdiction, 2012-2016**



Sources: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

Early childhood (1-4 year-olds) deaths account for the remaining 18 per cent of child deaths. Over the period 1998 to 2016, there has been a high degree of fluctuation in the early childhood mortality rate. The rate has declined by 21.6 per cent (not statistically significant) over this period.

The single largest cause of Indigenous child (0-4 year-old) mortality was perinatal conditions, which accounted for 43.5 per cent of Indigenous child deaths over the period 2012 to 2016. This cause also accounted for 42.7 per cent of the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous child mortality. Other important causes of child mortality were ‘sudden and ill-defined conditions’ (such as Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) causing 17.9 per cent of child deaths, and ‘congenital malformation’ (12.2 per cent) and ‘injury and poisoning’ (12 per cent of 0-4 year-old deaths).

Some health interventions can have a long lead time before measurable impacts are seen. The implementation timeframe for the Indigenous Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreement provided for a lag of more than a decade before outcomes are expected to be seen (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2014).

While the full effect of the COAG initiatives on Indigenous child mortality rates may still take some time to become evident, a number of intermediate measures show that improvements in Indigenous child and maternal health have started to appear. For example, increases in the take up of antenatal care programs, reductions in the rate of maternal smoking during pregnancy and low birthweight babies (Box 1) and increases in immunisation rates (Box 2). These emerging trends are expected to result in further reductions in child mortality rates.

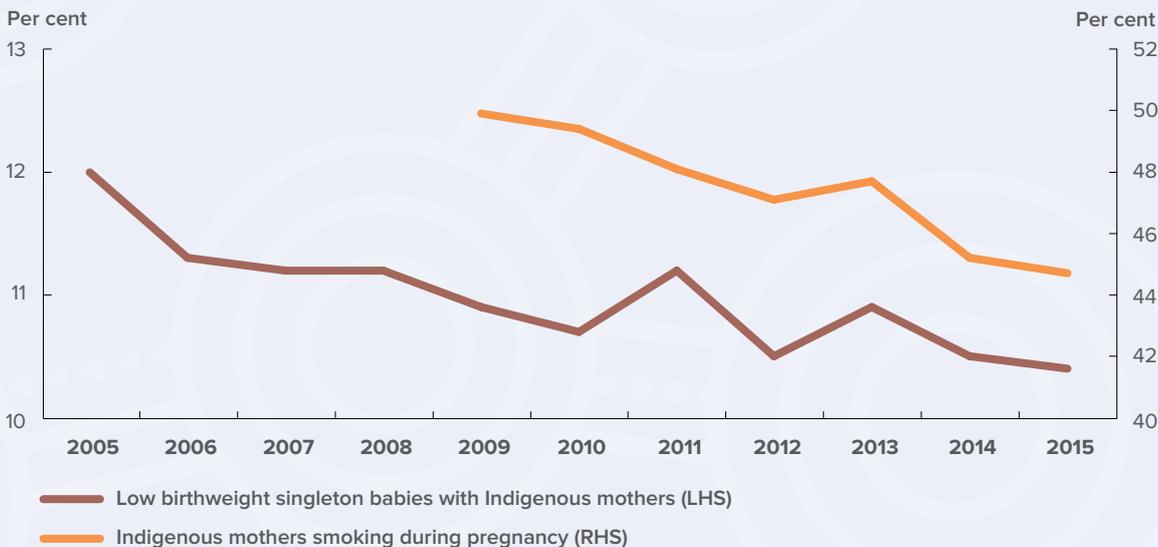
It is important to build on these positive drivers of change through continued focus on child and maternal health care to ensure Indigenous children have a healthy start to life.

### States and territories

Indigenous child mortality rates vary across jurisdictions (Figure 2). Over the period 2012 to 2016, New South Wales had the lowest Indigenous child mortality rate (110 per 100,000 population) and the smallest gap with non-Indigenous children (at 35 per 100,000). The Northern Territory had the highest Indigenous child mortality rate (332 per 100,000) and the largest gap (245 per 100,000).

There have been positive developments and Indigenous child mortality rates have fallen in all of the five jurisdictions over the period 1998 to 2016. However, there are still gaps that would need to be addressed to ensure achievement of the target of halving the child mortality gap by 2018.

**Figure 3: Indigenous maternal smoking and low child birthweight rates**



Source: AIHW, 2017

**Box 1: Improvements in maternal and child health risk factors**

Smoking during pregnancy, poor antenatal care and low birthweight are among the key risk factors for pregnancy-related complications and adverse birth outcomes. In recent years, there have been some signs of improvement in these key maternal and child health risk factors.

The proportion of Indigenous mothers having an antenatal visit in the first trimester increased substantially between 2010 and 2015 (from 41 per cent to 57 per cent), getting close to the proportion of non-Indigenous mothers which has increased slightly (61 per cent to 63 per cent) over the same period.<sup>8</sup> In 2015, the proportion of Indigenous mothers receiving antenatal care in the first trimester was highest in Outer Regional areas with 63 per cent, compared with 58 per cent in Very Remote areas and 52 per cent in Major Cities (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017a).

The proportion of Indigenous mothers having five or more antenatal visits has also increased slightly from 85 per cent in 2011 to 88 per cent in 2015.<sup>9</sup> Greater access to antenatal care

means improving chances of having a healthy baby by providing Indigenous mothers with opportunities to find and treat any prenatal conditions and health risks early in pregnancy.

Smoking during pregnancy is one of the strongest risk factors contributing to the high rates of low birthweight among babies born to Indigenous mothers – up to 51 per cent of low birthweight births to Indigenous mothers have been attributed to smoking during pregnancy (Australian Health Ministers’ Advisory Council 2017). There has been a significant reduction in the proportion of Indigenous mothers who smoked during pregnancy from 50 per cent in 2009 to 45 per cent in 2015 (Figure 3).<sup>10</sup>

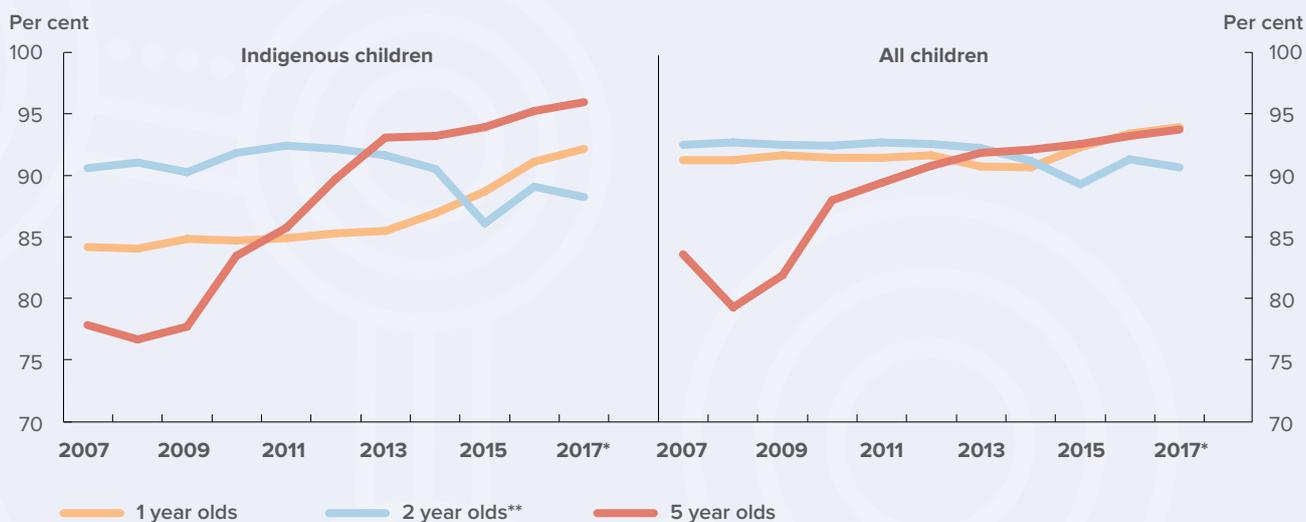
The proportion of low birthweight singleton babies born to Indigenous mothers has also fallen from 12 per cent in 2005 to 10.4 per cent in 2015. The proportion of low birthweight babies with non-Indigenous mothers remained between 4.6 and 4.8 per cent over this time, meaning the Indigenous rate is about twice the rate for babies born to non-Indigenous mothers (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017a).

8 Age-standardised data. Trend data excludes New South Wales due to a change in data collection practice introduced in 2011.

9 Age-standardised data, based on women who gave birth at 32 weeks or more gestation (excluding unknown gestation). Trend data excludes Victoria and Western Australia.

10 Age-standardised data.

**Figure 4: Share of children fully immunised**



\* 2017 data is for the nine months to September 2017

\*\* There was a decline in coverage rates in December 2014 and March 2017 due to changes to the definition of full immunisation. The more antigens included in the assessment, the higher the likelihood of reduced coverage rates. This usually resolves over time as the changes become more routine.

Source: Australian Department of Health

## Box 2: Immunisation

Immunisation is highly effective in reducing morbidity and mortality caused by vaccine-preventable diseases. Since the introduction of childhood vaccinations, deaths from vaccine-preventable diseases have fallen for the general population by 99 per cent.

Vaccinations are estimated to have saved some 78,000 lives and have been effective in reducing the disease disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations.

The Commonwealth Chief Medical Officer and state and territory Chief Health Officers have agreed on an aspirational target of 95 per cent immunisation coverage rate for all children. Over the past 10 years Australia has continued to improve immunisation rates in all children, but most notably for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged five, which are the first cohort nationally to reach the 95 per cent aspirational target (**Figure 4**).

## Translating policy into action

Interventions within the first three years of life have shown to have the greatest impact on health and life outcomes. The Australian Government has a number of programs that prioritise investment in child and maternal health.

For example, funding of \$94 million is being invested over three years from July 2015 for the Better Start to Life approach. This will expand two existing programs – the Australian Nurse Family Partnership Programme and the New Directions: Mothers and Babies Services Programme.

The Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) funds a range of early childhood initiatives to support young mothers, parents and families including facilitated playgroups, parenting classes, home visiting and outreach programs. These activities build the knowledge and skills of Indigenous parents and promote the healthy development of children.

### New directions: mothers and babies service

New Directions: Mothers and Babies Service (NDMBS) has expanded from 85 to 124 sites, with a further expansion planned for an additional 12 sites, bringing the total to 136. NDMBS continues to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their mothers with access to antenatal and postnatal care; standard information about baby care; practical advice and assistance with breast-feeding, nutrition and parenting; monitoring of developmental milestones, immunisation and infections; and health checks and referrals to treatment for Indigenous children before starting school.

## Early childhood education

### Target: 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education (by 2025)

From conception to the first year of school, a child's cognitive, physical, social and emotional development is in a stage of rapid growth – more than any other time in life. Our first years can shape other outcomes through life. They can influence our health, wellbeing, education, and employment. Learning and play during the years before school are critical to improving cognitive development. Accessing education during this time can also reduce the impact of barriers caused by disadvantage and poverty.

A supportive home environment is equally important for a child's development, and this starts with the carers in the child's life: parents, grandparents, and kin. Families and communities want their children to grow up in a safe, healthy and nurturing environment surrounded by their culture and community. For generations, tradition and dreaming have built tremendous strength, resilience, and pride.

Like any child, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children should have the ability and opportunity to participate in preschool education. It provides an encouraging environment for a child to further develop and grow, and reach school ready and excited to learn (**Box 1**). Additionally, they bring great social, cultural and emotional strengths with them to their learning journey.

The current target on preschool enrolment ensures that Indigenous children across the nation have an equal chance of participating in education and setting their path to success.

### Box 1: Evidence from literature

Research shows quality early childhood education (ECE) is particularly important for vulnerable Indigenous children and can have a positive impact on school attendance and academic success. A recent study noted that Indigenous children who had attended ECE services were better equipped with social and developmental skills, which aided their transition into school (Social Research Centre 2016).

Several studies of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) data have shown that children who attend ECE are more likely to be developmentally on track at school entry (Jorgensen et al. 2017; Biddle & Bath 2013).

Analysis of data from the Longitudinal Study for Indigenous Children indicated that ECE may promote a range of cognitive and developmental outcomes (Arcos Holzinger & Biddle 2015). Other studies show that ECE attendance positively impacts on Year 3 National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) results (an estimated increase of around 10 to 20 NAPLAN points) (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development & Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research 2013). Further, findings from the Programme for International Student Assessment show that, after controlling for socioeconomic background, students aged 15 who had attended ECE for at least one year out-performed those who had not (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2014).

### Key points

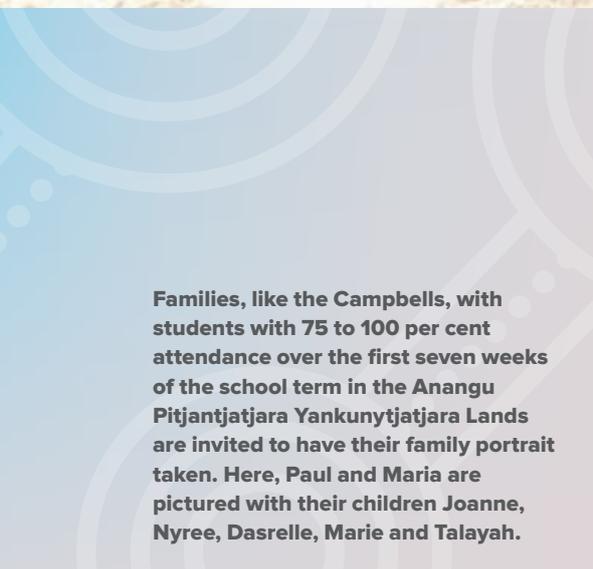
- The target to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education is on track, with 91 per cent enrolment in 2016.
- All jurisdictions with the exception of the Northern Territory are on track. Five jurisdictions achieved enrolments of Indigenous children above the benchmark rate of 95 per cent in 2016.
- Of the Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education, 93 per cent attended at least one hour in the reference week.
- More work needs to be done to improve attendance rates for Indigenous children to ensure they receive the full benefits from participation in early childhood education programs.



From left, Asharia Accoom and Morris Claudie at the opening of the Puuya Foundation's Kuunchi Kakana (families together) Centre at Lockhart River, Cape York, Queensland. The Puuya Foundation ensures that cultural activities are embedded into its early childhood program.



From left, Levi Williams, Tinam Burke, James Cooke and Emrick Stewart from Wiluna Remote Community School.



Families, like the Campbells, with students with 75 to 100 per cent attendance over the first seven weeks of the school term in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands are invited to have their family portrait taken. Here, Paul and Maria are pictured with their children Joanne, Nyree, Dasrelle, Marie and Talayah.



**Figure 5: Preschool enrolments by jurisdiction, 2016**



Sources: ABS unpublished, Preschool Education, Australia 2016, Australian Demographic Statistics, June 2016 (Cat. No. 3101.0), Births, Australia, 2016 (Cat. No. 3301.0), Estimates and Projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2001 to 2026 (Cat. No. 3238.0) and Schools, Australia 2016 (Cat. No. 4221.0).

## What the data tells us

### National

The target to have 95 per cent of Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education is on track. Progress against this target is measured by the proportion of children enrolled in early childhood education in the year before they start full-time school as collected in the National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection (NECECC).<sup>11 12</sup>

In 2016, there were around 14,700 Indigenous children in Australia enrolled in early childhood education programs (the year before full-time school) – this was 91 per cent of the estimated population.<sup>13</sup> This is above the 2016 national trajectory point (Figure 5). While preschool enrolment is on track, in 2016, only 65 per cent<sup>14</sup> of

11 National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection was the outcome of the 2010 National Information Agreement on Early Childhood Education and Care between Commonwealth, State and Territory authorities, and aims to provide nationally consistent and comparable early childhood education data.

12 Improved data quality in the 2016 NECECC collection, resulting from revisions to the ABS data collection methodology, mean that the 2016 data are not fully comparable to the 2015 data. Significant changes affecting the 2016 data include:

- the ABS has amended its data linkage approach to enhance the accuracy of child counts in NECECC, and
- an expanded child identification strategy in the Child Care Management System (one of the source datasets) has increased the count of children enrolled in a preschool program, as all children at long day care centres (of the appropriate age) are now recorded as enrolled in a preschool program.

For more information on NECECC data quality, including collection methodologies and data limitations, see Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017a).

13 Estimated population eligible for enrolment in the year before full-time school.

14 70 per cent of Indigenous children enrolled for 600 hours or more a year.

Indigenous preschoolers attended preschool for 600 hours or more (Box 2).

### States and territories

In 2016, all states and territories, except the Northern Territory, had Indigenous early childhood enrolment rates above their trajectory points (Figure 5).<sup>15</sup>

Most of the jurisdictions had already achieved Indigenous early childhood education enrolments above the benchmark of 95 per cent in 2016, with three (Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia) achieving universal enrolments for Indigenous children.

In 2016, of all Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education, 93 per cent had attended an early childhood education program for at least one hour in the reference week (Figure 6).<sup>16</sup> This was close to the non-Indigenous rate of 96 per cent. All states and territories, except the Northern Territory, had 90 per cent or higher attendance rates, with the highest attendance rates in Tasmania (100 per cent), followed by the Australian Capital Territory (97 per cent) and South Australia (96 per cent).

15 Single year of age estimated resident population and population projections may be subject to errors that cannot be adjusted for in the calculation of population estimates. Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory have relatively small Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations compared to the other states and territories which means year-to-year variability in single year of age populations may be more pronounced. This may result in year-to-year variability of the rate of preschool enrolment in these jurisdictions and should be used with caution.

16 The census date for the 2016 Collection is Friday 5 August 2016, with the one week reference period spanning 1 August to 7 August 2016. Some jurisdictions may adopt a two week reference period that needs to include the census week which means the permissible period spans 25 July to 14 August 2016 inclusive.

**Figure 6: Preschool attendance by jurisdiction, 2016**



Source: ABS unpublished, Preschool Education, Australia 2016.

**Figure 7: Preschool attendance by remoteness, 2016**



Source: ABS unpublished, Preschool Education, Australia 2016.

**Remoteness**

There are regional variations in the attendance patterns (Figure 7). Almost all (95 per cent) of Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education attended an early childhood program for at least one hour in the reference week in Major Cities and Regional areas. The proportion of children attending early childhood education programs was generally lower in Very Remote areas particularly for Indigenous children. The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children attending early childhood education programs was largest in Remote (6 percentage points) and Very Remote (11 percentage points) areas.

**Figure 8: Preschool enrolments and attendance, (600 hours or more a year), 2016**



Source: ABS, Preschool Education Australia 2016, Cat. No. 4240.0, 2017.

**Box 2: Hours of attending early childhood education program**

Hours of attendance represent a key aspect of early childhood education that has a significant direct influence on children’s learning and development and also on children’s overall experience of this stage of education.

The National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education specifies 600 hours per year as the standard for measuring universal access to quality early

childhood education programs for all children enrolled in the year before full-time school.

In 2016, most (93 per cent) of the Indigenous children enrolled in an early childhood education program were enrolled for 600 hours or more a year, 70 per cent of these attended for 600 hours or more. This means that 65 per cent of all Indigenous children enrolled in an early childhood education program attended for 600 hours or more (compared to 77 per cent for non-Indigenous children, **Figure 8**). Queensland had the highest proportion of children attending 600 hours or more (85 per cent), while the Northern Territory had the least (29 per cent).

**Translating policy into action**

**Early childhood education**

The past 10 years has seen an increased focus and investment in early childhood education and care across Commonwealth, state and territory governments. This recognises that access to quality early childhood services is critical to supporting children’s early development and learning, future schooling and later life opportunities.

Evidence shows engaging in education and care in the years preceding formal schooling can reduce the effects of disadvantage and developmental vulnerability (**Box 1**).

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, this is particularly important. Indigenous children are twice as likely to arrive at school developmentally behind as non-Indigenous children. This is due to a range of interconnected and intergenerational circumstances. Although 75 per cent of developmentally vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children live in regional and urban settings, children in remote locations tend to be more critically vulnerable.

Early childhood education is a collaborative effort across all governments. Under the National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education, the Australian Government has provided \$3.2 billion since 2008 to states and territories to ensure every Australian child has access to quality early childhood education programs for 15 hours per week in the year before formal school, regardless of the setting. The agreement has a strong focus on participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Integrated services have been identified as one of the ways of organising services into systems that effectively support children and families. Coordinated and integrated policies and services help children and their families access a continuum of services and can lead to improved child development outcomes, more children and families receiving services, and better use of financial and human resources.

Early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services are being integrated with schools in a number of Indigenous communities experiencing disadvantage.

Access to quality childcare provides children with enriched learning outcomes. Since 2003, the Australian Government has funded services under the Budget Based Funded program to support childcare services in regional and remote areas and Indigenous communities. As announced in the 2017-18 Budget, the Government has committed \$61.8 million under the Community Child Care Fund to support Budget-based funded services to transition to the new child care package, as well as to support services to meet the costs of expanding to increase Indigenous children's participation in early education and care.

Families can access fee subsidies from July 2018 and the Child Care Safety Net will provide targeted additional fee assistance to families and supplementary grant funding to services to reduce the barriers in accessing child care, in particular for disadvantaged or vulnerable families and communities.

Across all jurisdictions, there are initiatives in place to improve the cultural competency of early childhood education and care services to increase participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Evidence suggests that high quality, culturally safe and strong early childhood services act as a protective factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Government provides funding for activities such as supported playgroups, work to strengthen the cultural competency of preschools, increased engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families, school readiness and employment of Indigenous staff.

### **Indigenous Early Learning Engagement project**

The Indigenous Early Learning Engagement project was established to support the Government's Closing the Gap target to ensure 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds would be enrolled in early childhood education by 2025. The project facilitated Start Them Early workshops across Australia, aiming to increase Indigenous children and family participation in quality early learning. In total, 1,180 participants attended 32 workshops throughout Australia.

The workshops connected early learning services with support to increase engagement and cultural competence of services. The project provided a unique opportunity for early childhood providers to learn, firsthand, from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Connected Beginnings**

The Australian Government has committed around \$10 million per annum from the Community Child Care Fund to the Connected Beginnings program to integrate early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services with schools in a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities experiencing disadvantage. An additional commitment of \$12 million over three years from the

Indigenous Australians Health Program will fund health service delivery to enable health services to provide outreach on school grounds, for example by funding a maternal and child health nurse program.

Commonwealth agencies are implementing the program to ensure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children meet the learning and development milestones necessary for a positive transition to school. The program has commenced in nine sites and will provide children and families with holistic support and timely access to existing services that are co-located with, or in close proximity to, local schools.

### **Abecedarian education day care centre**

The Commonwealth has also invested in an Abecedarian day care centre in Alice Springs, focused on prevention and cognitive development during early childhood. The centre opened on 20 March 2017 with funding of more than \$4 million over two years (2016-17 and 2017-18). The centre focuses on developmentally vulnerable children of non-working parents in Alice Springs and has the capacity to support up to 50 children per day. Based on similar international program outcomes, it is expected the centre will have positive impacts throughout the life course and contribute to participants engaging in education, lessen the likelihood of them smoking or using drugs, and reduce chronic disease and the likelihood of teenage pregnancies.

### **Indigenous Advancement Strategy**

The Australian Government supports activities through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) that are designed to support Indigenous families and promote the healthy development of their children. Since the commencement of the IAS in July 2014, the Government has committed \$257 million to support early childhood activities. Funded activities under the IAS have a focus on increasing the participation of Indigenous children and parents in early childhood activities, getting children ready for school, developing effective parenting skills and fostering healthy and safe family environments. The IAS funds a range of early childhood initiatives, including supported playgroups, family support services, childcare and supplementary support for preschool.

### **State and territory initiatives**

Early childhood education is a collaborative effort across all governments. States and territories have contributed to developing and implementing a range of initiatives to support Indigenous children and their families.

CHILD MORTALITY,  
EARLY CHILDHOOD

## OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

### Deadly Dan the smoke free superhero

Deadly Dan the Smoke Free Man returns in a book titled *Deadly Dan at the League*.

“You smoke, you choke,” is Deadly Dan’s message. The fully illustrated book aims to promote conversation around healthy lifestyle choices and smoking. The book uses Koori English words and a culturally-relevant story for the north-west Melbourne Aboriginal community.

“The best resources are based locally and draw on the strengths of the Aboriginal community,” Healthy Lifestyle Team Manager, Laura Thompson, says.

“We are focusing our efforts on the next generation of Aboriginal children knowing that they also have an enormous influence on their parents, carers and Elders,” Health Promotion Coordinator, Sarah Sheridan, says.



Deadly Dan with children delivering the message “You smoke, you choke”.

“We hear again and again that people quit because their child informed them of the dangers of smoking.”

The book builds on a suite of Deadly Dan resources, including a children’s colouring in book, bookmarks, t-shirts, capes/cloaks and a Deadly Dan costume.



**Headstart Kindergarten and Preschool teacher, Danielle Bin Doraho, enjoys lunch with children enrolled at the Townsville learning centre.**

## **Headstart Kindy and Preschool: helping generations of children**

Headstart Kindergarten and Preschool in Townsville celebrated 50 years of service to the community last year.

Established after the successful 1967 referendum “yes” vote, the school was championed by original referendum campaigners including Eddie Mabo and Senator Margaret Reynolds.

The first school in Queensland especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, Headstart has always aimed to engage children early.

“I started at Headstart as a teacher’s aide 37 years ago,” Headstart Director, Deborah Saylor, says. “I have seen many changes to the way that early childhood education

and development is approached. Although methods have changed over the years, the outcomes remain the same; that is to engage with children at an early age.”

Generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have received their foundational early childhood education at Headstart. This is set to continue as ex-students enrol their children and grandchildren.

Headstart receives funding under the Australian Government’s Indigenous Advancement Strategy to support children and their families with the transition from early childhood to school.

# CHAPTER 3 EDUCATION

Opening up opportunities





Sophia, a Remote Schools Attendance Strategy (RSAS) staff member, signs the pledge at the National Conference for RSAS in November 2017.

**“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse and intrinsically linked by centuries of cultural knowledge. Education is an opportunity for our mobs to support and promote families to participate in life autonomy, take control of their opportunities and create a platform for the next generation to enhance their wellbeing.”**

**University of Sydney academic, Dr Vanessa Lee**

Dr Lee holds a Bachelor of Teaching degree majoring in early childhood and was the first Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person to graduate with a PhD from the Faculty of Medicine at Griffith University.

## **Introduction: laying the foundations for success**

A good quality education lays the foundation for success in life. Individuals who successfully complete Year 12 studies are more likely to find employment when they leave school.

Employment opportunities are further increased for students who go on to obtain tertiary qualifications.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments, education authorities, schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to get the best outcomes for students.

Over the past 10 years, we have made inroads to better support young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attain a Year 12 qualification and enrol in higher education, with the greatest increases seen for young women.

## **School attendance**

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**Target: Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018)**

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### **Key points**

- Attendance rates for Indigenous students have been stable between 2014 (83.5 per cent) and 2017 (83.2 per cent). However, the target is not on track to be met.
- In 2017, the overall attendance rate for Indigenous students nationally was 83.2 per cent, compared with 93.0 per cent for non-Indigenous students.

**Figure 9: Student attendance rates**



Source: ACARA, 2017

- There has been no meaningful improvement in any of the states and territories. In the Northern Territory the Indigenous attendance rate fell from 2014 (70.2 per cent) to 2017 (66.2 per cent).
- Indigenous attendance is lower in remote areas than non-remote areas, and the attendance gap remains larger in remote areas. In 2017, Indigenous attendance rates ranged from 86.8 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 64.6 per cent in Very Remote areas.
- School attendance rates have improved in almost half of RSAS schools since RSAS began.

## What the data tells us

### National

Progress against this target is assessed using data on Semester 1 school attendance for Years 1 to 10, reported by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA).

In 2017, the national school attendance rate was 83.2 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (**Figure 9**). For context, there were about 140,000 Indigenous students attending school on a given day in Semester 1 2017.<sup>17</sup> This compares to an attendance rate for non-Indigenous students of 93.0 per cent, resulting in a gap of almost 10 percentage points.

Nationally, the attendance rate for Indigenous students has been stable since 2014. The national Indigenous attendance rate was 83.5 per cent in 2014, and 83.2 per cent in 2017. As there has also been no change in the attendance rate of non-Indigenous students, there has been no meaningful change in the gap. The target to close the gap for Indigenous children in school attendance within five years (by 2018) is not on track.<sup>18</sup>

Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates both fall in secondary grades, declining with increasing year level – the decline for Indigenous students is more rapid, so the attendance gap increases throughout secondary school (**Box 1**). Attendance can also be considered using a second measure – the proportion of students who attended school 90 per cent or more of the time. This proportion is also lower for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students (**Box 2**).

Attendance rates are also slightly higher for girls than boys, with a larger difference for Indigenous students. In 2017, the attendance rate for all girls was 0.2 percentage points above that for boys, while the rate for Indigenous girls was 1.1 percentage points above Indigenous boys. The differences by gender have not changed since 2014.

<sup>17</sup> Numbers for 2017 are estimated using 2016 enrolment numbers. The 2017 enrolment numbers were not available in time to publish. Numbers for a given day are estimated using the assumption that all students had the same number of days counted towards their attendance rate.

<sup>18</sup> Trajectories have been developed to assess whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school attendance rates are rising fast enough to close the gap from the 2014 baseline to the end point for the target (Semester 1, 2019). These trajectories have been agreed by states and territories. The Indigenous attendance rate was counted as being on track if the attendance rate (rounded to a whole number) was equal or greater than the agreed trajectory point.

**Figure 10: Indigenous student attendance rates, by state and territory**



Source: ACARA, 2017

**Figure 11: Student attendance rates, by remoteness, Semester 1 2017**



Source: ACARA, 2017

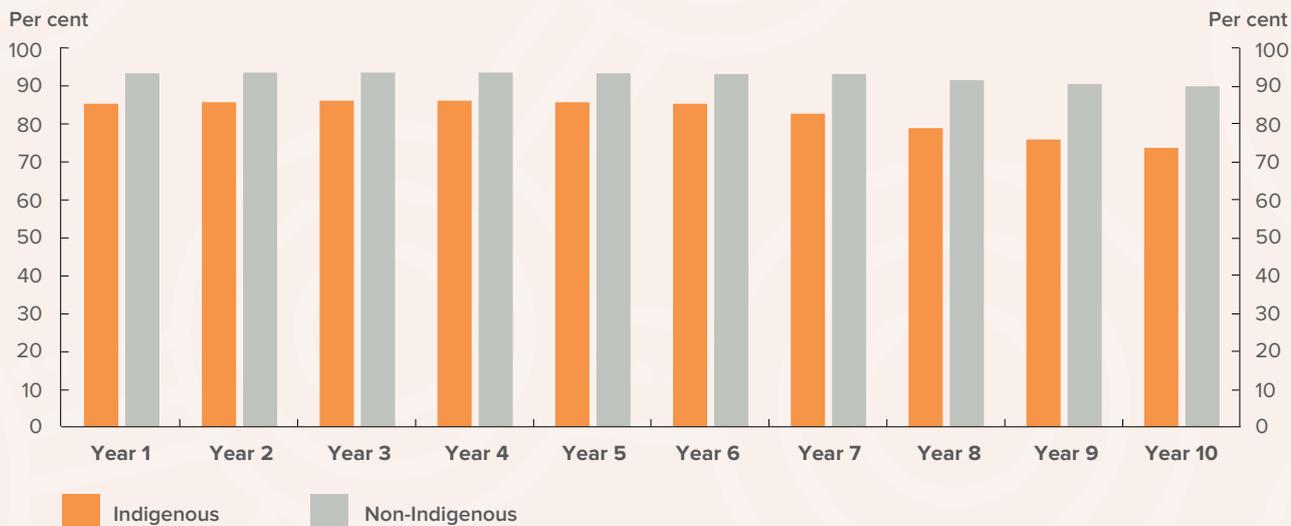
### States and territories

There has been no meaningful improvement in Indigenous attendance rates across any of the states and territories. The largest change has been in the Northern Territory, where the attendance rate fell by 4 percentage points from 2014 to 2017 (**Figure 10**). Changes in all other jurisdictions have been by less than one percentage point.

### Remoteness

Indigenous school attendance rates are higher in metropolitan areas, and lower in more remote areas. In 2017 the attendance rate for Indigenous students ranged from 86.8 per cent in Inner Regional areas to 64.6 per cent in Very Remote areas. As non-Indigenous attendance varies less with remoteness, the gap in attendance rates increases with remoteness (**Figure 11**). In Very Remote areas, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous attendance rates was 26.3 percentage points in 2017.

**Figure 12: Student attendance rates, by year level, Semester 1 2017**



Source: ACARA, 2017

**Box 1: Attendance by year level**

Attendance rates fall throughout the secondary grades, declining with increasing year level. The decline for Indigenous students is more rapid, and so the attendance gap increases throughout secondary school (Figure 12). Attendance rates were lower for

Indigenous students than for non-Indigenous students for all year levels. Indigenous attendance rates in the secondary grades have declined slightly (by less than two percentage points) from 2014 to 2017, without an equivalent fall in non-Indigenous attendance.

**Box 2: Level of consistent attendance**

In addition to attendance rates, the other attendance measure published is the attendance level – the proportion of students who attended school 90 per cent or more of the time. These are available for Year 1 to 10 students in Semester 1, with data from 2015 onwards.<sup>19</sup> Although not used to measure the target, attendance levels are useful for identifying the degree of consistent attendance.

In Semester 1 2017, 77.1 per cent of all students attended school 90 per cent or more of the time. This means that close to a quarter of Australian children are not attending school consistently. Among Indigenous students, only about half (48.8 per cent) attended

school 90 per cent or more of the time. These proportions have not shown meaningful change since 2015 (less than a percentage point of difference).

The attendance level has the same pattern by remoteness as the attendance rate. The highest Indigenous attendance level is in Inner Regional areas (58.5 per cent) and it falls off sharply in remote areas (to 21.2 per cent in Very Remote areas). Again, this relationship is weaker for non-Indigenous attendance levels, and so the gap is widest in remote areas (Figure 13).

<sup>19</sup> NSW Government data are not available for this measure. Australian totals do not include NSW Government schools.

**Figure 13: Proportion of students attending 90 per cent or more of the time by remoteness, Semester 1 2017\***



\* Students attending school 90 per cent or more of the time; Year 1 to 10 combined; excludes NSW government schools.

Source: ACARA, 2017

## Translating policy into action

### A framework to improve educational outcomes

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP) outlines 21 goals to improve the system of education that supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities.

These goals are aligned to four broad categories for reform, including the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in educational decision making; equality of access to educational services; equity of educational participation; and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes.

The AEP was developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and adopted by governments in 1989. It remains the foundation of subsequent national reform efforts.

Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) established in July 2014, the Australian Government has provided more than \$1.3 billion to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their early childhood years, through primary and secondary education, to post-school qualifications and into the workforce.

In May 2014, the Government committed to closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018. Evidence shows that around 20 per cent of the gap in school performance between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous 15 year-old students is explained by lower school attendance (Biddle 2014). There is a range of factors that affect school attendance, including overcrowded housing, student health, schools' cultural engagement and teacher

quality. Acknowledging this, the Government is working with schools, communities and state and territory governments to ensure children attend school every day.

From 2018, the Government will be introducing new arrangements for funding schools which will be fair and transparent, moving all schools and states to truly needs-based funding in just 10 years. Record levels of funding will be invested to help improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with growing investment to be tied to the implementation of evidence-backed quality reforms proven to lift student achievement. Funding is made up of a Schooling Resource Standard, which is an estimate of how much total public funding a school needs to meet the educational needs of its students, along with six loadings to provide extra funding for disadvantaged students and schools, of which there is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander loading.

Over the past 10 years, there has been progress in education across a range of indicators. The data shows the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students attend school and are achieving national minimum standards for literacy and numeracy. More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are progressing through schooling, completing Year 12 and enrolling in university. The focus of national education policy to date has been facilitating access to education. The next phase will focus on attainment, outcomes and engagement with parents to be a part of the solution. Although all the social indicators are important, it is education that is the catalyst in the long term for closing the other 'gaps'.

### Remote school attendance strategy

Evidence shows student attendance declines the further students are from metropolitan or inner regional hubs. This can be attributed to a range of factors including the availability of schooling and teachers, access to schools (due to transport difficulty and climatic conditions), poor housing and poor health.

The Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) established in 2014 aims to enhance attendance in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Since the introduction of RSAS, attendance rates have improved in 48 per cent of RSAS schools.

RSAS supports school attendance officers to work with schools, families, parents and community organisations to ensure all children go to school every day. This involves working with communities to develop a local plan to get students to school. RSAS support can include working with families, to offer support, strategies to support enrolment, assistance to travelling and mobile families, nutrition programs, rewards and incentives programs for students with improved attendance or behaviour, a daily bus run, having additional workers in the school to help teachers in the classroom, or a combination of some or all of these activities. Strategies are locally tailored to meet individual community needs.

RSAS currently operates in 78 sites in the Northern Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia. The program employs 470 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff (out of 506 total staff) and supports around 14,500 students to get to school every day. With a 93 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment rate, RSAS is an effective stepping stone for locally engaged staff to enter the workforce and transition to other types of employment. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff hold around half of the 60 RSAS coordinator or mentor positions. Working with schools and communities, RSAS has achieved increased attendance rates in some of the lowest performing schools in the country.

### 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum Education Package

In May 2017, the Australian Government announced the release of the 50th anniversary of the 1967 Referendum Education Package. The Education Package is providing \$138 million to inspire, assist and provide access to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. This includes a \$25 million fund to prepare students for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths (STEM) careers, including \$15 million towards a girls' STEM Academy, and \$60 million for mentoring and support services, including scholarships to support students in secondary and tertiary studies. From this package, \$41 million will go to activities specific to women and girls, while \$40 million will go to the Clontarf

Foundation to support young men in secondary school academies.

The Education Package includes funding for Beyond the Broncos Girls Academy to expand its intake to 1,300 places by December 2019 and Deadly Sista Girlz to provide support to an additional 600 girls through mentoring and education on personal health, wellbeing and positive lifestyles. The Government aims to provide young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with positive role models through activities such as the Stars Programme and Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience.

The Education Package is also supporting the development of the new Centre for Aboriginal Excellence and Leadership at the Port Adelaide Football Club.

### Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

With the support of the BHP Billiton Foundation, CSIRO has implemented an important education project aimed at increasing participation and achievement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in STEM. In Australia, a key focus area for the Foundation is fostering innovative thinking and problem-solving abilities that will help to address sustainable development challenges by improving educational opportunities and outcomes in STEM for underrepresented groups.

### Improving teacher quality

The quality of teaching is recognised as the largest 'in-school' influence on student achievement. Well trained, skilled and knowledgeable teachers who are able to engage with their students and the community are essential to lifting student outcomes.

The Australian Government is committed to improving the quality of the teaching workforce in Australia, from initial teachers to experienced teachers and school leaders. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be successful, a culture of high expectations in schools, strong student teacher and community relationships and support for culture are important.

At Radiant Life College, the school and teachers engage with the local community and parents to develop individual learning plans for all students. This strategy has seen successful engagement of students and an increase in attendance from 54 per cent in 2014 to 98 per cent in 2017.



**Presenters from the Questacon Smart Skills Initiative, which toured the Northern Territory, engage with students from a local school in Ngukurr.**

### **Australian curriculum and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages**

In December 2015, the Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages Framework was added to the Australian Curriculum. The framework is the first national curriculum document for students from foundation to Year 10 to provide a way forward for all schools in Australia to support the teaching and learning of the languages indigenous to this country. The prime purpose of the framework is to guide the development of teaching and learning for particular Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. It is intended that the framework be used by state and territory education jurisdictions, schools and communities to develop language-specific curricula and programs.

Research indicates that classroom teachers devote less than five minutes per week to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander curriculum, languages, literature and cultures, with many not engaged in these activities at all (Luke et al. 2013).

More needs to be done to ensure that all Australian students engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures. We need to educate all students to be truly respectful and value our nation's heritage. For all students, learning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages provides a distinctive means of understanding

the country in which they live, including the relationship between land, the environment and people. The ongoing and necessary reclamation and revitalisation of these languages also contribute to reconciliation.

The University of Melbourne, under the lead of prominent academic and historian Professor Marcia Langton, has been engaged to strengthen Australian school students' knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander civilisations across Australia and how they operate. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Curricula Project will include an analysis of how the current curriculum is applied and aims to develop resources for teachers to effectively embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority in other core curriculum areas.

### **Questacon**

Over the past 10 years, Questacon has successfully engaged remote Indigenous communities through interactive public exhibitions, school workshops, educator professional development and special programs. This includes the Garma Youth Forum – STEM workshops, the Questacon Smart Skills Initiative, STEM X Alice Springs, and the Shell Questacon Science Circus.

**Figure 14: Indigenous students meeting National Minimum Standards for reading**



Source: ACARA, 2017

## Literacy and numeracy

### Target: Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (by 2018)

#### Key points

- While the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has narrowed since 2008 across all areas, the target is not on track.
- The proportion of Indigenous students achieving national minimum standards in NAPLAN is on track in only one (Year 9 numeracy) of the eight areas (reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9).
- Outcomes vary by state and territory, and only Year 9 numeracy is on track in all the states and territories.
- Outcomes also vary significantly across regions, with outcomes for Indigenous students substantially worse in remote areas, with a larger gap compared to non-Indigenous students.

#### What the data tells us

##### National

Progress against this target is assessed using data on the proportion of students at or above the national minimum standards as measured through NAPLAN. Progress is tracked for eight areas – both reading and numeracy for Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 against agreed trajectory points.<sup>20</sup>

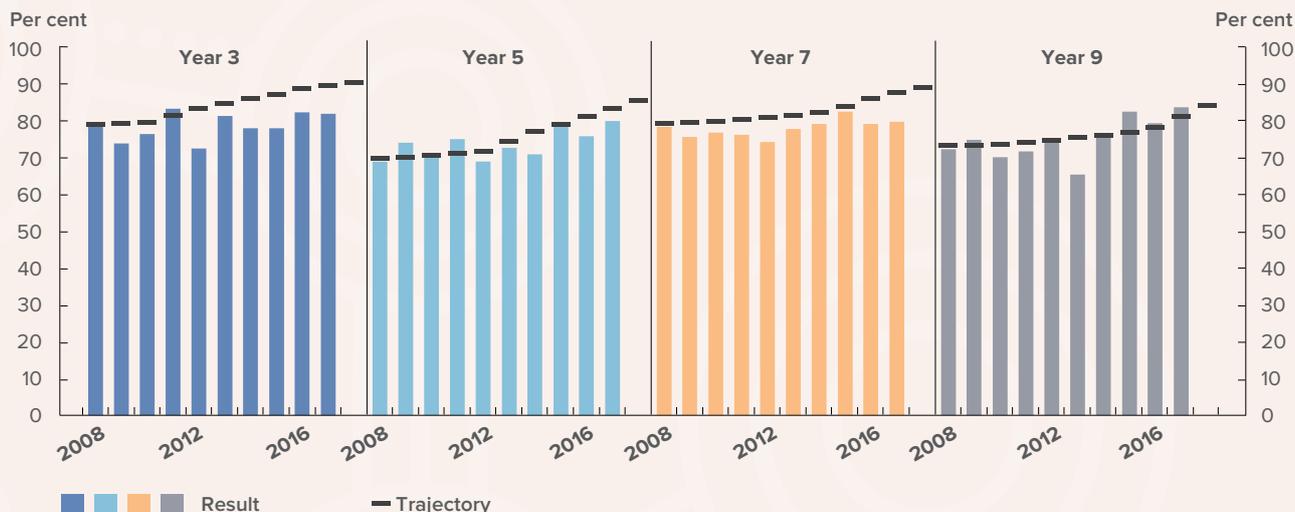
The target to halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading and numeracy within a decade (by 2018), is not on track.

In 2017, only one of the eight areas (Year 9 numeracy) was on track at the national level – with around 10,000 Year 9 Indigenous students attaining the national minimum standard in numeracy. In the other seven areas, outcomes were below the trajectory and as such, progress will need to accelerate for this target to be met (Figure 14 and Figure 15). Outcomes on track in 2017 are consistent with 2016, where Year 9 numeracy was also the only area on track.

The proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieving at or above the national minimum standard were significantly higher than the proportions in 2008 (the baseline), for reading in Years 3 and 5 and for numeracy in Years 5 and 9 (Table 2). These four areas have shown the largest reduction in the gap from 2008 to 2017 (by about 10 percentage points). However, the gap in outcomes between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students has narrowed at least slightly for all eight areas from 2008 to 2017.

<sup>20</sup> The target as originally agreed also included writing results. However, writing results from 2011 onwards cannot be directly compared to the writing results from previous years, and so have been excluded.

**Figure 15: Indigenous students meeting National Minimum Standards for numeracy**



Source: ACARA, 2017

**Table 2: Proportion of students meeting National Minimum Standards**

	2008			2017			Change from 2008 to 2017		
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	Gap
<b>Reading</b>									
Year 3	68	94	25	82	96	14	13*	2*	-11
Year 5	63	93	29	76	95	20	12*	3*	-10
Year 7	72	95	24	74	95	21	3	0	-3
Year 9	71	94	24	71	93	22	0	-1	-1
<b>Numeracy</b>									
Year 3	79	96	17	82	96	14	4	0	-3
Year 5	69	94	25	80	96	16	11*	2*	-9
Year 7	79	96	18	80	96	16	1	0	-1
Year 9	73	95	22	84	97	13	12*	2*	-10

\* A statistically significant increase in the proportion of students meeting the National Minimum Standards between 2008 and 2017. The change in the gap is not tested for whether change is statistically significant.

Source: ACARA, 2017

Although the target is measured by the proportion of students at or above national minimum standards, NAPLAN results are also reported in average test scores (Box 1). Reported results are sensitive to participation rates, which are typically lower for Indigenous students (Box 2).

**Table 3: NAPLAN measures on track by jurisdiction, 2017\***

	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	ACT	NT	AUST
<b>Reading</b>									
Year 3	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓		
Year 5		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Year 7							✓		
Year 9							✓		
<b>Numeracy</b>									
Year 3						✓	✓		
Year 5	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓		
Year 7						✓	✓		
Year 9	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

\* Tick indicates measure is on track with the target. Remaining measures are not on track with the target.

Source: Analysis of data from ACARA, 2017

### States and territories

Outcomes vary by state and territory (**Table 3**). Only Year 9 numeracy was on track in all the states and territories, and the Australian Capital Territory was the only jurisdiction on track across all eight areas.<sup>21</sup> Tasmania was on track in all but two areas (Years 7 and 9 reading), while Victoria was on track in half of the areas. New South Wales, Western Australia and South Australia each had three areas on track. Both Queensland and the Northern Territory were only on track in Year 9 numeracy. The Northern Territory has consistently had the lowest proportion of Indigenous students at or above the national minimum standards (for each of the eight areas).

There has been significant improvement in results for Indigenous students in 19 of the 64 state-level areas (numeracy and reading across four year levels in eight jurisdictions). Queensland had the most areas showing significant improvement from 2008 to 2017 (five areas), followed by Western Australia and New South Wales (four areas). Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory showed significant improvement in two areas. Neither the Australian Capital Territory nor Tasmania showed significant improvement, while Tasmania had the only significant decline (in Year 9 reading).

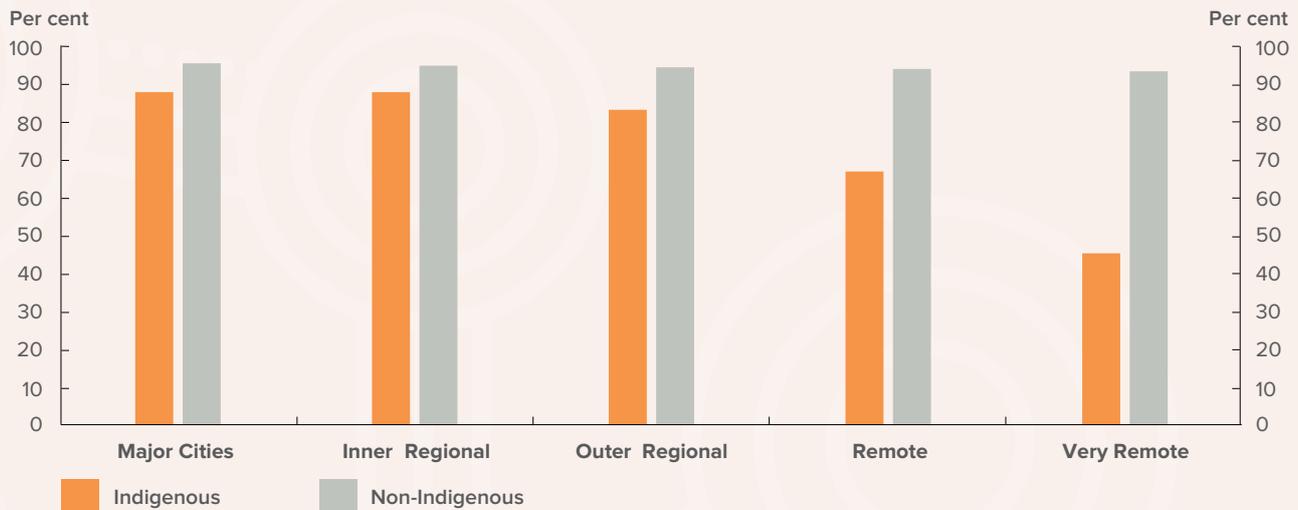
The gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students has narrowed at least slightly in 45 of the 64 state level areas. The gap in Year 9 numeracy results has narrowed across all jurisdictions.

### Remoteness

Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students vary substantially by remoteness area. For example, in Major City areas in 2017, 88 per cent of Indigenous Year 3 students met or exceeded the national minimum standard for reading, almost double the 46 per cent of students in Very Remote areas (**Figure 16**). Outcomes for non-Indigenous students show less variation by remoteness area, and as such, the gap is much wider in Very Remote areas than it is in metropolitan areas.

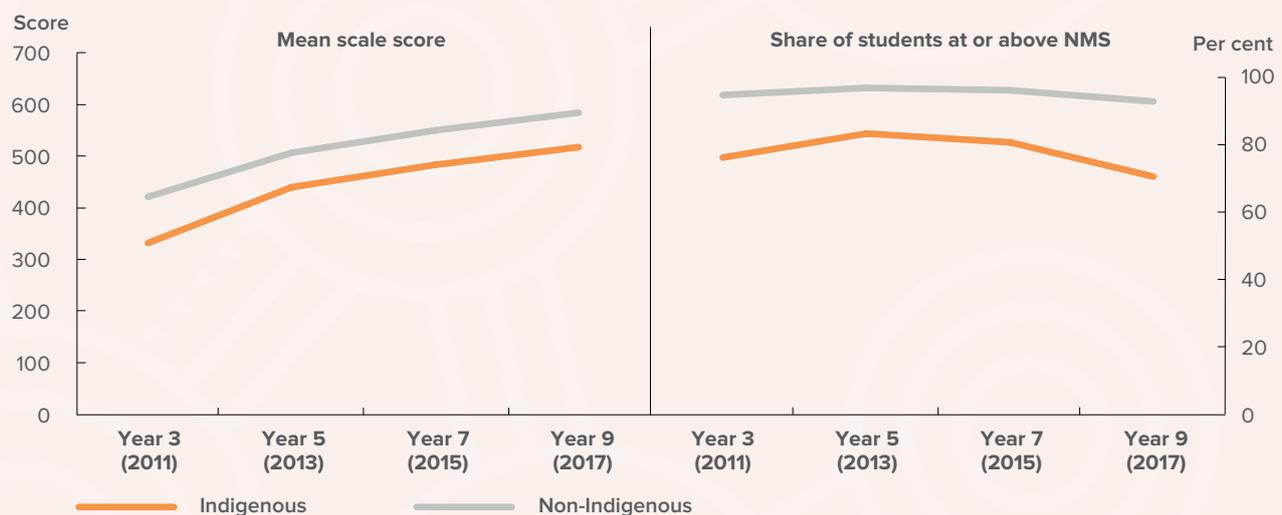
<sup>21</sup> Note that results are found to be on track using ranges of confidence around the results. The NT and the ACT have the largest confidence ranges. For example, in the ACT in 2017, the results for seven of the eight areas were under the trajectory points, but were still consistent with the trajectories due to their large confidence ranges.

**Figure 16: Indigenous students meeting National Minimum Standards for Year 3 reading, 2017**



Source: ACARA, 2017

**Figure 17: Reading results over time for the Year 9 2017 cohort**



Source: ACARA, 2017

**Box 1: Progress in mean scale scores**

The target is measured in terms of the proportion of students whose NAPLAN test scores were at or above the national minimum standard. However, the mean scale scores achieved by Indigenous students in the NAPLAN tests over time can also be used as a measure.

In 2017, mean scores show the same pattern of change from the baseline as the target measure – four of the eight areas had improved significantly from 2008 to 2017 (Years 3 and 5 reading, and Years 5 and 9 numeracy), while the other four showed no significant change.

Mean scale scores can also be used to examine how a cohort of students have improved as they move through the school system, by looking at growth over

time. For example, the average numeracy score of the cohort of students who were in Year 9 in 2017 was almost 200 points higher than when they were Year 3 students in 2011.

For the four cohorts so far that have taken the NAPLAN in Year 3 and then gone on to take it in Year 9 (that is, cohorts of students who were in Year 3 between 2008 and 2011), growth in their average scores from Year 3 to Year 9 was larger for Indigenous students than non-Indigenous students (albeit from a lower base). This means that although average scores for Indigenous students are still lower than for non-Indigenous students, scores for Indigenous cohorts showed a slightly larger increase over the six years between Year 3 and Year 9 – therefore the gap reduced (Figure 17).

**Figure 18: Indigenous participation rates in the numeracy test by remoteness, 2017**



Source: ACARA unpublished data, 2017

### Box 2: Participation rates

Participation rates are a measure of how valid a result is. Low participation can skew the results. For example, if the students who would have tested poorly are more likely to be absent or withdrawn from the NAPLAN, then results will be artificially high.

Indigenous students have lower NAPLAN participation rates than non-Indigenous students. Indigenous participation is worse in secondary grades and remote areas (**Figure 18**).

In 2017 across all eight areas nationally, less than 90 per cent of Indigenous students participated, while participation was over 90 per cent for non-Indigenous students. For example, Indigenous participation in the reading test ranged from 89 per cent in Year 3 to 75 per cent in Year 9 – in other words, a quarter of Indigenous Year 9 students were not counted in the 2017 reading results.

Participation rates have decreased slightly over time. Participation decreased from 2008 to 2017 in all eight areas, with the largest decreases in secondary grades. The largest fall was 6 percentage points in Year 9 numeracy.

### Translating policy into action

#### Sustained effort required to close the gap

Despite the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students meeting national minimum standards, the target to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements by 2018 is not on track. Students in many remote and regional locations do not have the necessary foundation skills to satisfactorily progress through schooling, indicating that more work needs to be done.

For both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, girls out-perform boys in reading literacy. Results from 2015 showed Indigenous 15 year-old girls were around a year of schooling ahead of Indigenous male peers in reading. However, despite this, on the same measure, Indigenous females are almost two-and-a-half years of schooling behind non-Indigenous girls the same age (Thomson et al. 2017).

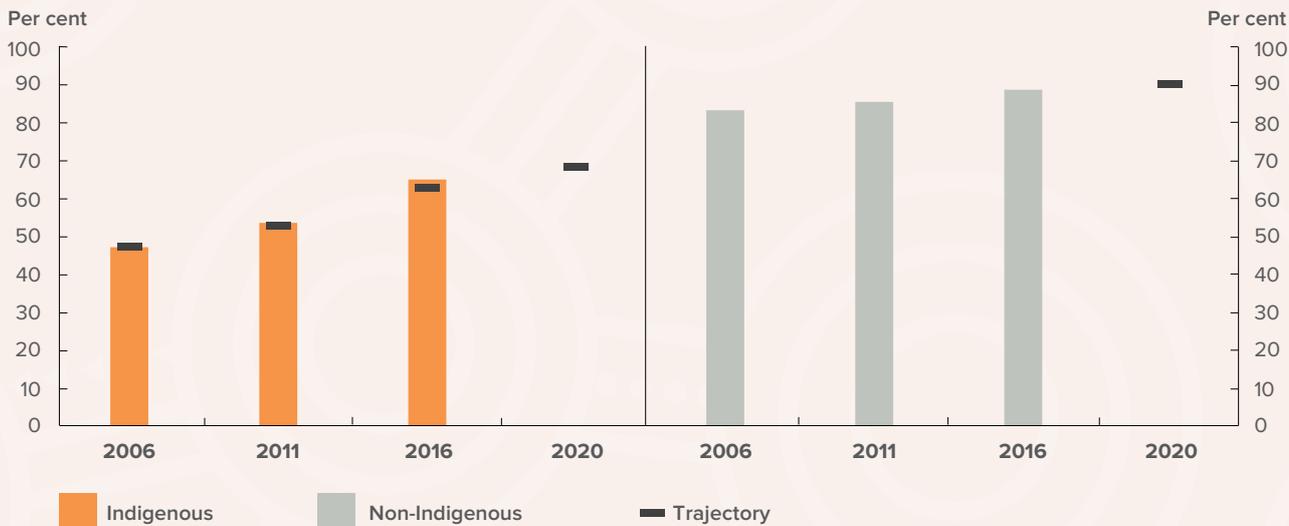
The Flexible Literacy for Remote Primary Schools Programme aims to increase teacher skills in teaching literacy, in particular through the use of Direct Instruction or Explicit Direct Instruction. The program has been piloted in 38 remote and very remote schools in the Northern Territory, Western Australia and Queensland over three school years from 2015 to 2017. More than 75 per cent of students in these schools are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.

An independent evaluation of the program conducted by the University of Melbourne’s Centre for Program Evaluation found that Direct Instruction and Explicit Direct Instruction teaching approaches are delivering promising improvements in literacy outcomes in most schools.



Students engaged in learning at high school in Albany, Western Australia.

**Figure 19: Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate, 20–24 year-olds**



Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

## Year 12 attainment

### Target: Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020)

#### Key points

- The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track, and the gap has narrowed by 12.6 percentage points over the past decade (from 36.4 percentage points in 2006 to 23.8 percentage points in 2016).
- Nationally, the proportion of Indigenous 20-24 year-olds who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent has increased from 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 65.3 per cent in 2016.
- The greatest increases over the past decade occurred in South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory, with attainment rates rising by more than 20 percentage points in each jurisdiction.

## What the data tells us

### National

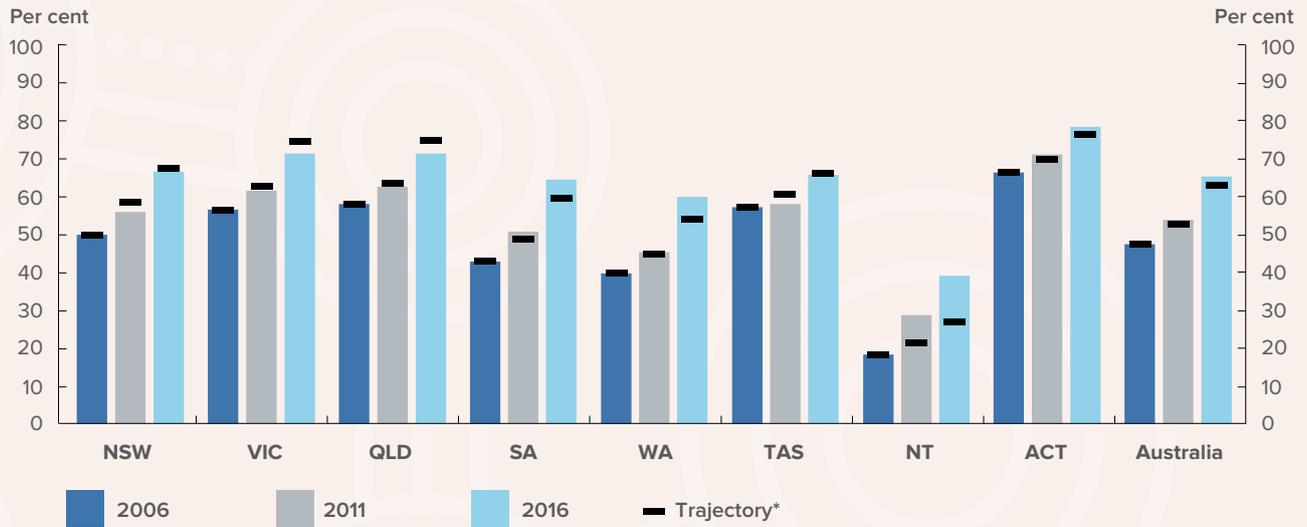
The target to halve the gap in Year 12 attainment by 2020 is on track, even with improvements in non-Indigenous attainment rates over the past decade. Progress against this target is measured using data on the proportion of 20 to 24 year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have completed Year 12, or obtained a Certificate level II or above qualification.<sup>22</sup>

Year 12 or equivalent attainment for Indigenous 20 to 24 year-olds increased significantly from 47.4 per cent in 2006 to 65.3 per cent in 2016 (an improvement of 17.9 percentage points, **Figure 19**). By comparison, over the same period the Year 12 attainment rate for non-Indigenous Australians improved from 83.8 per cent to 89.1 per cent (an improvement of 5.3 percentage points).

As a result of these improvements, the gap in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates has narrowed by 12.6 percentage points over the past decade (from 36.4 percentage points to 23.8 percentage points). This is noteworthy, given that the increase in Year 12 attainment rates for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians has accelerated over the past five years. Furthermore, there are signs that Year 12 attainment rates will continue to improve over the next five years (**Box 1**).

<sup>22</sup> The main data source used to assess progress against this target is the ABS Census, with new 2016 data released in October 2017.

**Figure 20: Year 12 or equivalent attainment rate by jurisdiction, 20–24 year-olds**



\* Trajectories are only a visual guide for a possible pathway from baseline to the target. As such, they are indicative only and are not intended to be forecasts or predictions.

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

**States and territories**

Indigenous Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates have improved across all the states and territories over the past decade. The largest increases have been in South Australia (42.7 per cent in 2006 to 64.3 per cent in 2016), the Northern Territory (18.3 per cent to 39.1 per cent) and Western Australia (39.6 per cent to 59.9 per cent) (Figure 20).

These three jurisdictions, along with the Australian Capital Territory, are currently above their trajectory points for this target. In addition, New South Wales and Tasmania are only marginally below their trajectory points, indicating that their targets remain achievable. While Victoria and Queensland are currently below their trajectory points, their attainment rates are still among the highest of all the jurisdictions.



High school student concentrating in class in Albany, Western Australia.

**Figure 21: Indigenous attendance in education and Year 12 attainment rates by cohort**



Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

**Box 1: Future directions in attainment rates**

There are strong indications that Indigenous Year 12 attainment rates will continue to increase by the 2021 Census (when data will next be available). For example, Year 12 attainment rates of 18 and 19 year-olds in 2016 (who will be the 23 and 24 year-olds in the next Census) were 10.9 percentage points higher than their counterparts in the 2011 Census (up from 49.9 per cent in 2011 to 60.8 per cent in 2016).

In addition, for Indigenous 15-19 year-olds (who will be 20 to 24 years old by the next Census), participation in education has also increased, with 65.7 per cent engaged in some form of study in 2016 (Figure 21). This is up from 59.8 per cent in 2011, with the gains primarily a result of increased secondary school participation.

In addition, there has also been an increase in the proportion of Indigenous students staying at school to Year 12, known as the Year 12 apparent retention rate.<sup>23</sup> In 2016, the Year 12 apparent retention rate was 59.8 per cent, up from 48.7 per cent in 2011 (Figure 22).

**Translating policy into action**

**Big gains in year 12 attainment**

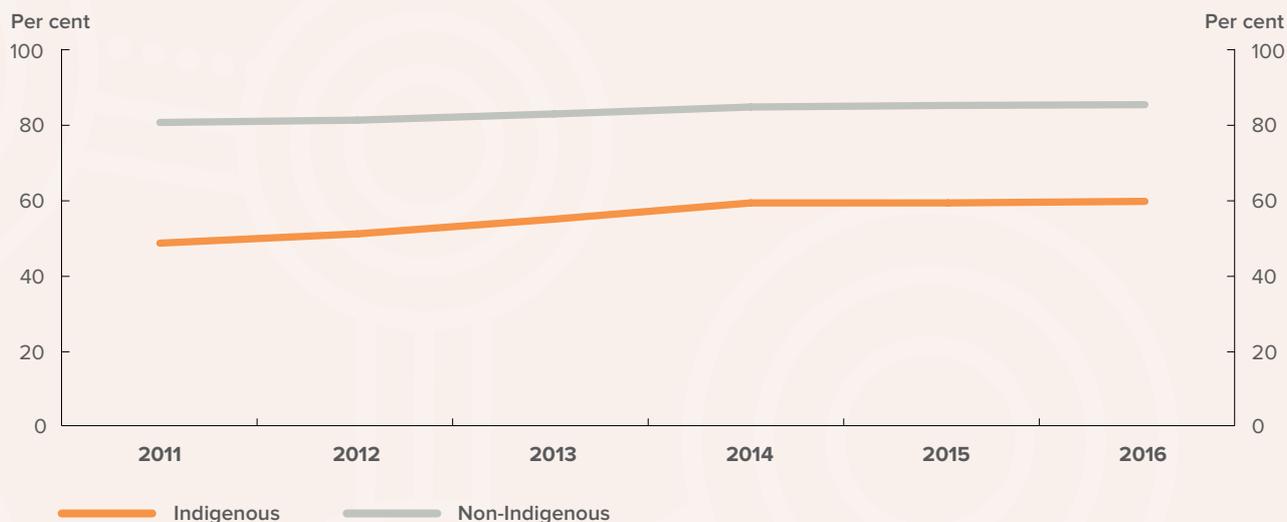
Attainment of Year 12 or an equivalent qualification is a key building block in making the transition into further education, employment or training. More students are graduating and moving into employment or further studies. Nearly twice as many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are entering university compared to men.

Nationally, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 20 to 24-year-olds who had achieved Year 12 or equivalent increased from 32 per cent in the late 1990s to 65.3 per cent in 2016. Of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women aged 20 to 24, 66.8 per cent had completed a Year 12 or equivalent qualification. This was slightly more than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men (63.7 per cent).

Although we are on track to meet the Year 12 attainment target, a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students continue to face barriers to Year 12 completion. A key priority for the Government is to support more young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve their low Year 12 retention rates, particularly in remote areas. Although 2016 Census data are not yet available by remoteness, in 2014-15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 attainment rates in Remote and Very Remote regions (both 41.7 per cent) were one-third lower than in Major Cities (63.1 per cent; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2016a)

<sup>23</sup> The apparent retention rate estimates the proportion of all Year 7/8 students who progress to Year 12, not just those who complete Year 12.

**Figure 22: Year 12 apparent retention rate**



Source: ABS Schools Australia 2016

Acknowledging the lack of access to secondary schooling in remote communities, the Australian Government has undertaken a cross-portfolio review into support arrangements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students who study away from home. The Study Away Review identified issues faced by those studying away from home and based on its findings, the Government is working to:

- build the evidence base on what works;
- strengthen family and community capacity;
- improve service coordination both at home and in boarding; and
- streamline funding arrangements, making processes less complex.

### Support for Indigenous students

To assist students living in remote and regional Australia, the Government provides financial support through ABSTUDY which aims to increase access and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in schooling, higher education and vocational education and training. ABSTUDY works to improve educational outcomes by providing a living allowance and other supplementary assistance for secondary students in remote locations, providing support for school and boarding fees, giving students access to options for finishing Year 12.

From 28 November 2016, the Department of Human Services replaced the requirement for a paper-based signed declaration form for ABSTUDY with a verbal declaration taken over the phone. This streamlined-process nearly halved claim processing times, with most claims now able to be completed over the phone. This was supported by a targeted communication campaign encouraging families to submit their ABSTUDY claims early to ensure support is in place for the beginning of the year.

From 1 January 2017, the ABSTUDY Group 2 School Fees Allowance, income tested component increased by 50 per cent from \$1,533 to \$2,322 per year. This significant increase is helping families to pay for school fees and boarding/hostel costs when Indigenous students are required to move away from home to study.

The Indigenous Youth Mobility Pathways Project (IYMP) is helping young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from regional and remote communities to move to a host location and participate in further education such as vocational education and training or an Australian apprenticeship. These skills will then help them get jobs in particular areas of community need, such as, trade, nursing, accountancy, business management and teaching. In 2017, IYMP helped at least 246 students continue their education.

## Higher education

### Key points

- The \$68 million Indigenous Student Success Programme is shifting focus from getting Indigenous students to university to supporting them to graduate.
- Indigenous university enrolments have more than doubled over the past decade, although Indigenous students are still underrepresented in domestic enrolments and their completion rates are lower.
- 56 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students undertaking vocational education and training courses are enrolled in Certificate III and above courses.

### What the data tells us

There have been very strong improvements in Indigenous university enrolment numbers over the past decade in the wake of higher Year 12 completion rates. The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education award courses has more than doubled over the past decade (from 8,803 in 2006 to 17,728 in 2016). In comparison, domestic award student enrolments increased by 46.2 per cent over the same period (Department of Education and Training 2016a). Females make up 65.7 per cent of the Indigenous cohort, compared with 58.0 per cent of the total domestic student population.

Nonetheless, Indigenous students remain underrepresented in universities, with Indigenous people comprising only 1.7 per cent of the domestic student population (compared with 3.1 per cent of the Australian working age population).

In addition, Indigenous undergraduates continue to have much lower completion rates. Only 40.5 per cent of Indigenous students who commenced university studies in 2010 had completed a degree by 2015, compared with 66.4 per cent of non-Indigenous students (Department of Education and Training 2016b).

### Translating policy into action

#### Surge in higher education enrolment

In the past decade, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university enrolments have more than doubled and we need to continue to ensure effective support for retention to ensure these students complete their studies. The dropout rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within the first year of university is twice that of non-Indigenous students.

To support the increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students entering university, the Government introduced the Indigenous Student Success Programme (ISSP), which commenced on 1 January 2017, replacing the Indigenous Commonwealth Scholarship Programme and the Indigenous Support Programme. ISSP provides supplementary funding to universities to help students take on the demands of university and succeed. ISSP offers scholarships, tutorial and other assistance to Australia's 18,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students attending 40 universities across Australia. The ISSP is shifting the focus from simply getting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the door, to also helping students succeed and graduate.

The National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development underpins the commitment of the Commonwealth, states and territories to addressing support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people undertaking vocational education and training.

In 2016, approximately 14,000 (National Centre for Vocational Education and Research 2017) 15 to 19-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary students participated in a Vocational Education and Training course. Of these, 10 per cent (1,428) were undertaking a school-based apprenticeship or traineeship.

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are now enrolling in higher-level vocational education and training courses, with 56 per cent of students enrolled in Certificate III and above. Completion of higher course levels improves employment outcomes.

The Government is supporting more remote and regional students to continue their education in their local community with Away from Base (AFB) assistance. Away From Base Mixed Mode delivery payments assist students living in regional and remote locations to study by distance, helping to cover the cost of travel, accommodation and meals when they have to travel away from their permanent home to attend campus for short blocks of study. In 2017, AFB is expected to assist around 6,500 students.

The Government is investing in our next generation of Australia's leaders by facilitating access and providing support to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to dream, aspire and succeed in education.

original Educati  
ommun engag



High School student, Emily Backhouse, after winning her second Nanga Mai Award for Outstanding Leadership with NSW Department of Education's Robyn Bale.

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## EDUCATION

# OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

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### Dubbo college students setting HSC records

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Closing the gap in educational advantage is a major focus for Dubbo College, with a record 60 Indigenous students graduating in 2017 with Higher School Certificates.

Students have created history by becoming the biggest Indigenous group the college has ever had sit and successfully complete their Year 12 exams. The number of Indigenous students graduating through Year 12 at Dubbo College increased by 50 per cent over the past 10 years.

“The school community has invested significant time and resources into supporting Indigenous students and the results have been very pleasing,” Dubbo College Senior Campus principal, Andrew Jones, says.

“Our approach has been first and foremost that if we raise all of our students up then we will raise our Indigenous students up so it’s very much looking at and supporting the individual.



**Dubbo College graduating year 12 students, from left, Macey Shipp, Yamirra Talbot and Marty Jeffery.**

“We have many of our Indigenous students going further in their education than their parents, with many continuing to tertiary studies following the Higher School Certificate.”

As well as providing strong in-house support programs, Dubbo College now has the Clontarf Academy to support Indigenous boys and the Girls’ Academy to support Indigenous girls at each of its campuses. Both organisations provide a vital link between the college and Indigenous families, and provide opportunities for students in school, the community and the workforce.

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## Barrelling towards a solid education

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The tiny community of Punmu in the Pilbara has come up with a unique way of getting kids to school and encouraging them to stay the whole day.

Punmu Community Coordinator, John Reudavey, came up with the idea while attending a fair in Perth.

“I saw a ride-on lawn mower towing a train of cut-down drums giving kids laps around the football oval. I thought the idea could work back at home to get the kids to school,” John says.

“I contacted a community friend, King Island-based Donald Graham, and told him about my idea. Donald said he could come up with a larger scale design that would work,” John says.

Donald, a retired cattle farmer and his brother-in-law Peter Doery sourced the materials needed and drove more than 5,100 kilometres from Melbourne to Punmu to design, and with the help of community members, build the train.

The train is made up of 12 carriages towed by a tractor. The drums are Avgas and Jet A1 fuel drums that are doubled side by side to add stability.



Indigenous school students enjoy a fun ride to school at Punmu in the Pilbara in Western Australia.

“The kids in some cases weren’t arriving at school until lunchtime – if at all – and sometimes leaving before the end of the day,” John says.

“We do a couple of runs each morning to ensure that we have the kids at school ready for breakfast, and then we do the return runs home at the end of the school day.”

The barrel train has boosted the enthusiasm of the students to arrive at school on time and stay the entire day.

“From the start we made it clear that the only way that they would be allowed to get a ride home on

the barrel train was to stay at school for the entire day. The results have been extremely positive,” John says.

“I may have come up with the idea, but this is a project the whole community has supported and been involved with. It has been a case of the community working together to ensure that the kids receive the encouragement and support to gain a good education.

“We want the kids to have a brighter future.”

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## Emily's a leader of the future

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Emily Backhouse, a Dharawal woman and Mount Annan High School student, has won the New South Wales Nanga Mai Award for outstanding leadership. Twice.

The Award celebrates Aboriginal excellence in the New South Wales public education system.

"I was extremely shocked to win the award for a second time, but also very proud to see that the work that I do is being recognised," Emily says.

Winning awards is not a new experience for Emily. In 2016, she won the Student Achievement Awards for Leadership, Citizenship and Community Service, and she has won the Aboriginal Student of the Year Award for Mount Annan High School on three occasions.

Emily also makes a big contribution to kids in her community in south-west Sydney. As the school vice-captain, she dedicates a lot of her time working with younger students at her school and other local primary schools.



**AFL Cape York House students getting in touch with their cultural side during 2017 NAIDOC Week celebrations.**

"Working with younger students and encouraging them to better themselves is very important to me. I want to ensure they have the same opportunities that I've had," Emily says.

"The best advice I can give to younger kids is to find something that you're passionate about, chase it and grab every opportunity that you can."

Emily has also been actively involved in the CREATE Foundation, Camp to Belong, NAIDOC Week and charity fundraisers. Her goal is to pursue a career in community engagement.

**Pictured on page 69**



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### **AFL Cape York House supporting young Indigenous men and women**

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AFL Cape York House is a residential facility in Cairns for young Indigenous men who come from remote communities in Far North Queensland.

The house provides a secure, culturally appropriate place to live while they attend school during the day. The house provides support under a three-pillar approach to education, wellbeing, careers and transition.

The house is a tangible example of the commitment of the Australian and Queensland governments to close the gap in Indigenous education.

“Being a small to medium style residential space gives us the opportunity to develop a personalised plan for each of our students,” Program Manager, Rick Hanlon, says.

Having six to seven partner schools allows AFL Cape York House to provide a number of public and private schools for students and their families to consider.

“Each school has a special market they specialise in and depending on our students’ strengths and weaknesses we are able to look at the best fit scenario for student and school,” Rick says.

AFL Cape York House aims to break the cycle of welfare dependence in remote communities. Mentoring and vocational skills development combine with structured routines and positive role models to help the boys to develop positive self-esteem and break the cycle.

“Another strength of AFL Cape York House is how students get to have a break from school. Traditional residential facilities for remote students are normally connected directly to the school, in our case students get to come home each day without having the school as a 24/7 environment,” Rick says.

The house focuses on providing the boys with independence and life skills, a sense of pride and belonging, improving self-esteem and a culture of success and leadership.

The residential program caters for up to 40 secondary school aged boys. In Semester One of 2017, students were achieving an average school attendance rate of 95 per cent which climbed to 96 per cent later in the year.

And soon there will be an AFL Cape York House for girls. In 2017, the Australian Government announced an investment of \$12 million investment in the future of Indigenous girls from Far North Queensland.

# CHAPTER 4 EMPLOYMENT

Transforming lives through jobs



Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion joins, from left, Clifford Gilbert and Richard Ngulkur, to inspect their paintwork during a visit to the Northern Territory community of Wadeye in 2017. Clifford and Richard were both job seekers in the Australian Government's Community Development Programme before securing work at the Wadeye business, Thamarrurr Housing and Construction.



**“Engaging the unique skills and knowledge of Indigenous people can have a positive impact in all organisations. It plays a key role in assisting organisations to develop mutually beneficial Indigenous employment strategies. Indigenous employees bring different perspectives, experiences and knowledge, which can create long-term value for organisations and individuals. These positive economic and social outcomes provide a workplace of choice for Indigenous people and the wider community.”**

**Senior HR Aboriginal Employment Consultant  
– Chevron Australia, Rishelle Hume**

## **Introduction: Transforming lives through employment**

The power of a job can be transformational through the provision of not only greater financial independence, but also skills and training that can open up future opportunities.

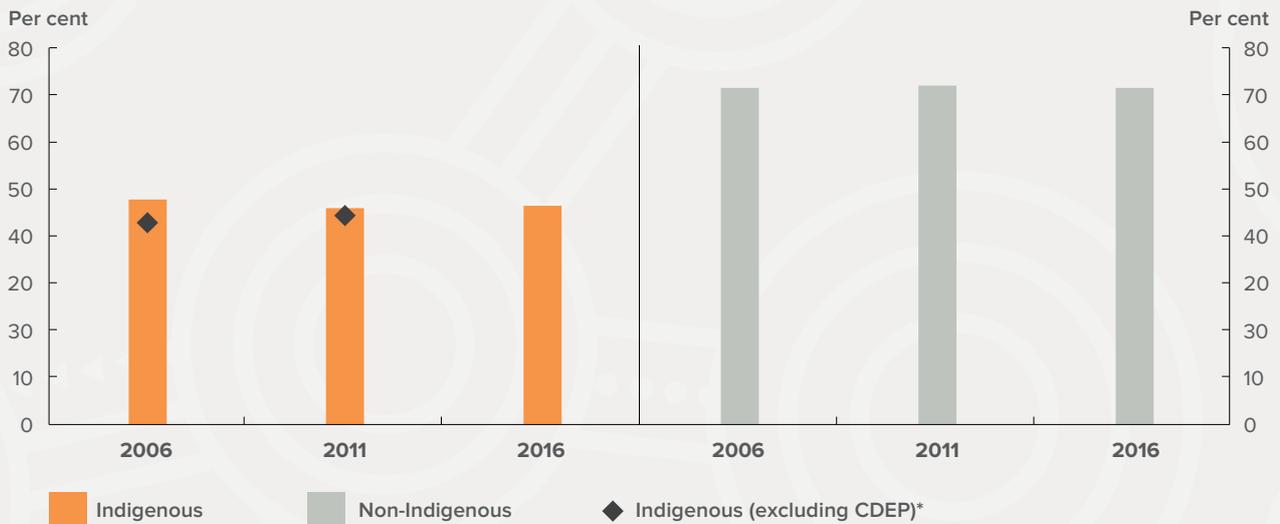
Employment also contributes significantly to people’s health, wellbeing and social outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders thrive in workplaces across the country – from Arnhem Land in the north, to Australia’s biggest city, Sydney, on the east coast and over to the Kimberley in the west.

The Australian Government is implementing a range of Indigenous-specific and mainstream initiatives that are supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into work. The emphasis is on achieving 26-week employment outcomes because this is a key to ensuring people remain in the workforce.

- The Government’s remote employment services initiative, the Community Development Programme (CDP), is successfully supporting job seekers to transition from welfare into work.
- The Indigenous Procurement Policy is ensuring Indigenous businesses win a bigger slice of the Commonwealth’s procurement spend. This, in turn, supports Indigenous employment as we know Indigenous businesses are much more likely to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous businesses.

**Figure 23: Employment rates, 15–64 year-olds**



\* Estimate of employment rate by removing CDEP participants from employment data. As the Census only asks Australians in remote areas about their CDEP status, it is likely to overestimate the excluding-CDEP employment rate. The CDEP program did not exist in 2016 so no estimate is shown.

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

- The Vocational Training and Employment Centre (VTEC) initiative has broken the cycle of training for training’s sake and has secured more than 7600 jobs for Indigenous job seekers (as at 31 December 2017).
- The Government announced a \$55.7 million Closing the Gap - Employment Services package in the 2017-18 Budget. As part of this package, jobactive is being boosted to deliver upfront intensive employment services to Indigenous job seekers.

The Australian Government is drawing on its regional network to strengthen its partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and stakeholders to develop and implement tailored and innovative solutions to the employment challenges facing Indigenous Australians.

- The evolution of the Indigenous employment rate was in part driven by broader economic factors across the states and territories, with the employment rate falling in Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory but stable or rising in the other states.
- Female Indigenous employment rates continue to improve, up from 39.0 per cent in 2006 (excluding CDEP) to 44.8 per cent in 2016. Participation rates have also risen, although this has been offset by Indigenous men increasingly dropping out of the labour market.

**Target: Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018)**

**Key points**

- Progress for this target is being masked by a change in remote employment programs. If this effect is removed, the employment rate rose by 4.2 percentage points over the past decade. Nonetheless, this target is not on track.

**What the data tells us**

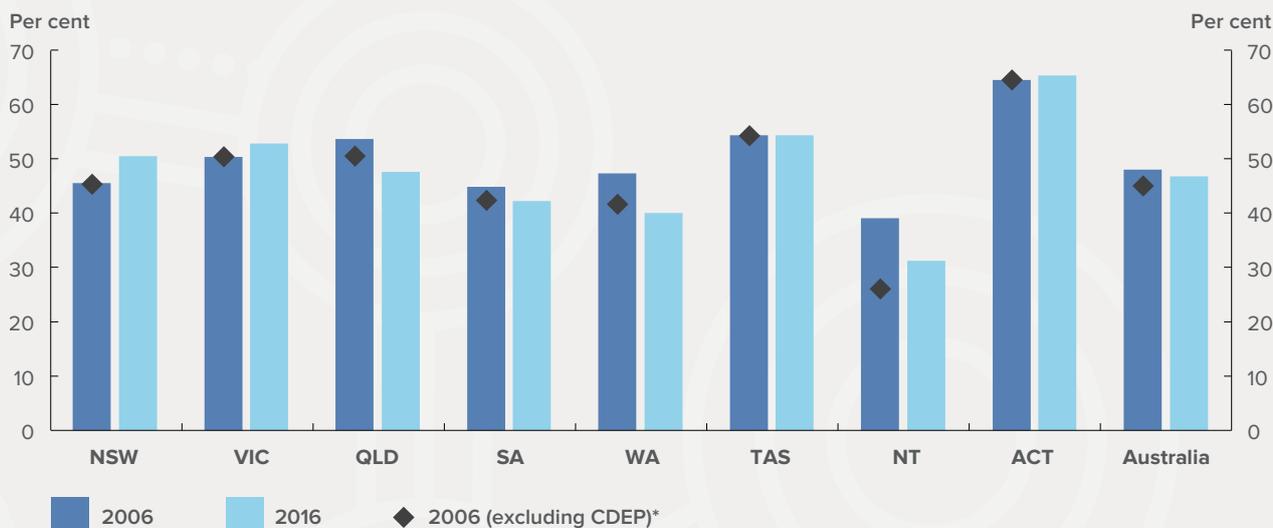
**National**

Progress against this target is measured using data on the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of workforce age (15-64 years) who are employed (the employment-to-population ratio, or referred to here as the employment rate).<sup>24</sup>

The Indigenous employment rate fell over the past decade, from 48.0 per cent in 2006 to 46.6 per cent in 2016 (Figure 23). Over the same period, the non-Indigenous employment rate was broadly stable, around 72 per cent. As a result, the gap has widened by

<sup>24</sup> The main data source used to assess progress against this target is the ABS National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) and Social Survey (NATSISS). Data from the 2014-15 NATSISS published in last year’s report showed that this target was not on track. While not directly comparable with the survey data, the ABS Census provides a secondary source of data for this target. New data for 2016 were released in October 2017, and the target is still not on track.

**Figure 24: Indigenous employment rates by jurisdiction, 15–64 year-olds**



\* Estimate of employment rate by removing CDEP participants from employment data. As the Census only asks Australians in remote areas about their CDEP status, it is likely to overestimate the excluding-CDEP employment rate. The CDEP program did not exist in 2016 so no estimate is shown.

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2016

1.5 percentage points to 25.2 percentage points over the past decade. Over the same period, the Indigenous unemployment rate rose slightly and the Indigenous participation rate was broadly steady (**Box 1**).

The target to halve the gap in employment by 2018 is not on track.

Nationally, the employment rate fell for Indigenous men between 2006 and 2016, but improved for women over the same period (**Box 2**). At the same time, the employment rate has fallen for younger Indigenous people over the past decade, with 15-19 year-olds increasingly not in employment, education or training (**Box 3**).

The employment target is complicated by the cessation of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP).<sup>25</sup> CDEP participants were previously classified as being employed, overstating employment outcomes. Job seekers who were eligible for CDEP are now supported into work-like activities through jobactive and Disability Employment Services (in urban and regional areas) and the Community Development Programme (in remote areas) and are no longer classified as being employed.<sup>26</sup>

Focusing on changes in the non-CDEP employment rate over time can provide a more accurate sense of labour market developments. If CDEP participants are excluded from those employed in 2006, the Indigenous employment rate falls by 5.6 percentage

points to 42.4 per cent. Given that the 2016 employment rate was 46.6 per cent, this represents a 4.2 percentage point improvement over the past decade. However, this increase is likely to be an underestimate of the actual improvement in the non-CDEP employment rate, because the Census underestimates the number of CDEP participants.<sup>27</sup>

### States and territories

As was reported in the 2017 Closing the Gap report, New South Wales is the only jurisdiction currently on track to meet the employment target (based on the 2014-15 NATSISS). Using the more recent 2016 Census as a secondary source, the employment rate has improved somewhat in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory between 2006 and 2016 (**Figure 24**).

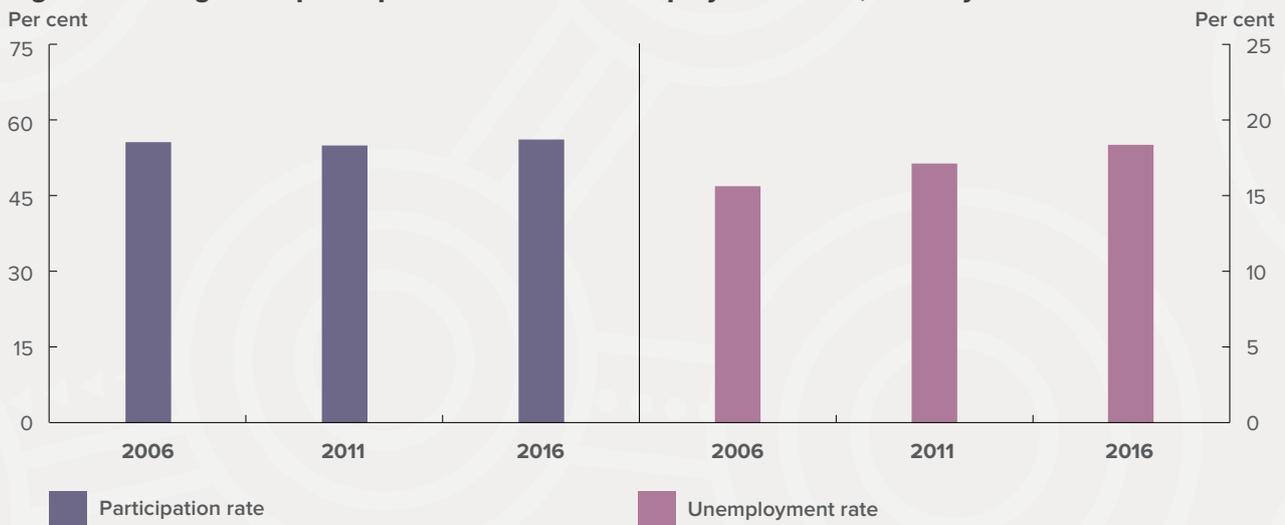
The build-up of (and transition following) the mining investment boom has driven some significant disparity in economic conditions across the states over the past decade. This has flowed through to differences in employment growth, including for Indigenous Australians. For example, the Indigenous employment rate fell in the prominent mining states of Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory between 2006 and 2016.

<sup>25</sup> CDEP was a Commonwealth employment program in which participants were paid CDEP wages (derived from income support) to participate in activity or training.

<sup>26</sup> As CDEP was wound down and participation declined, many of these individuals transferred across to other employment services, where they received income support and were then counted as unemployed.

<sup>27</sup> The ABS Census only asks people who were counted using an Interviewer Household Form about their participation in CDEP. In particular, this form is primarily used for discrete Indigenous communities. To compare, 32,782 Indigenous people were registered as CDEP participants as at 8 August 2006 (the date of the 2006 Census); however, only 14,497 people were counted as CDEP participants in the Census itself.

**Figure 25: Indigenous participation rates and unemployment rates, 15–64 year-olds**



Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

Yet in spite of the broader decline in Indigenous employment rates in the mining states, the mining industry itself is employing significantly more Indigenous Australians than previously. These mining jobs are providing crucial opportunities for employment in regional areas.

For example, the mining industry currently employs 6,599 Indigenous Australians in 2016 (or 3.9 per cent of Indigenous employees), two-and-a-half times the number employed in 2006 (when it comprised 2.2 per cent of Indigenous employment). For comparison, non-Indigenous mining employment grew by one-and-a-half times over the past decade.

The decline in Indigenous employment rates in mining states also partly reflects the transition from CDEP to CDP: the majority of the CDEP participants in 2006 were in Western Australia, the Northern Territory and Queensland. For example, Census data shows that the Northern Territory's Indigenous employment rate fell by 7.7 percentage points to 31.2 per cent in the ten years to 2016. However, excluding CDEP participants from the 2006 employment data indicates that the employment rate actually improved by at least 9.9 percentage points over the same period. This result is not surprising, especially as 21 per cent of the Northern Territory Indigenous working age population were CDEP participants in August 2006.

### Box 1: Unemployment and participation rates

An alternative way to measure labour market outcomes is the unemployment rate, which measures the number of unemployed people as a proportion of the number of people who are in the labour force (that is, who are either employed or unemployed).<sup>28</sup>

In 2016, the unemployment rate for Indigenous people of working age was 18.4 per cent, 2.7 times the non-Indigenous unemployment rate (6.8 per cent). This is an increase from 15.6 per cent in 2006 and 17.2 per cent in 2011 (**Figure 25**).

It is also important to consider the participation rate, which compares the labour force to the total working age population. Often people may give up looking for work, perhaps because there are no jobs in their local area, and therefore drop out of the labour force. Others may drop out of the labour force due to caring responsibilities.

In 2016, the national Indigenous participation rate was 57.1 per cent, compared with 77 per cent for the non-Indigenous population and broadly steady relative to 2006 (56.8 per cent).

<sup>28</sup> Note that there are differences between the Census and the ABS Labour Force Survey. For more information, see Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017b).

**Figure 26: Indigenous employment rates by gender, 15–64 year-olds**



\* Estimate of employment rate by removing CDEP participants from employment data. As the Census only asks Australians in remote areas about their CDEP status, it is likely to overestimate the excluding-CDEP employment rate. The CDEP program did not exist in 2016 so no estimate is shown.  
Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006, 2011 and 2016

**Box 2: Employment by gender**

Differences in employment rates between Indigenous men and women have narrowed over the past decade (Figure 26), continuing a longer-term trend since the 1970s. Employment rates for Indigenous women have increased from 43.2 per cent in 2006 (39.0 per cent if excluding CDEP) to 44.8 per cent in 2016. On the other hand, the male Indigenous employment rate declined by 4.5 percentage points

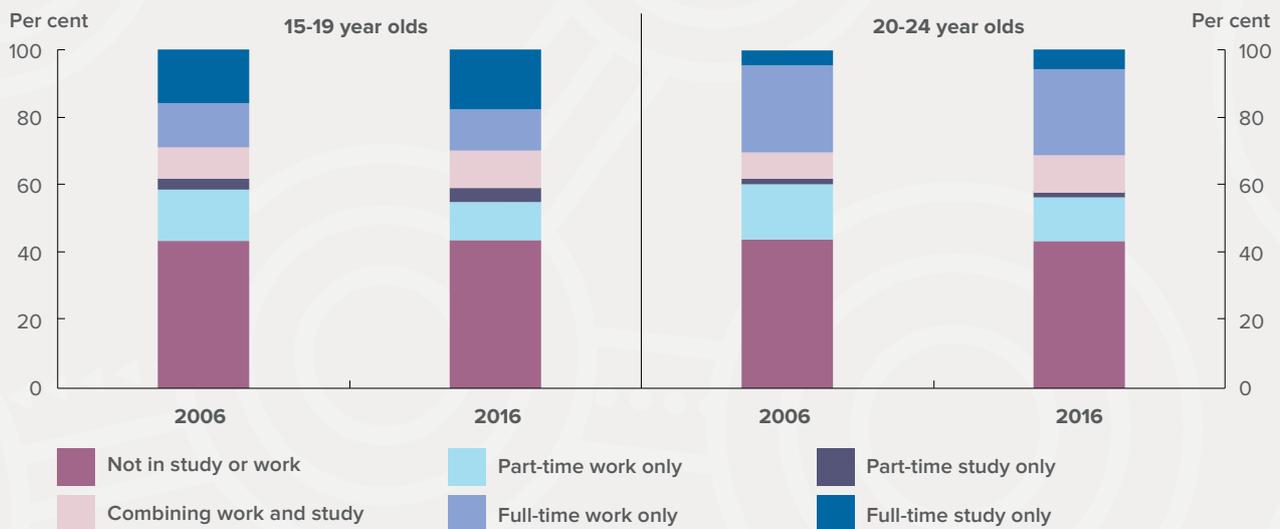
(but rose by 2.4 percentage points if excluding CDEP) between 2006 and 2016 (to 48.5 per cent).

In addition, Indigenous women are increasingly participating in the labour market, with their participation rate rising from 51.1 per cent in 2006 to 53.9 per cent in 2016. Indigenous men are instead dropping out of the labour market, with their participation rate falling by 2.6 percentage points (from 63.0 per cent to 60.4 per cent).

**The Centre for Appropriate Technology has a core commitment to providing employment for Aboriginal employees with high quality design and fabrication skills. Here, Project Manager Elliot Rich and Upholster James Young are seen measuring the panels for the Designer Dome. This project was completed at the centre’s Alice Springs workshop, employing exclusively Aboriginal workers.**



**Figure 27: Indigenous participation rates in education and employment\***



\* Chart excludes those away from work but not studying, as well as those where either education or work status could not be determined. No adjustment is made for CDEP status in 2006.

Sources: ABS Census of Population and Housing 2006 and 2016

### Box 3: Youth not in employment, education or training

There are three important transitions that many young people will make as they approach adulthood. The first is transitioning through secondary school and completing Year 12 (or its equivalent). The second involves beginning post-school education and obtaining a qualification. The third transition is employment following education and embarking on a career path.

These are not necessarily easy transitions to make. During this period, the majority of young people spend at least one short spell not engaged in either the labour force or in education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016). However, ongoing disengagement has been linked to future unemployment, lower income and insecurity, placing these young people at risk of social and economic disadvantage and exclusion (Pech et al. 2009).

A significant proportion of young Indigenous people are not in employment, education or training (NEET). In 2016, 42.0 per cent of Indigenous 15–24 year-olds were NEET, with only one-third of these actively looking for work at the time (Figure 27).<sup>29</sup> These rates have deteriorated somewhat over the past decade: 41.1 per cent of Indigenous 15–24 year-olds were NEET in 2006. Most of this change is a result of an increase in Indigenous 15–19 year-olds who were NEET.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) research indicates that the most

important driver of NEET status in Australia is low educational attainment. Indeed, young Australians with Year 10 or below education are over three times more likely to be NEET as those with tertiary education (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development 2016).

However, there are other drivers of disengagement from the labour force and education. Slightly more young Indigenous women (43.3 per cent) were NEET in 2016 than their male peers (40.8 per cent). This gap is largely a result of childcare responsibilities – only 29.4 per cent of young Indigenous women who have never had a child were NEET in 2016.

Disability is another important reason for youth disengagement. According to the 2016 Census, 6.3 per cent of Indigenous 15–24 year-olds that were NEET had a profound or severe disability.<sup>30</sup> By contrast, only 2.4 per cent of their peers that were engaged in employment or education had a profound or severe disability.

Finally, young Indigenous people in remote communities often have greater barriers to starting a qualification or obtaining a job, due to scarce labour market opportunities. The OECD (2016) notes that only 28 per cent of Indigenous youths in Major Cities were NEET in 2011 (when data were last available), compared with 55 per cent in Very Remote areas.

<sup>29</sup> It is important to note that the Census only captures NEET status at a point in time, and so does not indicate the length of time an individual is disengaged from the labour force or education.

<sup>30</sup> The ABS defines a person with a profound or severe disability as requiring assistance with one or more of three core activity areas (self-care, mobility and communication) because of a disability, long-term health condition (lasting six months or more) or old age.



CareerTrackers is supporting Todd Crawford to make a career for himself in the finance industry.

Article on page 85

## Translating policy into action

### Strengthening and growing the workforce

#### *jobactive*

jobactive is the Australian Government's employment service for urban and regional centres. Around two-thirds of all Indigenous job seekers receiving Commonwealth employment assistance are supported through jobactive. Since the commencement of jobactive in July 2015, around 81,000 job placements have been achieved for Indigenous Australians.<sup>31</sup>

### Community Development Programme

The Community Development Programme (CDP) is the Government's remote employment and community development service, delivered across 60 regions to more than 1,000 communities. The CDP is a community-based program focused on helping job seekers to develop work-related skills and experience, address barriers, gain employment and make positive contributions to their communities.

Activities are community designed and delivered, and include a broad variety of projects such as work to renovate community buildings, landscaping, furniture production, helping in aged care facilities, training in hospitality, and preserving culture through traditional arts.

Since July 2015,<sup>32</sup> the program has supported remote jobseekers into around 21,600 jobs (including more than 15,700 jobs for Indigenous Australians). In the same period, the CDP supported jobseekers to stay in more than 7,000 jobs for at least 26 weeks (including more than 4,700 jobs for Indigenous Australians).

The 2017-18 Budget included an announcement that the Government was considering whether a new remote employment model should be designed and introduced. This was in recognition that more needs to be done to break the cycle of welfare dependency in remote Australia.

The Government's vision is to design a new model that reflects ongoing feedback from stakeholders and communities on what they want. The Minister for Indigenous Affairs has stated his intention to bring back a 'wage-based' model for remote Australia, with greater local control, that provides local jobs for local people and is delivered by more Indigenous organisations. The vision is for a future program that combines the best parts from the CDP and past models such as the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP), with a new way of thinking to ensure the program not only maintains momentum but further improves outcomes for remote jobseekers and communities.

The Government commenced formal consultation on a new employment and participation model for remote communities with the release of a public discussion paper on 14 December 2017. This discussion paper explored how to grow the remote labour market, provide more incentives to jobseekers, give communities more control and greater decision-making, and improve the support available to jobseekers so they can move from welfare and into work. The paper outlined three potential options for discussion. These included an improved version of the current CDP model to provide more tailored support, a model based on the CDP Reform Bill introduced in 2015 and a new wage-based model, underpinned by three tiers of participation.

### Vocational Training and Employment Centres

Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTECs) are employment service providers that source guaranteed jobs, then assist jobseekers into these jobs and provide 'wrap around' support to achieve sustainable employment. As at 31 December 2017, with VTEC support, 7,617 Indigenous Australians had started in jobs and 4,320 jobseekers had achieved 26-week employment outcomes.

### Employment Parity Initiative

The Employment Parity Initiative (EPI) works with large employers to increase Indigenous employment within their companies. As at 31 December 2017, the EPI had signed 12 large employers as parity partners, collectively committing to 7,465 jobs and placing 3,745 Indigenous Australians into jobs. Of those 1,881 had achieved 26-week employment outcomes.

### Tailored Assistance Employment grants

These grants can support either employers or third-party providers and generally target small to medium sized employers and employment opportunities not covered by other initiatives.

Grants include school-based apprenticeship and traineeship projects, and Indigenous cadetship projects that link undergraduates to employers who offer ongoing employment following completion of university.

Between 1 July 2014 and 31 December 2017, 311 agreements under the Tailored Assistance Employment Grants (including school-based traineeships and cadetships) were executed with a contracted value of more than \$197 million (GST inclusive). During the same period, 13,249 employment places occurred for Indigenous Australians.

<sup>31</sup> As at 31 December 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Data is as at 31 December 2017.

### **Prison to Work**

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) released the Prison to Work report in December 2016 and noted jurisdictional Prison to Work Action Plans in June 2017.

The Australian Government is working with state and territory governments to address actions identified in the report to better support Indigenous prisoners moving from prison and into employment. States and territories are being regularly consulted and involved in joint actions to achieve these objectives. Jurisdictions will update COAG on progress every two years.

In the 2017-18 Budget the Government announced a \$17.6 million initiative to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners access the support they need to better prepare them to find employment and reintegrate into the community upon their release from prison. The Time to Work Employment Service will commence in all states and territories in 2018.

### **Jobs for Indigenous rangers**

The Government is investing \$70 million a year to support Indigenous rangers. Together, the Indigenous rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas programs have created more than 2,500 jobs for First Australians (as at 30 June 2015). The majority of these jobs are located in regional and remote parts of the country.

The Indigenous ranger program supports Indigenous people to combine traditional knowledge with conservation training to protect and manage their land, sea and culture.

### **Building an Indigenous workforce in the public sector**

In a commitment to increase Indigenous employment across the Commonwealth public sector, the Government announced a target of 3 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation by 2018. At 30 June 2015, Indigenous representation across the Commonwealth public sector was 2.2 per cent. By 30 June 2017, Indigenous representation had increased to 2.7 per cent. A sustained effort will be required for the 3 per cent target to be met.

### **Disability Employment Services**

This is a specialised employment support program for people whose disability is their main barrier to gaining employment. Around 10,800 Indigenous Australians participate in the program. Since it started in March 2010, the proportion of Indigenous jobseekers in the program has steadily increased from 4.5 per cent to 5.7 per cent (as of 31 August 2017). The number of employment outcomes has increased at a similar rate. Around 6.2 per cent of all participants that maintain employment for 13 weeks are Indigenous Australians (from 3.5 per cent in 2010), and for 26 weeks of employment the number has risen from 3.5 per cent in 2010 to almost 6 per cent.

### **ParentsNext**

This program helps parents receiving a Parenting Payment in 10 locations identify their education and employment goals, develop a pathway to achieve those goals, and link into activities and services in the local community.

From 1 July 2018, there will be a \$263 million national expansion of this program including a second stream delivering more intensive ParentsNext in the existing 10 locations and a further 20 locations, where there is a high proportion of Parenting Payment recipients who are Indigenous.

### **Transition to Work**

The Transition to Work service has been expanded (from 1 January 2018) to include all Indigenous Australians aged 15-21 who are not in work or study, including those with a Year 12 Certificate. The service provides intensive, pre-employment support to improve the work-readiness of young people and help them into work (including apprenticeships and traineeships) or education. It is expected that around 4,600 extra Indigenous young people per year will benefit from the service.

## EMPLOYMENT

# OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

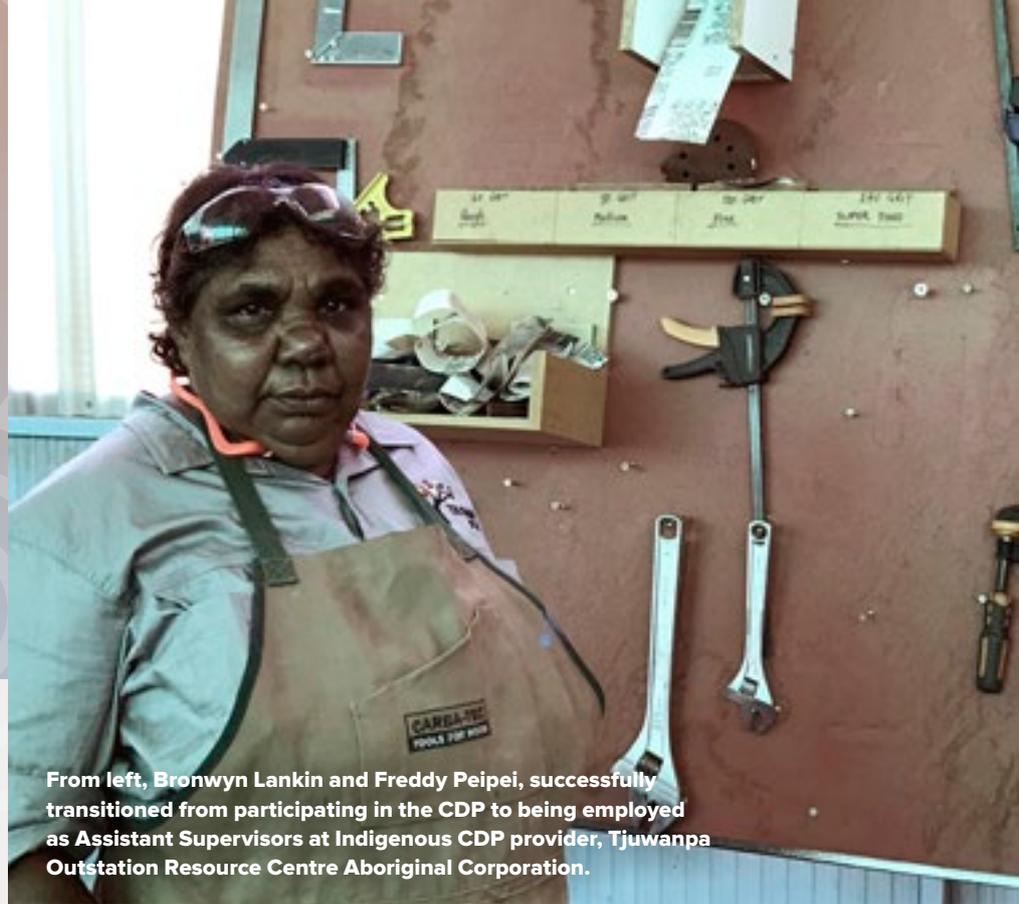
### Leading by example in Ntaria

Finding a job where you feel you belong might be a journey, but it is a journey worth taking.

Bronwyn Lankin and Freddy Peipei know this from their own experience. Now they are helping others to participate in activities, learn skills and find employment.

Both Bronwyn and Freddy are former Community Development Programme (CDP) participants from the community of Ntaria, also known as Hermannsburg 130 kilometres west of Alice Springs. The local Indigenous CDP provider, Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation, provides CDP services to Ntaria and its 42 outstations.

During a visit to the Tjuwanpa CDP Women's Work Shed for a Christmas party, Bronwyn Lankin found herself interested in what the Women's Work Shed activity could offer to the women in her community.



From left, Bronwyn Lankin and Freddy Peipei, successfully transitioned from participating in the CDP to being employed as Assistant Supervisors at Indigenous CDP provider, Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation.

Learning the skills required to work in the shed, Bronwyn found she could then help other women in the activity to create furniture for the community. Her dedication to the safety of the work area led to her working on White Card training and Safe Equipment Procedure Panels, along with expanding her general woodworking skills.

Bronwyn is now employed by the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation as an Assistant Supervisor in the Women's Work Shed. She is proud of her achievement so far.

"The CDP has helped me learn about working in a team environment, about routine and about work structures. It feels good working together with other people in the community to achieve good things," Bronwyn says.

Tjuwanpa CDP Women's Work Shed Supervisor, Robyn Ellis, adds: "We know that CDP participants such as Bronwyn want to be active, and to know they are contributing back to their communities. To be working makes them feel prouder, stronger, and stand taller."

Freddy Peipei, originally from Areyonga south-west of Ntaria, has also seen how learning a range of new skills through the CDP can lead to employment. Freddy has found his participation led him to be driven to achieve more and to give back to his community.

"I wanted to be the best I could, and I wanted to pass on all that I had learned, to encourage others to do as well as they could too," Freddy says.

Now working for the Tjuwanpa Outstation Resource Centre Aboriginal Corporation in cemetery restoration, Freddy values the opportunity to show respect for his community and guide current CDP participants towards future employment.

"This job gives me purpose, and it helps me support my family. What I do is important to the community, so it makes me proud that we are doing well," Freddy says.



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## Todd Crawford is engineering his own career

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Like most kids growing up in Roma, Queensland, Todd Crawford was into sport and wanted to follow in the footsteps of the rugby league great, Darren Lockyer.

Despite the interest in football, Todd, now 25, says he was always interested in engineering.

“When I was a kid I always enjoyed tinkering with things,” Todd says.

In the end, his love of “pulling things apart and putting them back together” won out. With the support of CareerTrackers, he is now gaining valuable experience in the finance industry through an internship with Macquarie Group, which draws on his knowledge of engineering.

While studying Year 10, Todd started a school-based apprenticeship through TAFE in what is now known as a Certificate in Electrotechnology Electrician. He combined his school studies with work at Advance Communications in Roma – a business he continued to work at for a couple of years after finishing high school.

“I did my first TAFE block in Brisbane, and that was when I realised that I wanted to further my education,” Todd says.

“I applied for a lot of different universities and was finally accepted at the Queensland University of Technology.”

It was during Todd’s time at university while studying electrical engineering that he became involved with CareerTrackers, an organisation that creates internship opportunities for Indigenous university students. CareerTrackers is funded through the Australian Government’s Tailored Assistance Employment Grants.

“CareerTrackers has been amazing in the advice and support that they’ve offered me,” Todd says.

“They build a strong sense of community from the top down and have helped me to gain an internship that has allowed me to apply my classroom learning to the real world. Through supporting CareerTrackers, the Commonwealth Government has provided me with a living allowance during the semester and assistance with flights and accommodation to Sydney where I undertake my internship with Macquarie Group.”

Todd is studying both engineering and finance and is due to graduate in mid-2018, after which he hopes to develop his career in the finance industry.

The Australian Government announced last year it was investing up to an additional \$13.46 million in CareerTrackers to deliver their Indigenous Internship program for up to 275 interns over three years. Ninety-four per cent of CareerTrackers’ interns complete their university studies, compared with 63 per cent for Australian students in general and 40 per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Of these, 89 per cent convert into full-time graduate employment upon completion of their university degree.

**Pictured on page 81**

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## Personal experience helping steer healthy lives

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They say when the student is ready, the teacher appears. For Jaucintha Iles, that teacher took the form of nurse at the local clinic.

“She asked me if I wanted to be a cleaner for the rest of my life,” Jaucintha says.

The young Yiman and South Sea Islander woman was holding down two jobs, one at the local grocery store, and another as a cleaner at Rockhampton Base Hospital.

“The jobs allowed me to live comfortably but I had aspirations to do more,” she says. “I wanted to learn new skills and to improve my knowledge so I would be able to make a contribution to my community. When I told her that I’ve always had an interest in health, she encouraged me to visit the local university.”

Two months later, Jaucintha began a Certificate III in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Healthcare and started with CQ Youth Connect as an Indigenous Youth Engagement Officer. Her own experiences helped her in reaching out to disengaged young people.

“I had my daughter at the age of 16 and have survived domestic violence in relationships and other tough experiences in life that have taught me a lot,” Jaucintha says.

“It is my passion to empower youth and to help guide them while letting them know that I understand and can relate to the struggles that they face.”

“It can be challenging at times putting a smile on their faces and changing a student’s perspective on life is rewarding.”

“I have the opportunity to empower other youth to make informed healthy choices by promoting physical, spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing. I love my job.”

Jaucintha finds herself surrounded by new mentors.

“I have the best role models around me guiding, encouraging and supporting me. The people who I work with have taught me to be confident and to believe in myself so I can be a role model for my community.”

“My long-term goal is to further my education so I can do the best work that I can in my community.”



Jaucintha Iles is committed to improving the lives of those in people living in Rockhampton, Queensland.

# CHAPTER 5 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Growing the Indigenous business sector



Bradshaw and Timber Creek Contracting and Resource Company Managing Director, Daniel Jones, says he is proud to be providing a positive example to young Aboriginal people in his community.

Article on page 100



**“Economic development driven by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is the key to developing strong and sustainable economies that can empower local residents and provide greater employment opportunities.”**

**Kowanyama River House owner and founder,  
Thomas Hudson**

## **Introduction: Strengthening the Indigenous business sector**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have demonstrated they are highly successful in business – from small start-ups to large companies together employing thousands of Indigenous staff.

The number of Indigenous Australians going into business is growing rapidly – with a 30 per cent jump in the number of Indigenous Australians reporting that they were in business in 2016 compared to 2011, compared to a 1 per cent increase for non-Indigenous Australians. And these businesses are diversifying. For instance, Supply Nation-registered Indigenous businesses generated around \$1.15 billion in revenue in 2014-15 across a range of sectors from construction to professional, scientific and technical services. Their revenues have been growing at an annual average rate of 12.5 per cent – the envy of any sector in the Australian economy.

The Australian Government recognises that encouraging more Indigenous Australians to consider a life in small business can drive economic development at the local level. Providing the right support ensures more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people thrive in the business sector – and for this reason, the Government has implemented a range of integrated initiatives that balance demand-side policies that create and drive opportunities for Indigenous businesses with supply-side reforms that build the capacity and effectiveness of businesses to capitalise on these opportunities.

The Indigenous Procurement Policy has been a game-changer, with the Commonwealth Government driving demand for the services Indigenous businesses provide and tapping into the extraordinary capabilities of the Indigenous business sector. The IPP gives Indigenous businesses an opportunity to bid for Commonwealth contracts first and demonstrate, like all other businesses, they can deliver the goods or services on a value-for-money basis.

COAG leaders have been working together closely to support Indigenous economic development by strengthening their Indigenous employment and procurement policies. Recognising that governments hold significant levers through their public sector employment policies, government purchasing practices and government-funded infrastructure projects, COAG members have developed a national overview and report of jurisdictional Indigenous employment policies.

All states and territories have Indigenous employment strategies and Indigenous targets in the public service and most jurisdictions have made good progress in embedding Indigenous employment and supplier-use objectives within infrastructure projects. Jurisdictions are carrying out considerable and wide-ranging work to support Indigenous employment, education and training and the Indigenous business sector, including but not limited to: Indigenous entrepreneurs' packages; Indigenous ranger programs; regional development initiatives, business directories; back to work, leadership and Indigenous trainee programs. COAG members are now considering how to better monitor performance and strengthen reporting to ensure all governments and the private sector are playing their part to support Indigenous economic participation.

In order for Indigenous businesses to continue to win a greater slice of the economic pie, Indigenous Business Australia's Business Development and Assistance Programme and the Indigenous Entrepreneur Fund help build a coordinated and interconnected support system to build their capacity to meet the increasing demand for Indigenous-produced goods and services.

The Government will provide this through an Indigenous Business Sector Strategy that forms a 10 year roadmap to help Indigenous entrepreneurs access vital business and financial support.

### Key points

- The Government is actively driving reform to increase Indigenous participation and aspiration in the Australian economy
- Indigenous businesses and people are shaping the design and delivery of economic policy
- There are opportunities land and infrastructure can provide for Indigenous groups and individuals.

## Translating policy into action

### Economic development through entrepreneurship

One of the most effective means to achieve financial and economic independence is through entrepreneurship. The flow-on benefits of greater Indigenous business ownership are significant, as they build family and community wealth, create employment, encourage the uptake of education, increase choice possibilities and open opportunities to engage with a globalised economy.

Backing Indigenous businesses means we are also getting more Indigenous Australians into work as Indigenous businesses are far more likely to employ an Indigenous jobseeker. For instance, Supply Nation-registered Indigenous businesses have an Indigenous employment rate of around 40 per cent compared to an Indigenous employment rate of around 0.7 per cent across all Australian businesses. The gains from greater business ownership and employment can bring investment and further economic access to Indigenous communities.

Greater opportunities and economic participation, more Indigenous-owned businesses and higher employment levels lead to better outcomes for Indigenous Australians in a range of areas, from health and education to safer communities, less insecurity and greater political participation. In addition, all of these outcomes lead to greater choices for Indigenous Australians – greater individual choice, greater intergenerational choice and greater community choice – to the point where Indigenous Australians have the same opportunities as any other Australians to exercise genuine choices about their own lives and communities, creating real economic independence.

The Commonwealth through Indigenous Business Australia and other programs has helped to build the supply of Indigenous businesses across the country for 40 years. Progress, however, had been slow. To drive economic independence, the Commonwealth began thinking differently about its role in drawing Indigenous businesses into the broader economy as a significant purchaser, and the ability to use that expenditure to support a social purpose.

## Indigenous Procurement Policy

In 2015, the Government introduced the Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) to leverage the Commonwealth's annual multi-billion-dollar procurement spend to drive demand for Indigenous goods and services, stimulate Indigenous economic development and grow the Indigenous business sector.

The IPP has three main components:

- a target of 3 per cent of Commonwealth contracts that need to be awarded to Indigenous businesses each financial year;
- a mandatory amount set aside for remote contracts and contracts valued between \$80,000 - \$200,000; and
- minimum Indigenous participation requirements in contracts valued at or above \$7.5m in certain industries.

The IPP is driving results. We have brought forward the 2020 target of 3 per cent – nearly three years ahead of schedule and in 2016-17 all Commonwealth portfolios exceeded their targets.

The results from the IPP are helping change the nature of the Government's engagement with Indigenous Australia, from a frame of disadvantage, welfare and dependency to economic empowerment, opportunity, aspiration and excellence.

## Indigenous Grants Policy

The Government is doing more to build demand for Indigenous led service delivery. The Indigenous Grants Policy (IGP) will be trialled with three Commonwealth Departments to see how best a greater share of the almost \$15 billion in Indigenous-related grants can be directed to Indigenous businesses, individuals and organisations.

Indigenous led granting activities have a greater chance of achieving sustainable, long-term community, social and economic outcomes. They are designed so that Indigenous Australians have a greater say in the design and delivery of Commonwealth grants in their communities, which is central to positioning them to lead activities related to their economic agency.

The IGP trial reflects the Government's commitment to continue to improve how we work with Indigenous Australians.

This potential strengthened role for Indigenous organisations, businesses and individuals is likely to have beneficial economic flow-on effects

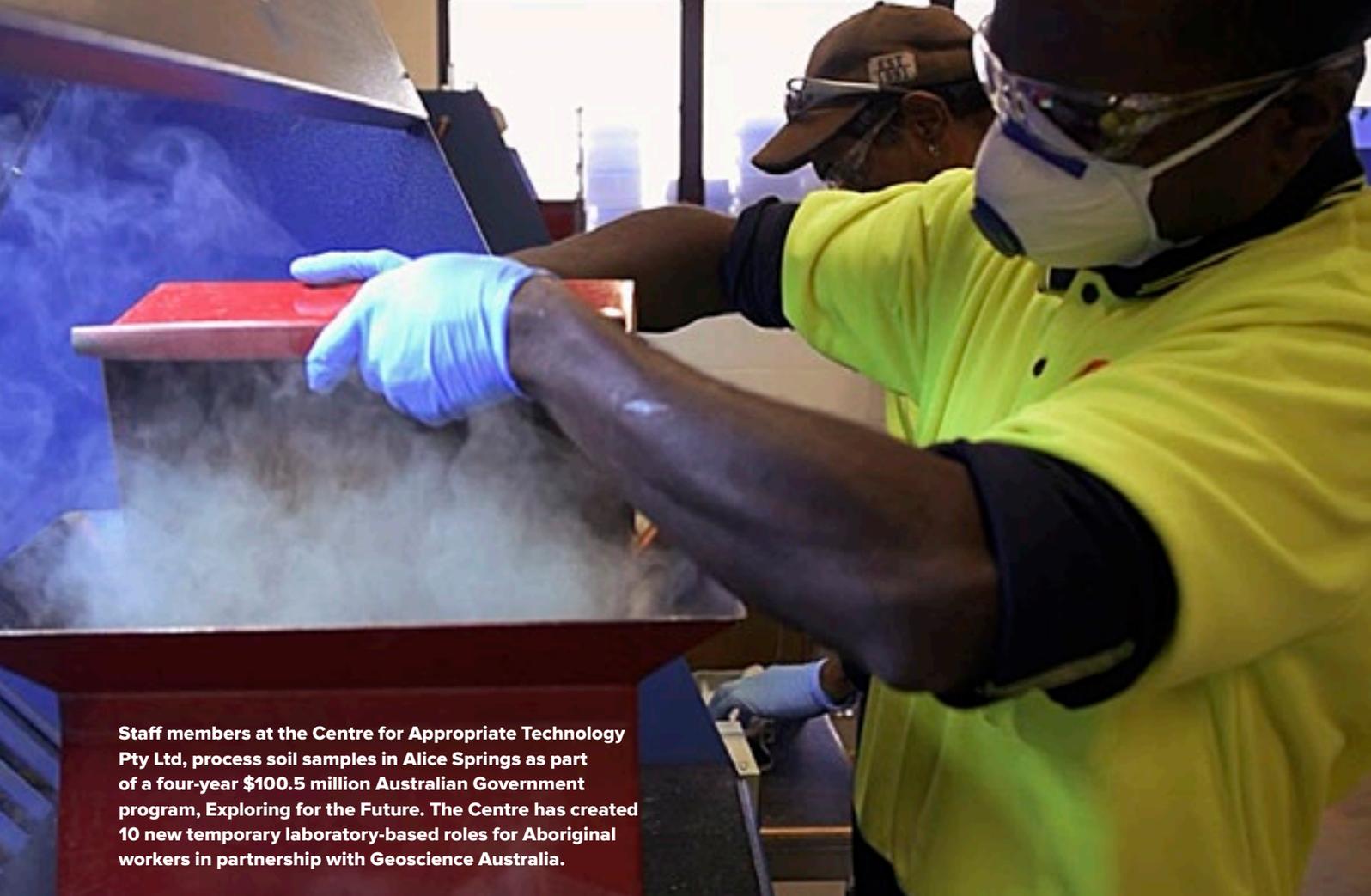
for local communities and improve service delivery. The principles of the IGP trial are:

- The delivery of programs and activities that are intended to benefit primarily Indigenous Australians are designed by the Commonwealth and Indigenous Australians working together
- The Commonwealth will preference Indigenous organisations to deliver grant-funded activities provided they can demonstrate they meet any relevant criteria, provide value for money and can deliver the desired outcomes. Using local Indigenous organisations ensures economic benefits flow back into communities and local Indigenous Australians are involved closely in decision-making in the organisation, leading to better service delivery. Further, evidence suggests Indigenous organisations are more likely to employ other Indigenous Australians.
- All individuals or organisations delivering grant-funded activities that are intended to primarily benefit Indigenous Australians should employ Indigenous Australians and use Indigenous suppliers, as well as demonstrate relevant local cultural competence. A key to improving service delivery is ensuring entities funded through Commonwealth grants are accepted within the communities in which they work, and have a sound understanding of local settings. Stakeholders have identified local cultural competence as a priority.
- The trial includes an evaluation strategy that will assess the effectiveness of the implementation of IGP principals and determine the suitability of a broader rollout. This is an opportunity to demonstrate best practice and to learn from previous service delivery experiences that did not embed sufficiently robust evaluation into Indigenous programme design.

The Government intends to begin the IGP trial from July 2018.

## Indigenous Entrepreneurs Package

As part of the 2016 election commitment, the Australian Government announced it would build on the success of policies like the Indigenous Procurement Policy by introducing a \$115 million Indigenous Entrepreneurs Package. This is because a strong and prosperous Indigenous business sector is key to empowering Indigenous Australians – through job creation, financial security for families and communities, and contributing to the growth of local economies and the Australian economy broadly.



**Staff members at the Centre for Appropriate Technology Pty Ltd, process soil samples in Alice Springs as part of a four-year \$100.5 million Australian Government program, Exploring for the Future. The Centre has created 10 new temporary laboratory-based roles for Aboriginal workers in partnership with Geoscience Australia.**

The Indigenous Entrepreneurs Package included three components:

- a commitment to develop the first Indigenous Business Sector Strategy to provide Indigenous businesses with the support, finances and networks they need for their businesses to thrive;
- a commitment to refocus Indigenous Business Australia's business support program on early stage entrepreneurs across Australia; and
- a \$90 million Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund.

We know there is growing opportunity for Indigenous businesses across the country. For Indigenous businesses to take up opportunities created by the IPP and emerging policy and sector opportunities, a coordinated and interconnected support system is required. The Indigenous Business Sector Strategy will provide the support the sector needs to meet the growing demand. The Strategy is a 10 year road map to help improve access to business and financial support for Australia's growing Indigenous business sector. It has been designed in consultation with over 200 Indigenous businesses and sector partners.

The Strategy hinges around four themes: better access to business support, improved access to capital, stronger networks, and greater access to information. It will also look at targeted solutions for urban, regional and remote locations; and increasing the talent pipeline through youth and women.

The work of Indigenous Business Australia (IBA) and its Business Development and Assistance Programme supports the aims of the Strategy. The Australian Government has changed the funding arrangements for IBA to refocus more heavily on assisting early-stage entrepreneurs and start-ups. IBA has launched a new grant/loan finance package for start-ups, a new working capital product for businesses winning their first contracts and entered into new business support partnerships.

Over the past year, IBA has changed its business support program significantly. It recently launched its Start-Up Finance Package and a new working capital product. It has also entered into new accelerator partnerships offering start-up entrepreneurs who have innovative and scalable ideas access to experienced entrepreneurial development. As part of its work to better support the Indigenous business sector, the Government has worked with IBA to deliver a new Performance and Warranty Bond product to increase investment in Indigenous businesses, particularly in the fields of construction and engineering. IBA has also launched a new \$50 million Indigenous Impact Investment programme to encourage impact investment in ventures that support Indigenous economic development.

The Indigenous Entrepreneurs Fund (IEF) is also supporting the Indigenous business sector, particularly in remote Australia through a dedicated business advisory service and grants for business plant and equipment.

**Under the Indigenous Procurement Policy Indigenous small-to-medium Indigenous-owned enterprises like Ergonomic Workstation Products Pty Ltd (EWP) are competing for a share of the Commonwealth's multi-billion dollar procurement spend. From left, Sandy Ivinson and Managing Director Gerard Ivinson attended the 2017 National Indigenous Business Trade Fair series to connect with Commonwealth Government procurement officials. EWP specialises in the supply and installation of ergonomic products that create a safe and injury free environment.**



These businesses have varied in size and experience from individual start-ups and family businesses, to small and medium enterprises and Indigenous corporations. Funding has been spread geographically across the country in regional and remote areas of most states and territories.

Access to the required business plant and equipment has been vital for these businesses that, for various reasons, have not been able to access commercial finance. The IEF support has freed up working capital within the businesses to enable them to employ local Indigenous people in sustainable jobs. For example, within some small businesses, additional apprentices have been engaged in skilled roles, which in turn provides them with the opportunity to one day own and run their own business. It has also enabled these businesses to play a more active role in supply-chain opportunities, tendering in their own right to win work that was previously out of reach.

With an improved asset base and greater potential to secure ongoing contracts, these businesses are now better positioned to be sustainable and more likely to be able to access commercial finance in the future.

By investing in today's Indigenous businesses and entrepreneurs, the Government is fostering a generation who will build their own business knowledge, assets and wealth and demonstrate to young people that business is a viable option for them.

### **Supporting Indigenous economic development through infrastructure**

The Australian Government has identified infrastructure as an area that can help with Indigenous economic participation, due to the scale of opportunities to enhance employment and business capability in both urban and regional Australia.

To support Indigenous Economic Development, the Commonwealth is working across all levels of Government and in collaboration with the private sector to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in large scale government infrastructure projects. This includes through the Northern Australia White Paper, the Government's City Deals, through COAG's Indigenous economic development agenda and the development of an Indigenous Employment and Supplier-Use Framework.

The White Paper on Developing Northern Australia outlines that projects funded through the \$600 million Northern Australian Roads Programme and the \$100 million Northern Australia Beef Roads Programme need to include Indigenous employment and procurement targets that reflect the local Indigenous working-age population.

City Deals are a new approach in Australia, bringing together the three levels of government, the community and private enterprise to create place-based partnerships and facilitate more investment and planning in infrastructure. Under the Government's City Deals:

- the lead contractor for the \$250 million Townsville stadium will be targeting 6.6 per cent of the construction workforce to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- the details of an Indigenous employment target associated with infrastructure funding under the Launceston city deal are being developed;
- the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is working closely with the NSW Government on opportunities relating to the proposed Western Sydney deal; and
- work has recently begun on deals for Darwin, Perth and Hobart.

Increasing Indigenous employment, economic participation and creating the right economic opportunities to increase demand for Indigenous businesses is also at the heart of COAG's Indigenous Economic Development Agenda. All jurisdictions have agreed to establishing state and territory-specific Indigenous procurement policies, Indigenous employment and Indigenous business targets, and to strengthen their reporting mechanisms.

The Australian Government, led by the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, is also developing an Indigenous Employment and Supplier Use Framework. The framework will include a Commonwealth negotiating position for the new National Partnership Agreement on Infrastructure (2019-20) that will tie Commonwealth funding to the achievement of agreed Indigenous employment and supplier use targets.

### **Cape York Region Package**

The \$260.5 million Cape York Region Package is seen as a unique opportunity to address Indigenous economic, training and employment issues in the Cape York region. Tender documents relating to the \$200 million Peninsula Developmental Road component of the package have included incentive payments for targets relating to Indigenous training and employment, Indigenous economic opportunity and local industry participation. The targets for 2016 were exceeded.

In addition, \$50.5 million of the \$260.5 million available under the Cape York package has been allocated to upgrade priority transport and non-transport infrastructure in remote communities. Importantly, these projects are being delivered by the local and Indigenous Shires and will sustain ongoing employment for the local and Indigenous workforce.

Importantly, these projects are being delivered by the local and Indigenous Shires and will sustain ongoing employment for the local and Indigenous workforce.

### **Land rights**

Land rights, including native title have made a significant contribution to achieving economic, social and cultural outcomes and ensuring sustainable intergenerational benefits for Indigenous communities over the past 10 years. As at 30 June 2017, Indigenous Australians' rights and interests in land were fully recognised across more than 40 per cent of the land area of Australia. This included native title determinations over approximately 34 per cent of Australia, with a further 26 per cent of Australia subject to application for recognition of native title rights. Native title has been determined to exist over approximately 32 per cent of Australia. This is a significant increase from 2007, where native title was determined over approximately 9 per cent of the country.

In the past 10 years the vast majority of native title determinations have been made by consent rather than often protracted and expensive litigation. A key lesson from native title has been the importance of agreement-making for securing positive outcomes for Indigenous people and the community. Institutional reforms to improve the case management of claims by the Federal Court in 2009 also saw a threefold increase in the number of native title claims settled by consent determinations in 2010-11 (27) compared to 2009-10 (nine). The Government is currently considering a range of recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the native title system to resolve claims, better facilitate agreement-making around the use of native title land (including to improve the ability of native title holders to do business on their land) and promote the autonomy of native title groups to make decisions about their land and to resolve internal disputes.

### **Economic opportunity through native title**

Although many communities have benefited from native title arrangements, the Government recognises the difficulties communities can face when attempting to use their land for commercial gain. Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) and other Native Title Agreements are a mechanism by which native title holders can negotiate economic outcomes in return for the use of traditional land and waters. As of 13 September 2017, 1,186 ILUAs had been registered, providing a range of social and economic benefits for communities around Australia. An ILUA can record the consent of native title parties to dealings on native title land and comprehensively settle one or more native title disputes.

The Yawuru agreements finalised in 2010 between the Yawuru People, the Western Australian Government and the Shire of Broom, for example, include \$56 million in monetary benefits for the Yawuru

for capacity building, preservation of culture and heritage, economic development, housing and joint management of a proposed conservation estate.

Comprehensive settlements have increased in prominence in recent years. These settlements involve the resolution of one or more native title claims over an area and other broader issues, such as compensation and have supported long-term economic opportunities for Indigenous communities, as well as heritage management. Comprehensive settlements promote faster, sustainable outcomes and can provide long term economic development opportunities for Indigenous communities.

The Government is also exploring ways to support greater Indigenous-led economic activity on native title land through leasehold arrangements.

### **Commonwealth support for native title**

The Australian Government provides approximately \$90 million in funding to Native Title Representative Bodies and Native Title Service Providers annually. These organisations assist Indigenous people in resolving native title claims and managing native title related issues.

The Government funds the Federal Court and the National Native Title Tribunal which handle native title claims. In 2017-18, total funding for the Federal Court is \$74.9 million of which approximately \$10 million has been provided to the National Native Title Tribunal.

The Government also provides funding to assist mid to senior-level anthropologists to become expert anthropologists. Native title anthropologists play an important role in the native title system, often providing fundamental connection evidence in native title claims.

### **Native title corporations**

As the number of determinations rises, so too does the number of native title corporations established to hold and manage native title on behalf of the native title group. There are currently more than 170 corporations, more than three times the number that existed 10 years ago. In 2015, the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia recognised for the first time the need for direct funding to build the capacity of these corporations. This ongoing funding (\$20.4 million over four years) is currently being applied to a number of nationally available support measures, as well as in response to application by specific corporations.

### **NBN Co Limited's Sky Muster satellite service**

Many of Australia's remote Indigenous communities will be served by NBN Co Limited's Sky Muster satellite service.

The National Broadband Network will assist businesses in these areas to improve their productivity, reduce costs and access new markets. The satellite service will provide broadband internet access with enough capacity to provide for services from basic web browsing and banking transactions through to more advanced applications such as e-health services and distance education.

As of 14 December 2017, there were more than 83,000 premises connected to the Sky Muster service.

There are currently 92 Indigenous community organisations receiving Sky Muster services through NBN Co's Public Interest Premises programme. The Northern Territory has the highest number with 37 Indigenous organisations.

### **Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support programme**

Australian Indigenous visual art is internationally recognised and sought after for its quality, innovation and cultural richness. The Australian Government invests around \$20 million annually in Australia's Indigenous visual arts industry through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program. The program provides operational support to around 80 Indigenous owned art centres, mostly in remote communities, as well as a number of service organisations, art fairs and regional hubs. Together these organisations enable the development, production and marketing of Indigenous visual art, and provide professional opportunities for around 8,000 artists.

### **Increasing overseas opportunities for Indigenous businesses**

Australia is working to improve Indigenous Australians' economic prosperity by creating opportunities for greater access to, and participation in, the global economy.

The Australian Government has recently announced a Charter with Indigenous Australian businesses: Promoting the Economic Interests of Australian Businesses Overseas. The Charter, available on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, provides practical information to help Indigenous Australian businesses optimise opportunities to engage with international markets and investors, and participate fully in the global economy.

Complementing this, the Government is exploring ways to work with the Indigenous business community to increase opportunities for export ready businesses to access international markets, including through participation in international business delegations.



**Former Sydney Swans player Michael O'Loughlin is passionate about being a role model for business success. Michael is pictured here with his colleague, General Manager, ARA Indigenous Services/CMC, Suzanne Grech at the 2017 National Indigenous Business Trade Fair Series.**

### Torres Strait fishing

The Australian Fisheries Management Authority (AFMA), under a financial agreement with the Torres Strait Regional Authority, coordinates and supports attendance by Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal traditional and commercial fishers on three fisheries working groups, one management advisory committee and two resource assessment groups. AFMA is delegated by the Protected Zone Joint Authority (PZJA) to provide day-to-day management, including the development of policies and plans of management for the management of Torres Strait fisheries. These various advisory committees provide the means for direct engagement with Indigenous stakeholders and is a primary source of policy and management advice for the PZJA.

The PZJA has applied a number of management policies designed to benefit Indigenous Torres Strait Islander communities. Only Indigenous Torres Strait Islander people are eligible for the grant of a new licence to fish in any Torres Strait fishery. As a result of Government-funded adjustments, the Torres Strait Finfish and Bêche-de-mer fisheries are only accessed by either Indigenous Torres Strait Islander people or other fishers permitted under special leasing arrangements recommended by an Indigenous advisory body. All revenue gained from leasing is held in trust by the Torres Strait Regional Authority for the benefit of Torres Strait communities.

Australian Government legislation came into effect on 7 November 2017 ensuring AFMA takes account of the interests of all fisheries users, including Indigenous and recreational fishers, in the management of Commonwealth fisheries. (The Fisheries Legislation Amendment Bill was passed by the House of Representatives on 26 October 2017 having been previously passed by the Senate. Royal Assent was given on 6 November 2017). This legislative amendment gives effect to a 2016 election commitment to strengthen the voice of Indigenous and recreational fishers in the management of the Commonwealth's commercial fisheries.

### Biosecurity

The clean, pest and disease free status of Australia is one of our greatest assets and gives us a competitive edge in a global market where quality and safety is highly valued. The Government has invested \$200 million in biosecurity measures across Australia to our protect farmers and all Australians. It includes support to ensure our northern barrier remains intact. The Government is investing \$12.4 million to expand biosecurity activities in northern Australia undertaken by Indigenous ranger groups. Sixty-nine skilled ranger groups are now playing a vital biosecurity role, with many located along coastlines in very remote areas.



**Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion and the Executive Director of the Office of Township Leasing, Greg Roche look on as Trustee of the Tiwi Aboriginal Lands Trust, Kim Puruntatameri, signs a township lease covering Pirlangimpi.**

**Article on page 98**

## ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

# OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

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### Community benefits from historic Gunyangara community entity township lease

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When the 99-year township lease for Gunyangara was signed over to the Ngarrariyal Aboriginal Corporation, it represented years of collaboration between the Gumatj Corporation, the Northern Land Council and the Government.

The first Commonwealth-approved community entity under the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976, Ngarrariyal Aboriginal Corporation is to hold and administer a township lease.

The idea for local control was first proposed by Dr Galarrwuy Yunupingu in 2007, and the community entity model was developed at the request of local Traditional Owners.

The Gunyangara lease provides the first example of how a sustainable, local Aboriginal corporation can hold and administer a township lease to strengthen local decision-making and enable Traditional Owners to leverage their land assets for economic and community benefit.

The Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Nigel Scullion, approved the community entity and consented to the lease. The Ngarrariyal Aboriginal Corporation, Northern Land Council and Arnhem Land Aboriginal Land Trust have executed it.

Transitional township leasing models covering Mutitjulu and Pirlangimpi were also executed in 2017. Control of these leases can be transferred to local Aboriginal organisations when they are ready to take over.

The leases covering Gunyangara, Mutitjulu and Pirlangimpi all increase local decision-making and open up economic opportunities for the local community.

**Pictured on page 97**

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### Dice Australia delivering technological solutions to sustainable and enterprising communities

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Dice Australia is a leading service provider to the construction and renewable energy sectors and provides services across the country – particularly in the Northern Territory.

Dice was established by Raymond Pratt, a proud Arrernte man. He says he was inspired to go into business by his father Len Pratt.

“Dad is also an electrician by trade and started his business Len Pratt Electrical when he was 23. I completed my entire apprenticeship with him,” Raymond says.

Raymond realised that to build his business into a successful company that would be a vehicle to make a positive difference, Dice needed to evolve beyond electrical contracting. With this in mind, Raymond has steered Dice into cutting edge and innovative technologies to provide renewable energy-efficient solutions to homes, businesses and remote communities.



**Owner and Director of Dice Australia, Raymond Pratt. His company is leading the way by delivering high quality products and services to remote communities.**

“By working with and teaming up with other industry leaders in their fields of expertise, and continuing to find people and companies that share a similar vision and values, the dream has now become a reality,” Raymond says.

Dice’s collaborative business model allows it to supply high-quality products and services on projects of all sizes and in all regions, from maintenance at Defence bases through to delivering affordable energy solutions to the most remote communities in Australia. Through its collaborative approach, Dice has won a significant number of contracts.

“The Australian Government’s Indigenous Procurement Policy (IPP) has created a new era in entrepreneurship. The IPP has helped to open doors for us to engage with and partner with larger corporate, government and non-government entities. It’s allowed some of our existing customers to be recognised for supporting us as an Indigenous business and this has further encouraged the customers to keep using us and in some cases increase the volume of work we were receiving from them,” Raymond says.

Dice’s vision is to encourage Indigenous business engagement by promoting employment and facilitating business ownership. Where possible Dice chooses to engage, mentor and support local, regional and national Indigenous businesses.

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### **Indigenous Timber Creek business a leading local employer and service provider**

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Bradshaw and Timber Creek Contracting and Resource Company has grown to become a key employer and service provider in Timber Creek.

Based on the banks of the Victoria River in the Northern Territory, the business employs 12 to 15 full-time Aboriginal workers and offers a range of services, from civil works to quarry services, trades and related services, and facilities and waste management.

This year a \$2.5 million grant from the Aboriginal Benefit Account funded the expansion of the local workshop to include a 16-bed workers accommodation facility, commercial kitchen, diner and laundry for Aboriginal employees, and significant plant and machinery upgrades.

The business's managing director, Daniel Jones, is proud to provide a positive example to young Aboriginal people in his community.

"I was watching my community slowly go downhill and I decided that we needed to do something for ourselves. I looked for some way to go into business for myself and my community," Daniel says.

"We are very proud of our company for the sense of satisfaction that we get from growing from nothing to one of the major employers in our area, achieving successful completions of Defence and other Northern Territory contracts where nine years ago we had nothing."

The company has won new contracts with the Northern Territory Government and Victoria Daly Regional Council, and consolidated partnership and sub-contracting arrangements with larger providers.

**Pictured on page 88**





Kowanyama River House owner and founder, Thomas Hudson, is expanding his Indigenous tourism business on the Cape York Peninsula of Far North Queensland.

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### **Kowanyama River House growing to new heights with IAS funding**

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Kowanyama River House in Far North Queensland is expanding its facilities thanks to funding under the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

The expansion will double its current nine room capacity to enable it to meet increased consumer demand. It is likely that this will also spur an increase in the staff numbers needed to operate the facility.

Owner and founder, Thomas Hudson, says he came up with the idea when he saw a problem of Aboriginal communities lacking accommodation to house itinerant contractors.

"They have a fly-in-and-fly-out service that doesn't work for the community as it doesn't contribute to the economy or engage with the community in terms of employment," Thomas says.

Thomas, who spent years as a councillor and served a term as Mayor of Kowanyama Aboriginal Shire Council, is very passionate about supporting Kowanyama and his local community.

"I wanted to be a role model to my fellow people and send a message to everyone: 'never give up'," he says.

"It wasn't an easy track and I'm the type of person who had a dream in my head and the commitment to never give up. Commitment comes with it and that's where the hard work is. You need to work with the business and community."

# CHAPTER 6 HEALTHY LIVES

Taking a holistic approach



Papunya girls, from left, Sabrina and Naomi, show off some healthy fruit at the Nguru-Walaja (Yuendumu) Store managed by Outback Stores.



**“Without good nutrition infants cannot thrive, children cannot succeed at school and employment opportunities are diminished. Remote community members want their children to grow up healthy but face barriers to accessing nutritious, affordable food. Communities are driving solutions and are active partners in our practical, community-based program. They recognise the importance of programs that are long-term and build capacity and confidence.”**

Chair EON Foundation, Caroline de Mori

## **Introduction: A holistic approach to improving health outcomes**

Access to health services is fundamental to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The provision of primary health care and specialist services for First Australians is playing an increasing role in the prevention and management of chronic disease.

True and lasting gains are made when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and individuals are front and centre of decision making and driving outcomes in their choices in respect to health care.

We must also continue to focus on addressing the social and cultural determinants of health in order to further improve health and wellbeing.

The Government is investing broadly and carefully to lift outcomes in these areas, which in turn will help enhance the health of our First Nations people.

As part of this, the Government is investing in programs that increase food security and boost nutrition levels in remote Indigenous communities. Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to access healthy, affordable food is a key to better health.

**Table 4: Life expectancy at birth**

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Gap (years)	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
2005-2007	67.5	73.1	78.9	82.6	11.4	9.6
2010-2012	69.1	73.7	79.7	83.1	10.6	9.5

Source: ABS, 2013, Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012. ABS Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003.

## Target: Close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (by 2031)

### Key points

- Between the periods 2005-2007 and 2010-2012, there was a small reduction in the life expectancy gap of 0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females.
- Over the longer term, Indigenous mortality rates have declined significantly by 14 per cent since 1998. However, there has been no improvement since the 2006 baseline and the target is not on track to be met.
- There have been significant improvements in the Indigenous mortality rate from chronic diseases, particularly from circulatory diseases (the leading cause of death) since 1998. However, Indigenous mortality rates from cancer (second leading cause of death) are rising and the gap is widening.
- There have been improvements in early detection and management of chronic disease and reductions in smoking which should contribute to long-term improvements in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## What the data tells us

### National

While the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is gradually improving, the target to close the gap in life expectancy by 2031 is not on track. Progress will have to gather pace if the target is to be met in 2031. The target is measured by estimates of life expectancy at birth, which are available every five years.<sup>33</sup>

The most recent Indigenous life expectancy estimates were published in 2013 and showed Indigenous males born between 2010 and 2012 have a life expectancy of 69.1 years (10.6 years less than non-Indigenous males) while females have an estimated life expectancy of 73.7 years (9.5 years less than non-Indigenous females) (**Table 4** and **Box 1**).

Between the periods 2005-2007 and 2010-2012, the estimated life expectancy at birth for Indigenous males increased by around 0.3 years per year, and by around 0.1 years per year for Indigenous females – this led to a small reduction in the gap of 0.8 years for males and 0.1 years for females. To meet the target of closing the gap by 2031, Indigenous life expectancy needs to increase by around 0.6 to 0.8 years per year.

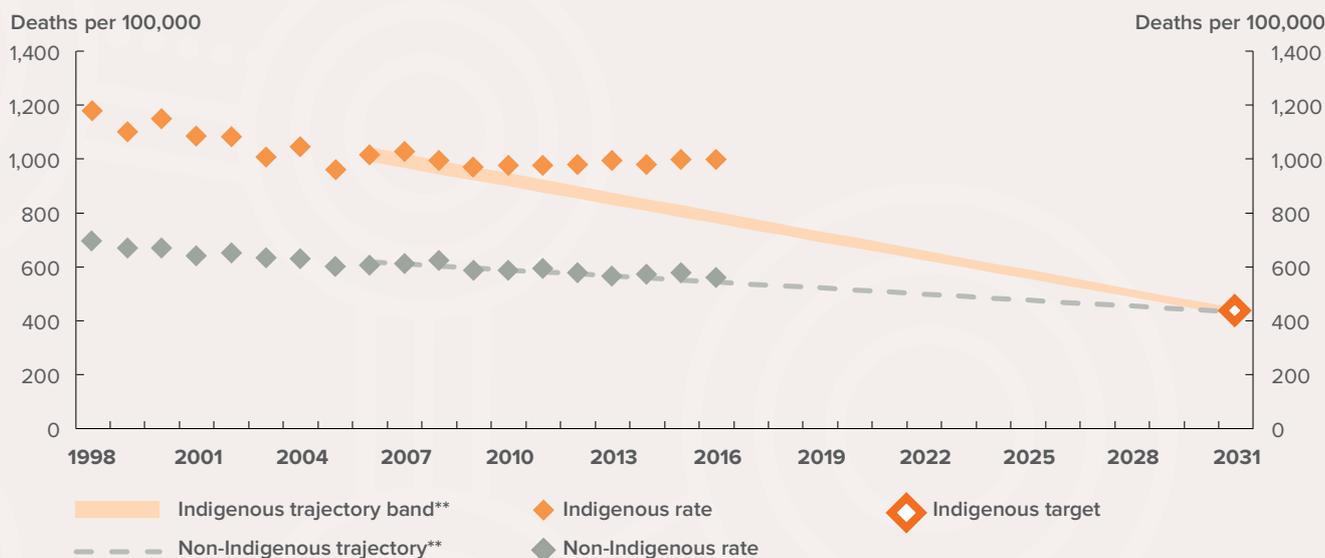
### Mortality

While official Indigenous life expectancy estimates are only available every five years, progress for this target is tracked using annual mortality rates.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) publishes life tables and calculates life expectancy for the Australian population and for some groups of the population. These measures are based on three years of data to reduce the effect of variations in death rates from year to year. Updated estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy are due to be published by the ABS in 2018.

<sup>34</sup> Indigenous mortality data includes New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory only, which are the jurisdictions considered to have adequate levels of Indigenous identification suitable to publish.

**Figure 28: Mortality rates\***



\* Indigenous mortality data for New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory only and is age standardised.

\*\* The non-Indigenous trajectory is based on the non-Indigenous trend between 1998 and 2012, from which the Indigenous trajectory was derived.

Sources: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

Between 1998 and 2016, the overall Indigenous mortality rate declined significantly, by 14 per cent.<sup>35</sup> Non-Indigenous death rates also declined over this period, and the gap has narrowed by around nine per cent (not statistically significant). Despite these long-term improvements, there has been no significant change in the Indigenous mortality rate between 2006 (baseline) and 2016 and the current Indigenous mortality rate is not on track to meet the target (**Figure 28**).<sup>36</sup> Mortality rates are also continuing to decline for non-Indigenous Australians, which explains why the gap has not narrowed since 2006.

### Leading causes of Indigenous mortality

In 2016, nearly three in four (71 per cent) Indigenous deaths were from chronic diseases (including circulatory disease, cancer, diabetes and respiratory disease). These diseases accounted for 79 per cent of the gap in mortality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

While it is undeniable that progress needs to be faster, there have been consistent, gradual improvements in health outcomes impacting on life expectancy.

There have been reductions in smoking (**Box 2**), improved early detection and management of chronic disease, and improvements in social determinants of health such as educational attainment.

Between 1998 and 2016, the decline in Indigenous mortality rates was the strongest for circulatory disease. Indigenous mortality rates from circulatory diseases reduced by about 45 per cent, and the gap narrowed by 43 per cent. Since 2006, there has been a significant decrease of 23 per cent in Indigenous circulatory disease mortality rates.

However, cancer mortality rates are rising for Indigenous Australians and the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians' cancer mortality rates is widening. Between 1998 and 2016, there was a significant increase by 23 per cent in the cancer mortality rate for Indigenous Australians while the rate has declined significantly by 14 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians.

Some health interventions under Closing the Gap, especially population health interventions, have a long lead time before measurable impacts are seen. For instance, smoking rates may take five years to impact on heart disease and up to 30 years to impact on cancer deaths. Improvements in educational attainment will take 20 to 30 years to impact on early deaths from chronic disease in the middle years when most deaths for Indigenous Australians occur (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2017).

35 As the Indigenous population is much younger, comparisons of mortality rates with non-Indigenous Australians are made after adjusting for the different age structures of the two populations.

36 From 2015, deaths data provided by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages includes Medical Certificate of Cause of Death information, resulting in an increase in the number of deaths identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in Queensland.

**Figure 29: Mortality rates by jurisdiction, 2012-2016**



Sources: ABS and AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database

**Table 5: Life expectancies at selected ages: 2010-2012**

Age in years	Males		Gap (years)	Females		Gap (years)
	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous		Indigenous	Non-Indigenous	
0	69.1	79.7	-10.6	73.7	83.1	-9.5
1	68.7	79.0	-10.3	73.2	82.4	-9.2
5	64.9	75.1	-10.2	69.3	78.5	-9.2
25	45.7	55.5	-9.8	49.8	58.7	-8.9
50	24.5	31.7	-7.2	27.2	34.4	-7.1
65	13.9	18.6	-4.7	15.8	20.6	-4.8
85	4.2	4.6	-0.4	4.4	4.8	-0.3

Source: ABS, 2013 Life tables for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2010–2012. ABS Cat. No. 3302.0.55.003.

### States and territories

Over the period 2012 to 2016,<sup>37</sup> Indigenous mortality rates varied across the jurisdictions (**Figure 29**). The Northern Territory had the highest Indigenous mortality rate (1,478 per 100,000 population) as well as the largest gap with non-Indigenous Australians, followed by Western Australia (1,225 per 100,000).

Only Western Australia has seen a significant decline in Indigenous mortality rates rate since 2006 – a decline of 20.4 per cent, leading to a narrowing of the gap by 27.2 per cent.

Of the four jurisdictions (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory) that have agreed trajectories for this target, none were on track in 2016 to meet the target.

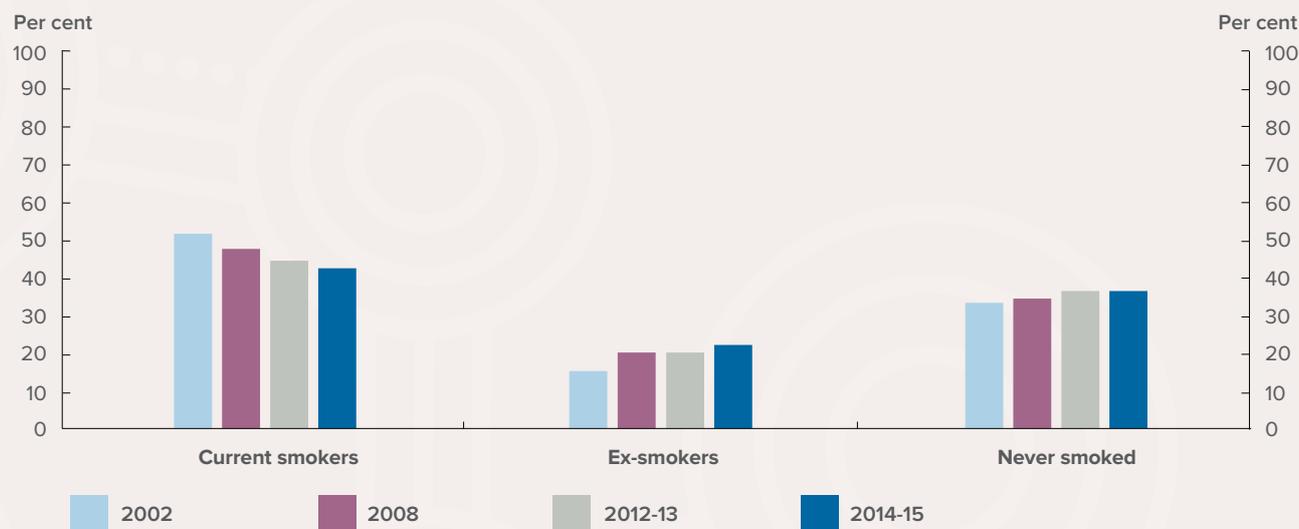
### Box 1: Life expectancy by age

Life expectancy at birth provides an estimate of the average number of years a group of newborns (in the period 2010-2012) could live if current death rates remain unchanged. The ABS also published estimates of life expectancies at other age groups for the period 2010-2012. (**Table 5**).

Indigenous life expectancy for those aged 65 years during 2010-2012 is 13.9 years for males and 15.8 years for females, a gap of less than five years.

<sup>37</sup> Due to the small numbers involved, five years of data is combined so that differences between the jurisdictions can be shown.

**Figure 30: Smoking trends for Indigenous Australians**



Source: AHMAC, 2017

### Box 2: Falling smoking rates among Indigenous Australians and impact on mortality

Smoking, and tobacco use, is the leading contributor to the burden of disease among Indigenous Australians, accounting for 12 per cent of the total burden in 2011 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2016). Smoking prevalence for Indigenous Australians (aged 15 years and over) has declined significantly (a reduction of 9 percentage points) between 2002 and 2014-15, from 51 to 42 per cent (Figure 30). While some health effects from smoking are immediate, there is a long lag, up to three decades, between changes in smoking rates and impacts upon many smoking-related diseases. As such, many of the health benefits and improvements in mortality will not be seen for some time.

This decline in smoking prevalence means an increase in the number of Indigenous Australians who have quit smoking (ex-smokers) and in the number who have chosen to never take up smoking (never smoked). From 2002 to 2014-15, the proportion of Indigenous ex-smokers (15 years and over) increased from 15 per cent to 22 per cent (around 99,500 people), and the proportion who never smoked increased from 33 per cent to 36 per cent (around 158,200 people) (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2017).

Most of the decline in Indigenous smoking prevalence has been in non-remote areas (from 50 per cent in 2002 to 39 per cent in 2014-15) while smoking rates in remote areas have remained relatively stable (55 per cent in 2002 and 52 per cent in 2014-15) (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2017).

Quitting smoking earlier in life (or not smoking) provides the greatest expected health benefits.

Encouragingly the largest decreases in smoking rates have been in the younger age groups: from 58 per cent in 2002 to 41 per cent in 2014-15 for 18-24 year-olds; and from 33 per cent to 17 per cent for 15-17 year-olds (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council 2017). Given the younger age profile of the Indigenous population, the decline in smoking prevalence among younger adults has significant potential for further population level decline in smoking and related health benefits.

Decreases in Indigenous smoking prevalence and smoking initiation (smoking rates for 15-17 year-olds) have been faster for the period 2008 to 2014-15 than for the period 1994 to 2004-05. This suggests that smoking cessation measures targeting Indigenous Australians, implemented since 2008, are having an impact (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017c).

The significant decline in smoking prevalence among Indigenous Australians will provide health benefits over time. For example, the burden of tobacco-related cardiovascular disease is likely to continue to decline in the short term. However, because of the long lag time between smoking behaviour and the onset of tobacco-related cancer mortality, smoking related deaths are likely to continue to rise over the next decade, before peaking, due to the legacy from when smoking prevalence was at its peak (Lovett et al. 2017).

These findings emphasize the need to sustain effective and culturally appropriate smoking prevention/cessation programs to keep downward pressure on smoking rates – especially among subgroups of Indigenous Australians with relatively stable smoking rates (remote and older age groups). This will assist in accelerating decline in smoking prevalence, which, in turn, will lead to greater health gains over the short and the long term.

## Translating policy into action

### Primary health care

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-23 sets out the Australian Government's vision, principles, priorities and strategies to deliver better health outcomes for Indigenous Australians. It provides the policy framework.

An implementation plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-23 outlines the actions to be taken by the Australian Government, the Aboriginal community controlled health sector, and other key stakeholders to give effect to the vision, principles, priorities and strategies set out in the health plan.

Significant gains have been achieved by reforming the health system, addressing behavioural factors that influence health outcomes and improving investment across the life course by targeting the leading causes of death.

Funding of \$3.6 billion over four years (from 2017-18) is being provided through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme to implement Indigenous-specific measures outlined in the health implementation plan. Initiatives under the implementation plan are also delivered through mainstream programs such as the Medicare Benefits Schedule, the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, public hospital and aged care facilities. Progress under the plan is measured against 20 goals that were developed to complement the existing COAG Closing the Gap targets, and focus on prevention and early intervention across the life course.

Primary Health Networks are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to identify, design and commission culturally-appropriate services to meet the needs of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Under the 2008 National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes, the Australian Government delivered the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package (ICDP), worth \$805.5 million over four years (2009-2013) to tackle chronic disease among Indigenous Australians. The ICDP focused on tackling the risk factors of chronic disease, providing primary health care services that deliver, and improving patient journeys by fixing gaps in the health system. A 2012-13 evaluation of the ICDP found that it produced substantial increases in access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Closing the Gap PBS co-payment measure, implemented 1 July 2010, subsidises medication for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with existing chronic disease, or who are at risk of chronic disease. This measure is aimed at improving access and use of medications. In 2015-16, 4.8 million scripts were issued under the Closing the Gap co-payment measure, assisting more than 277,000 patients.

### Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

From July 2017, the Government has been supporting the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health (ACCH) sector through a new Network Funding Agreement (NFA) with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). The NFA was developed in consultation with the ACCH sector and takes a streamlined, outcomes-focused approach to funding a national network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sector Support Organisations under the Indigenous Australians Health Programme.

### Supporting Indigenous Australians with disabilities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disability at approximately twice the rate of other Australians. Given this, it is vital that the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) continues to work with Indigenous communities in metropolitan, regional and remote communities to ensure they have appropriate access to the scheme.

More than 5,500 people who identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander are currently being assisted by the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). It is expected the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being supported by the NDIS will grow as the scheme continues to be rolled out.

The NDIA is engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through a dedicated Indigenous engagement strategy, a rural and remote strategy and the agency's Reconciliation Action Plan.



Jason Bartlett decided to share his story to help other men take responsibility for their health. 'Passing on Wisdom: Jason's Diabetes Story' documents his final days before he died in June 2017. Here, Jason's widow, Jamiee Bartlett, holds a photograph of her husband, left to right, with Dr Sandra Thompson, from the WA Centre for Rural Health, Minister for Indigenous Health, and Aged Care Ken Wyatt AM, and Adrian Bartlett (both cousins of Jason), his brother Phil Bartlett and WACRH's Lenny Papertalk.



Dr James Fitzpatrick examining a young child as part of child development assessments in the Pilbara, Western Australia. Dr Fitzpatrick is heavily involved in a community-led movement 'Making FASD History' that has been initiated Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley region, and is now operating across the Pilbara, Central Australia, and Newcastle, NSW. Aboriginal communities are leading the way in understanding and overcoming this condition.

### **School nutrition projects in the Northern Territory**

The Australian Government allocated \$24 million for school nutrition projects in the Northern Territory over three years until mid-2018 for school nutrition activities. These activities are providing nutritious meals aimed at increasing Indigenous attendance and engagement. School nutrition projects operate in 72 sites in 63 communities and provide meals to around 5,400 children per school day. In addition, school nutrition projects aim to increase local Indigenous employment, employing around 230 staff of which around 168 are local Aboriginal people.

### **Social and emotional wellbeing**

Following the National Apology Australia's Indigenous Peoples, and as part of the Council of Australian Governments' Closing the Gap strategy, funding is provided to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation to address the harmful legacy of colonisation, in particular the history of child removal that has affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The work of the Healing Foundation and other key stakeholders has been significant in focusing attention on the need for trauma-informed practice and services.

The National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-23 published in October 2017 provides a dedicated focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing and mental health. It sets out a comprehensive and culturally appropriate stepped care model that is equally applicable to both Indigenous specific and mainstream health services. It will guide and support Indigenous mental health policy and practice over the next five years and is an important resource for policy makers, advocates, service providers, clients, consumers and researchers.

It is designed to complement the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and contribute to the vision of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2012-2023. It therefore forms an essential component of the national response to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing support services are funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with priority given to members of the Stolen Generations and their families. Activities include counselling, family tracing and reunions, and a range of healing activities.

### **National Indigenous Critical Response Service**

The Australian Government is investing \$10 million in the National Indigenous Critical Response Service (NICRS) to provide support to individuals, families and communities in response to suicides or other critical incidents involving deaths. This service commenced in 2017 and is being progressively rolled out across Australia over three years.

The NICRS helps affected individuals and families by assessing their needs and providing practical and social support, including by facilitating connections with support services as needed and monitoring throughcare over time, referring on to social, health or other services where appropriate.

The service helps to coordinate services in a culturally appropriate way and is also strengthening community capacity and resilience in some high-risk communities.

### **Aged care**

An Aged Care Diversity Framework has been developed for all older people and is intended to assist providers, and enhance the aged care sector's capacity to better meet the diverse characteristics and life experiences of older people, thereby ensuring inclusive aged care services. Under the framework, an action plan is being developed to address the specific barriers and challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Encouraging healthy lifestyle choices**

#### **Indigenous sports**

Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government has committed more than \$135 million to support 151 activities that use sport as a tool to achieve Closing the Gap outcomes. This investment includes activities that increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation in sport and recreation, use sport and recreation to improve wellbeing and resilience, improve educational attendance and attainment, engage youth, develop or upgrade infrastructure facilities and help to provide employment and training opportunities.

#### **Outback Stores**

Outback Stores, a Commonwealth-owned company, was established in 2006 in recognition of the hardship faced by many residents in remote areas in accessing regular, quality, affordable and healthy food. It has a mandate to improve access to affordable healthy food and provide employment for remote Indigenous communities through the provision of quality retail management services for community stores.

Outback Stores manages 36 community stores throughout the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia to ensure food security in these communities. In 2016-17, health and employment strategies implemented by Outback Stores resulted in:

- a reduction of full sugar drink sales which resulted in a reduction of 11.5 tonnes less sugar consumed;
- 406 tonnes of fresh fruit and vegetables sold in communities in which Outback Stores operates; and
- 298 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being employed in the stores that Outback Stores manages, which is almost 80 per cent of all team members employed in stores.

### **Support for Northern Territory stores**

The Australian Government is helping to improve the health of people living in remote Northern Territory communities through the Northern Territory Community Stores Licensing Scheme that is making healthy food and drinks more accessible for local residents. There are currently more than 100 licensed stores operating in the Northern Territory. The Government is also supporting community stores through the Aboriginals Benefit Account, which has provided \$55.8 million to support 18 stores over the last five years in the NT.

### **Strategy to Reduce Sugar Consumption through remote community stores**

The Australian Government has developed a strategy to reduce the sales of highly sugared products sold in stores in remote Indigenous communities. The store is often the main - or only - source of food and drinks in remote communities, so a reduction the amount of sugared products sold in the store is an effective way of reducing the amount sugar products consumed. The strategy is being implemented in stages through until June 2020, focusing on sugary drinks and expanding to other high-sugar products such as confectionary.

### **Reducing substance misuse and harm**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Drug Strategy 2014-2019 provides a framework for action to minimise the harms to individuals, families and communities from alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. The strategy guides governments, communities, service providers and individuals to identify key issues and priority areas for action.

Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government funds more than 80 organisations across the country to deliver Indigenous specific alcohol and other drug treatment services. Providers aim to reduce substance misuse by providing a range of services that can include early intervention, treatment and prevention, residential rehabilitation, transitional aftercare and outreach support. Elements can include access to sobering up shelters, advocacy and referral, counselling, case management, youth-specific support, education and health promotion, cultural and capacity building, and life skills support.

Overall funding for alcohol and other drug treatment services under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy in 2017-18 is around \$70 million. This is in addition to alcohol and other drug services, including Indigenous-specific services, funded through the Health portfolio.

Approximately 32,700 clients received at least one type of substance-use service funded under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, with around 170,400 instances of care provided, based data from the 2015-16 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Organisations Online Services Report.

In recognition of the acute need in the Northern Territory, the Australian Government is investing around \$91.5 million over seven years (from 2015-16) to tackle alcohol misuse through the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NP NTRAI). This includes around \$13 million for Alcohol Action Initiatives (AAIs), which are community-developed activities to tackle alcohol misuse and harm. Around \$14 million is also provided under the NP NTRAI for an AAI workforce to engage directly with communities to ensure activities are evidence-based and to strengthen community capacity and governance to help communities proactively manage alcohol concerns. In addition, around \$31 million has been provided under the NP NTRAI to support a Remote Alcohol and Other Drug Workforce to provide alcohol and drug support and education, interventions, and referrals for community members.

### **Reducing petrol sniffing**

In some remote communities, petrol sniffing was having a significant impact on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities. This led to communities and governments working together to develop a solution. Low aromatic fuel was first made available in communities in Central Australia and Western Australia in 2005 and has been highly successful in reducing rates of petrol sniffing. The fuel is now available in more than 175 fuel outlets in Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia.

## Immunisation

Immunisation has been a specific focus globally over the past decade, particularly for organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund and the World Health Organisation. Ensuring high immunisation coverage rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is an important contribution to Closing the Gap in Indigenous health outcomes.

Australia's National Immunisation Programme, a collaborative program involving the Australian Government and the state and territory governments, was established in 1997 to reduce the burden of vaccine-preventable diseases by improving national immunisation coverage rates. Since 2013, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander five year-old cohort coverage rate has exceeded the immunisation coverage rate of all children in the same age cohort.

The NIP provides free vaccines against 17 vaccine-preventable diseases to eligible groups including children, the elderly, pregnant women and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Since the introduction of the NIP in 1997, Australia has lifted its national childhood immunisation rates to more than 90 per cent from a reported low of 53 per cent in the late 1980s.

To support and increase vaccination rates, the NIP was expanded on 1 July 2017 to provide ongoing free catch-up vaccines equivalent to those received in childhood for all young people up to the age of 19 years, and refugee and humanitarian entrants of any age.

To further support vaccination uptake, a three-year childhood immunisation education campaign was launched by the Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, on 13 August 2017.

## Better identifying Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

### *Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) Action Plan*

The Australian Government provided funding of \$9.2 million over four years (2013-14 to 2016-17) towards the FASD Action Plan. To build on this early investment, the Government announced in the 2016 Budget a \$10.5 million investment in initiatives to reduce the impact of FASD in the Australian community.

A national FASD Strategic Action Plan is currently being developed. This will provide an approach for all levels of government, organisations and individuals regarding strategies that target the reduction of alcohol-related harms relating to FASD. The strategy will aim to reduce the prevalence of FASD in Australia and provide advice and coordination on the support available to those affected by the disorder.

## Reducing smoking

Further reducing the smoking prevalence among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be expected to provide a meaningful contribution to the Government's efforts to halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five. In particular, successful efforts to reduce smoking prevalence among pregnant Indigenous women and their families, and their exposure to tobacco smoke are likely to be particularly important. In this regard, there is strong evidence that tobacco smoking and smoke exposure during pregnancy and childhood cause considerable childhood morbidity and mortality (Mund et al. 2013).

Progress in this area will continue to require a combination of population-level strategies and approaches in tobacco control (such as measures to further reduce the affordability of tobacco products and comprehensive smoke-free legislation and policies), as well as initiatives targeted towards Indigenous Australians such as the Government's Tackling Indigenous Smoking program.

## Improving the quality of remote housing

Good quality housing underpins all of the Closing the Gap targets in health, education and employment, as well as community safety.

The Australian Government has invested \$5.5 billion over the past 10 years to improve the quality of housing in remote communities. This has seen percentage of houses that are overcrowded drop from 52 per cent to 37 per cent. Tenants now have rights and responsibilities they didn't previously have and the system of housing operates as a genuine public housing system.



Adrian Clinch, an Aboriginal Community Researcher for the Telethon Kids Institute, was awarded NAIDOC Scholar of the Year at the Port Hedland 2017 NAIDOC Awards for his work on the Warajanga Marnti Warrarnja 'Together We Walk on Country' Project that aims to make FASD history in the Pilbara, Western Australia.



Minister for Indigenous Health Ken Wyatt AM with resident Judy Young at the Tjilpiku Pampaku Ngura aged care facility at Pukatja, in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands.

HEALTHY  
LIVES

OUTSTANDING  
LOCAL  
SOLUTIONS  
DELIVERING  
EXCITING  
OUTCOMES



Students from the Ngalangangpum School tending to the school garden with EON Foundation staff at Warmun in the East Kimberley.

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**EON thriving communities leading to healthier lives**

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For more than 10 years, the EON Foundation has worked with remote Aboriginal communities to make healthy choices easy choices.

EON Thriving Communities is a practical, hands-on gardening, nutrition education, cooking and hygiene program developed in partnership with remote schools and communities and based around edible vegetable, fruit and bush tucker gardens.

By developing the program in

consultation with community members, and adapting its approach based on the feedback provided by communities, the EON Foundation supports local decision-making.

“The EON Foundation works in partnership with communities working alongside them to make a lasting contribution to community health and sustainability, whilst establishing local edible gardens to improve food security and access to healthy food for school children, their families and community members,” EON Foundation General Manager, Anjie Brook, says.

“The program also focuses on providing a secure and sustainable source of healthy food to bring about generational change, improvement to health, education and economic opportunities for those in remote Aboriginal communities.”

As the program operates by invitation only, there is a high sense of ownership in the communities. Through funding from both the Australian Government and the Western Australian Government, the program is now working in 20 communities across Western Australia, with a long list of communities interested in being involved.



**Isaiah Dawe is giving back through the establishment of ID Know Yourself.**

## **Isaiah Dawe and ID Know Yourself**

Isaiah Dawe is a man who knows all about the foster care system. He has overcome the challenges of living in 17 different foster homes.

Isaiah, a Saltwater Murray man from the Butchulla and Garawa clans, has used this experience to establish ID Know Yourself, a mentoring program for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the New South Wales foster care system.

"The vision of ID Know Yourself is to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people growing up in out-of-home care in New South Wales have access to their culture and support and assistance they need to live safe, happy and fulfilling lives," Isaiah says.

"The slogan 'know yourself' is about knowing what you are capable of, knowing your worth and what you can achieve in this world.

"The ID Know Yourself program is designed to improve outcomes for Indigenous young people within foster care in five key areas. The key areas are identity/culture, education, life after care, health and yarn time."

"The program was established on the back of my own personal experience as a young Aboriginal person who went through the foster care system. I know first-hand the negative experiences that can occur and what's needed for those to flourish," he says.

"I was in the foster care system from the age of two months old until I turned 18 and went through 17 foster homes in that time. During this period of my life, I was stripped of my culture and identity, suffered malnutrition and various forms of abuse ranging from physical, emotional, and sexual."

"Unfortunately, to this day I haven't had the opportunity to meet my family."

Despite this, Isaiah went on to contribute to his community at the national and international level. He was elected as a member of the 2017 National Indigenous Youth Parliament, where he was awarded for being the most positive influencer of the group. He was also hand-picked by National Congress of Australia's First Peoples as one of 10 Indigenous leaders across the country to travel to the United States to participate in an international leadership exchange program.

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### Outback Stores: good for community health, good for the economy

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Outback Stores recognises the hardship many residents in remote areas face accessing regular, quality, affordable and healthy food.

The Commonwealth-owned company works side by side with communities to make a positive difference in the health, employment and economy of remote Indigenous communities.

Outback Stores currently manages 36 community stores across the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia, but it provides much more than just retail management services.

“Before Outback Stores, it was rare to find fresh, quality, well-priced fruit and vegetables. Now they are within walking distance for most families,” Outback Stores Chief Executive Officer, Michael Borg, says.

And it is more than just a supply of high quality and affordable food, drinks and household items. Outback Stores provided \$1.45 million in financial support to 13 of the 36 stores it manages in 2016-17. It organised 46 flights at a cost of more than \$105,000 to airlift emergency supplies to 14 central and northern Australia communities cut off in the wet.



**Outback Stores customers from the Kundat Djaru community (Ringer Soak) in Western Australia with Outback Stores Store Manager, Peter Russell.**

Outback Stores also promotes healthy food and drink choices through its nutrition policies in all stores. As a result, 406 tonnes of fruit and vegetables have been sold in communities over the past year, and 7 per cent fewer sticks of tobacco sold. And that was before it turned its attention to reducing sugar consumption recognising its links to obesity and diabetes.

“Last year there was 11.5 tonnes less sugar consumed across 36 communities using tools such as price, promotion, placement, product portions and education,” Health and Nutrition Manager, Jen Savenake, says.

To put that in perspective, that’s a truckload: literally. A semi-trailer load, to be precise.

Outback Stores has a strong commitment to employing local staff. There are 298 Indigenous staff currently employed in the community stores managed by the company, which is 79 per cent of all store staff.

And that commitment is backed by training and development. Close to 70 per cent of all permanent Indigenous employees are enrolled in accredited training, opening up their pathways to further employment and opportunities.



“We focus on employing local people and we aim to provide great career pathways whilst keeping money in the community. People are happy they can work and still be ‘on country’ with family,” Michael says.

Barunga store manager, Amelita John, is paving the way for aspiring Indigenous leaders to follow in her footsteps. Since 2015, Amelia has moved from operating the register to managing the store. With her outstanding work ethic, attitude and leadership she was encouraged to complete her Certificate II in retail operations.

The first Indigenous manager for Outback Stores, Amelita manages the Bagala store, which is an all Indigenous-run store with eight Indigenous staff, something the Barunga community and Outback Stores are both proud of.

Remote stores are often the hub of the community. Outback Stores is supporting store owners and community members to keep them operating well into the future, improving the health and prospects of Australia’s First Peoples and the communities they live in.

# CHAPTER 7

## SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

Co-designing solutions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people





From left, Bettina Danganbarr, a Yolngu woman and an Aboriginal Community Police Officer in the East Arnhem Land community of Galiwin'ku, and the Founder and Chair of Galiwin'ku Women's Space, a Yolngu-run organisation that proactively works towards the prevention of domestic and family violence. Bettina is pictured here, with Carol Miyarrwala, Melanie Garrawurra and Tanya Lakawuy.

**“Aboriginal people, whether they live on their traditional lands or not, have lived on this continent for thousands of years. We have the knowledge, resilience and strength of culture passed on to us that when called upon will see us through difficult times and emerge stronger. The issue for those working with us is acknowledging that it is only if we address our issues ourselves, our way, will they be solved. Nobody else can do it for us. This is what we mean by self-determination and we know that self-determination works.”**

CEO Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency,  
Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AM

## Introduction: Community safety a fundamental right

Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people, like all Australians, have the right to grow up and live their lives in a safe home and community.

The reality, however, is Indigenous Australians are significantly more likely to experience child abuse and neglect, family violence and other forms of violent crime and to be incarcerated than non-Indigenous Australians.

It is for this reason that ensuring communities are safe remains one of the Australian Government's three priority areas in Indigenous Affairs.

The key to improving community safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lies in addressing the entrenched disadvantage and underlying factors that drive violent and criminal behaviour and contribute to the overrepresentation of Indigenous people in the child protection and justice systems.

Although states and territories have constitutional responsibility for the justice and child protection systems, including policing, courts and prisons, the Australian Government has a role to play in supporting the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, investing in prevention and early intervention activities and ensuring Indigenous people have access to justice.

The Australian Government is working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to co-design and implement a range of early intervention and prevention initiatives to improve the safety and security of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

## Key points

- Addressing high rates of violence, including family violence, in Indigenous communities is a key to improving outcomes in other areas across the life course, including achievements in education, employment and health outcomes;
- A focus on safety in the early years and strengthening Indigenous families are critical to preventing Indigenous people from coming into contact with the child protection or justice systems in the first place;
- Reducing the high rates of Indigenous incarceration requires a focus on addressing the key drivers of violent and criminal behaviour, including exposure to childhood abuse and neglect, poor school attendance and performance, unemployment, and drug and alcohol abuse.

## What the data tells us

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly more likely than the wider community to be hospitalised as a consequence of family violence. In 2014-15, the hospitalisation rate for family violence-related assaults for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females was 32 times the rate for non-Indigenous females, and for Indigenous males the rate was 23 times the rate for non-Indigenous males (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision 2016b, p. 4.98).

In 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are almost 10 times more likely to be in Out Of Home Care than non-Indigenous children (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare 2017b).

In 2015-16, young Indigenous Australians aged 10-16 were 16 times as likely as non-Indigenous Australians to have contact with both the child protection system and youth justice supervision (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare 2017c).

As at 30 June 2017 there were 11,307 prisoners who identified as being Indigenous, representing 27 per cent of total prisoners (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017d).

- The Indigenous imprisonment rate was 13 times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians and has increased by 39 per cent since 2007.
- Nine in 10 (or 10,199) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners were male.
- Rates of reoffending are high with 76 per cent of Indigenous prisoners having previously been under sentence, compared to 49 per cent of non-Indigenous prisoners.

Analysis using 2016 data showed the majority (63 per cent) of Indigenous Australians who were in prison were incarcerated for violence-related offences and offences that caused harm.

Over the five-year period from 2011-12 to 2015-16, rates of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people under supervision fell (Australian Institute for Health and Welfare 2017d). This decrease was proportionally greater for non-Indigenous young people, which resulted in an increase in the level of Indigenous over-representation.

In 2015-16, Indigenous young people continued to be overrepresented in the youth justice system:

- young Indigenous people were 17 times as likely as non-Indigenous young people to be under supervision on an average day.
- Indigenous overrepresentation was higher for those in detention (25 times) than for those under community-based supervision (15 times).
- eight in 10 of young Indigenous people under supervision on an average day were male.

## Translating policy into action

### Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to reduce family violence

Violence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities robs Indigenous children of their futures, presents a barrier to women's economic participation, and has created an intergenerational cycle of violence that threatens to engulf communities.

The National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022 represents a commitment by the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to reduce violence against women and children.

In October 2016, the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, released the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children.

The Third Action Plan includes a \$25 million investment in frontline Indigenous organisations and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services to address family violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. The package is intended to deliver practical actions to prevent and reduce violence while also ensuring victims receive the support they need. Funding of \$19 million has been invested in eight Indigenous community organisations to deliver a range of services including:

- trauma-informed therapeutic services for Indigenous children affected by family violence to break the cycle of intergenerational violence;
- services for perpetrators to encourage behaviour change and prevent future offending; and
- intensive family-focused case management to address drivers and behaviours that lead to family violence.

Delivering on the Prime Minister's commitment to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when creating policy and programs, the Government embarked on an extensive co-design process to develop and deliver evidence-based and community-informed family violence interventions for Indigenous communities.

All Third Action Plan providers under the \$25 million investment for Indigenous organisation form an integral part of the co-design team. The Government harnessed the expertise of an Indigenous business, Inside Policy, to lead and manage the co-design process. Inside Policy, working with the Government and providers, have brought their insights, input and advice from their communities and their organisational experience into the design process.

### **Building community capacity**

In order to prevent family violence, it is critical to support communities to challenge the social norms, attitudes and behaviour in communities that support and enable violence to continue. The Australian Government is committed to assisting communities to challenge these views and support them to build capacity to find practical, place-based responses for tackling violence and abuse.

The Building Better Lives for Ourselves (BBLFO) program aims to empower and equip Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to address and halt the effects of intergenerational trauma and violence in their communities. Since April 2015 this project has delivered a series of trauma-informed consultations, "think tanks" and workshops to a network of approximately 150 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. BBLFO aims to tackle the factors underlying ongoing violence and abuse of women and children using three approaches: community-driven development to build community ownership; use of a trauma-based approach to leadership training; building confidence, responsibility and personal empowerment to develop women's leadership.

BBLFO has transformed the lives of the women who have participated in it and is expected to have positive flow-on benefits for their families and communities as these women apply their new-found skills and confidence to address issues of importance in each of their regions. This project is a great example of the powerful impact on communities of empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

In addition, the Government has invested in working with mainstream domestic violence organisations, White Ribbon and Our Watch, to adapt their tools and education material to better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to protect children**

The safety of Indigenous children is paramount and the Australian Government is committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children grow up in families where they are safe, healthy and able to get an education.

The increasing number of children in out-of-home care, the amount of time they spend in care, and continuing instability in placements is of great concern for all governments. This is particularly the case, given many of these children are also at greater risk of coming under youth justice supervision.

The Australian Government is working closely with all states and territories – which have responsibility for child protection systems – and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities to address the underlying factors that lead to higher rates of contact with the child protection system and better support families.

### **National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020**

The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020 reflects the long-term commitment of all governments and the non-government sector to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Australia's children. The safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remains a priority focus for all governments under the National Framework.

To help progress towards this, the Third Action Plan 2015-2018 has an explicit cross-cutting focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families aimed at ensuring the five domains of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Child Placement Principle (prevention, partnership, placement, participation and connection) are applied to the implementation of strategies and actions under the plan.

## Families

A key priority for the Australian Government is to ensure that Indigenous families are provided with better access to earlier support to prevent them entering the child protection system.

### **Intensive Family Support Service**

Responding to the *Growing them strong, together* report (the Bath Report) by the NT's Board of Inquiry into the Child Protection System in 2010, the Government established the Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) as part of a package of supports. Since the first IFSS services were established in 2011, the IFSS has expanded significantly and is now delivered by nine providers in 26 locations across the Northern Territory and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands of South Australia. Five of the funded services are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.

The IFSS is an evidence-based prevention and early intervention program that aims to reduce child neglect by working intensively with vulnerable families to improve parenting capability and in turn keep children safe, at home with their families, in their communities and out of the child protection system.

Key elements of IFSS are its community development approach, including engagement with local communities in establishing new sites and a strong focus on local workforce development. Subject to extensive consultations with local communities and the Northern Territory Government to determine community need and readiness, suitable non-government organisations were selected to provide intensive support to parents and caregivers of children where child neglect is a concern.

Although the IFSS is available to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, the proportion of Indigenous families participating in it is consistently greater than 85 per cent. To ensure the IFSS is delivered with cultural sensitivity and in a safe way, the program has maintained a strong emphasis on the employment and training of local Indigenous staff.

Since its inception, evaluations of the IFSS have shown decreases in overall child neglect for children in the area of physical care and emotional development followed by improvements to parental supervision in the provision of health care to the child. This also includes increases in school attendance, resulting in better communication and respect between parents, caregivers and their children.

From 1 July 2016 to 30 June 2017, of the 161 families participating in the IFSS, seven children were removed into out-of-home care and 54 families exited the program due to achieving the set goals. This compares to 18 families that exited the program due to achieving goals in the period 1 January 2016 to 30 June 2016.

## Family advocacy and support services

Under the Third Action Plan the Family Advocacy and Support Services (FASS) are designed to assist families moving between the state and federal court systems, complementing specialist services available in state and territory courts. Many families involved in family law matters have complex needs, and may be involved in matters across the family law, child protection and family violence systems. The FASS will prioritise clients who face additional barriers to accessing assistance, including Indigenous clients.

The Government has contracted an Indigenous-owned consultancy to evaluate the FASS nationally. The evaluation will consider the benefits of the service to clients and the courts and assess whether it has achieved its intended short-term outcomes. Early feedback from legal aid commissions is that the service is meeting a crucial need and that their lawyers' enhanced ability to intervene early and liaise with social workers is helping them to better identify clients' non-legal needs and support them to access other supports.

### **Legally-assisted and culturally-appropriate family dispute resolution in family relationship centres**

As part of the funding package to support the Third Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022, \$6.2 million was allocated towards piloting and evaluating enhanced models of legally-assisted and culturally-appropriate family dispute resolution (FDR) to vulnerable families, particularly Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) families. The enhanced FDR pilots commenced on 1 June 2017 and conclude on 30 June 2019. The pilots are being delivered by eight Family Relationship Centres at Tamworth and Bankstown in NSW, Sunshine and Broadmeadows in Victoria, Toowoomba and Upper Mt Gravatt in Queensland, and in Perth and Darwin.

The National Centre for Indigenous Studies at the Australian National University will evaluate the pilots to determine whether they provide a safe and successful alternative to court, with particular emphasis on whether they assist Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse families to better interact with the family law system.

### Indigenous incarceration rates

Factors such as poor education and low employment contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being overrepresented in the criminal justice system.

The Australian Government is investing in activities at the local level to tackle the underlying factors that lead to the high rates of offending and incarceration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Government is investing \$264 million across Australia in 2017–18 in activities aimed at improving community safety and justice outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

### Alcohol and other drug treatment services

Alcohol and other drug misuse is a key driver of violent offending behaviour and addressing such abuse is critical to reduce violence and incarceration rates in the Indigenous communities.

Through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, the Australian Government funds more than 80 organisations across the country to deliver Indigenous specific alcohol and other drug treatment services. Overall funding for alcohol and other drug treatment services under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy in 2017-18 is around \$70 million. This is in addition to alcohol and other drug services, including Indigenous-specific services, funded through the Health portfolio.

### Prisoner throughcare

The Australian Government is committed to helping reduce the high rates at which Indigenous Australians reoffending and break the cycle of recidivism by supporting prisoners with targeted, holistic and intensive support using a throughcare model to address their specific needs and circumstances. Throughcare is a unique service delivery approach that provides individual case management to support rehabilitation and address the underlying causes of offending behaviour, including unemployment, drug and alcohol abuse and poor community engagement.

The Government is investing in a co-design process to enhance the existing model of adult throughcare which will strengthen service delivery standards, improve workforce development and support robust data and evaluation strategies to test the impact the throughcare services have on people's lives. The Government is also investing in co-designing and trialling a specific model of throughcare for young people leaving detention, including those on remand, in recognition of a gap in intensive support services for young people leaving the youth justice system.



**Children at the Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre in Thomastown, Victoria learn traditional music. Bubup Wilam for Early Learning provides a range of strengths based services and programs, delivered in partnership with families, which are focused on closing the gap in school attendance, retention, academic and social/emotional achievements.**

### Custody Notification Services

Custody Notification Services (CNS) are a key way to provide holistic wellbeing support to people detained by police, including those in protective custody who are not being charged with an offence, in order to help end preventable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in custody. Although states and territories have arrangements in place to notify Aboriginal Legal Services when an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Australian is taken into police custody, there is no standard way this is applied and it is not a legislated requirement in most states.

To address this, the Australian Government has offered to work with state and territory governments to establish a more robust CNS model in every jurisdiction. The Government is offering to fund the initial three years of the CNS, contingent on each jurisdiction introducing legislation making use of the service mandatory and continuing to fund it into the future. The Government is working with interested states and territories to develop tailored CNS models that work within each jurisdiction.

## Law and justice

The Australian Government is committed to improving law and justice outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The Government is the primary funder of Indigenous legal services, while the majority of services are provided for state and territory criminal law matters. The Government's Indigenous Legal Assistance Programme funds Indigenous legal services to support access to justice for Indigenous Australians, ensuring they receive the help needed to assist them to overcome their legal problems and fully exercise their legal rights as Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) in each state and territory are funded through the ILAP.

Over the past 10 years, funding has been administered under different programs. The overall aim has remained constant for ATSILS: to deliver community-based, culturally appropriate legal assistance services at permanent sites, court circuits and outreach locations in urban, rural and remote areas.

## Policing

Although the states and territories are responsible for policing, the Commonwealth's investments in police infrastructure and improving policing in remote areas supplement state and territory efforts to keep these communities safe.

The Australian Government is continuing to support remote policing in the Northern Territory by enhancing the remote police presence, providing police infrastructure, and funding for specialist units tackling substance abuse, domestic violence and child abuse. In Wadeye all infrastructure works have now been completed, including construction of staff housing and a new and expanded police station, and work will continue to provide both Ngukurr and Maningrida with new police facilities for their communities. The Government is also continuing to support Community Engagement Police Officers in the Northern Territory to promote crime prevention and community engagement. In the Torres Strait, in Queensland, Australian Government funding is supporting the upgrading of five airstrips to improve police response times.

## Community night patrols

Community night patrols help keep communities safer by employing local people to serve their local communities through crisis and non-crisis support. Community night patrols operate in 81 communities in the Northern Territory, nine communities in South Australia and one in Western Australia. The Government funds 20 service providers through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy with total funding of \$28.5 million being provided in 2016-17.

Last year, alone, night patrollers provided more than 245,000 incidents of assistance to their local communities. Patrollers also ensure that children are at home or in another safe location at night with a parent or carer so they are well rested and able to go to school every day. As well as making communities safer community night patrols create jobs. In 2016-17, 93 per cent of the 390 patrollers and team leaders delivering services on the ground identified as Aboriginal.

## Online safety

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right – as do all Australians – to have safe positive experiences online.

The eSafety Commissioner is undertaking a number of key initiatives to enhance online safety for vulnerable groups. The Commissioner has recently begun working on a digital literacy and online safety training tool for people in remote Indigenous communities. This tool will support a digital tutoring program targeted at very remote communities. In addition, as a publicly available app it will be available for community members to download and use long after the training rollout has completed. This app will be tailored to the needs identified through targeted consultation. It is an innovative, new resource building on the work of the office in particular providing online safety guidance and support to vulnerable Australians.

This new Indigenous initiative builds on the Office's resource, Be Deadly Online (BDO). BDO is a series of videos, resources and discussion starters to empower communities with strategies to better manage and address the risks of cyberbullying, social networking and sexting. This resource was created in 2013 with the input and guidance of the Geraldton, Carnarvon and Yarrabah communities.



**Bunuba woman, June Oscar AO, started a five-year term as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner in the Australian Human Rights Commission in April 2017. Ms Oscar is the first Indigenous woman to be appointed to the position. She is pictured here from left, the then Attorney-General George Brandis, Minister for Indigenous Affairs Nigel Scullion, and the Minister for Indigenous Health, and Aged Care Ken Wyatt AM.**



**MacYouth staff, Phyllis Rowe, Cheryl Ragget and Eunice Jack, with two female Elders and four young women from Mt Liebig, Papunya and Haasts Bluff, at a camp at Ilpilli, 120km East of Kintore, aimed at engaging young women in traditional dance, cooking and storytelling to support them to reconnect with their land and culture.**

## SAFE AND STRONG COMMUNITIES

# OUTSTANDING LOCAL SOLUTIONS DELIVERING EXCITING OUTCOMES

### Lajamanu group taking leadership role in community safety

Senior residents in Lajamanu are actively working to encourage greater respect for Indigenous and non-Indigenous law and justice within the remote Northern Territory community.

From 2011, a governance officer funded by the Australian Government has helped to build up the capacity of the Lajamanu Kurdiji Group for leadership on community safety issues, including proactive conflict resolution, working with offenders and supporting mediation with the police.

The group has also been supported by other organisations, including the Central Land Council and the Northern Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA).

Lajamanu is a Warlpiri community located about 560 kilometres south-west of Katherine. In the local Warlpiri dialect, “kurdiji” means “to shield, block, protect or ward off”. The Lajamanu Kurdiji group is comprised of both men and women from the town.

The Lajamanu Kurdiji group is heavily engaged with the court system, and works closely with NAAJA’s Community Legal Education



Lajamanu Kurdiji Group members, from left, Peter Jigili, Lamun Tasman, Joe Marshall and, right back, Anthony Johnson.

team to provide feedback and recommendations about offenders to judges. In June 2017, for the first time, select members of the group sat with a judge during court proceedings, including sentencing.

Judge Elisabeth Armitage says the local Elders play an important role in helping the judges, the prosecution and defence lawyers understand the circumstances of people before the court.

Judge Armitage has thanked Kurdiji members for being involved in court proceedings.

“It’s a highlight and privilege to have Kurdiji members involved,” she says.

The group also plays a role supporting offender remediation, often in conjunction with the police. When local youths broke into a community store, the Kurdiji group held a community meeting with the offenders to show them the harm they had caused and behaviour expected of them in the future. The youths apologised for their actions and undertook to uphold a higher standard of conduct.



Prisoner Throughcare officers Sterling Wedel, left, and Trevor Prior.

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## Throughcare helping to reduce Indigenous incarceration

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The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (ATSILS) is helping to turn around the lives of many Indigenous prisoners in Queensland.

By supporting Indigenous prisoners (and their families) to make decisions that reduce the likelihood of them reoffending, ATSILS Queensland is reducing recidivism and incarceration rates.

The legal service's Throughcare program delivers intensive high-quality case management services focused targeted prisoners considered to be of a high risk of re-offending. Support is provided both before and after the prisoners are released from jail.

Where possible, ATSILS Queensland works collaboratively with correctional facility staff and other stakeholders to deliver its Throughcare services.

The legal service has helped to turn around the lives of many Indigenous prisoners – including a client aged in his late forties who suffers an alcohol addiction.

This particular client participated in the Throughcare program for some 15 months following his release. During that time, he established himself in a stable rental unit – his first ever home of his own – refrained from drinking alcohol, and started to mend his relationship with his long-term partner. He reported as required to Probation and Parole and slowly but surely started to sort himself out.

When his Throughcare file was closed, there was justifiable confidence he would continue to progress. However, in late 2016 during a visit to his home community, he was again drawn into negative drinking patterns with some of his friends and family, resulting in him being charged with a drink-driving offence.

The man immediately contacted his former Throughcare officer at ATSILS Queensland who advised him to get a lawyer, and provided him

with a letter of support from ATSILS Queensland. The letter, presented at his court appearance, argued that it would be disastrous for the man to return to prison after the progress he had made, and offered to readmit him into the Throughcare program.

The letter of support persuaded the court to release the man on probation. The man's initial reaction was one of shock that he had not been returned to prison.

"In the past that's always what happened," he said.

The client pointed to the support he had received from Throughcare, and the trust, he had in the program that prompted him to ask for help.

Seven months later, the man still enjoys his liberty. While he continues to struggle with his drinking every day, he has not given up. And even better, he now has some confidence the "system" can work in his favour.

If it hadn't been for Throughcare, the man would have been likely to re-offend, to fail to appear at court or to seek legal advice, and may have ended up back in prison.

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