
NSW Closing the Gap Annual Report 2023–2024



In partnership with



NSW CAPO
Coalition of Aboriginal
Peak Organisations

Cover artwork

The cover artwork was designed for the *2022–2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap*. It represents connection to the land of NSW, from the red dirt and mountain ranges to the water.

The bottom part of the artwork symbolises the ocean that NSW is connected to, and its link to Saltwater people.

The rivers and creeks are symbolised throughout the artwork, with symbols along the waterways representing Freshwater people, who regularly gathered along the banks.

NSW is known for its many distinctive mountain ranges and escarpments, which are illustrated in the artwork – from mountain ranges close to the ocean to the inland mountain ranges, which include bushland and rainforests.

The orange and brown areas symbolise the colours of the land elsewhere in NSW.

Animal tracks are included throughout the artwork, representing the wildlife that live and wander throughout NSW, including kangaroo, goanna and emu tracks. These animals are very significant to Aboriginal people.

The centrepiece is the gathering of Aboriginal people and government, working together in Closing the Gap.

About the artist

The artist, Lani Balzan, is a proud Aboriginal woman from the Wiradjuri people of the three-river tribe. One of her biggest goals and inspirations in creating her artwork is to develop a better connection to her culture and to continue to work towards reconciliation – bringing people and communities together to learn about the amazing culture we have here in Australia.

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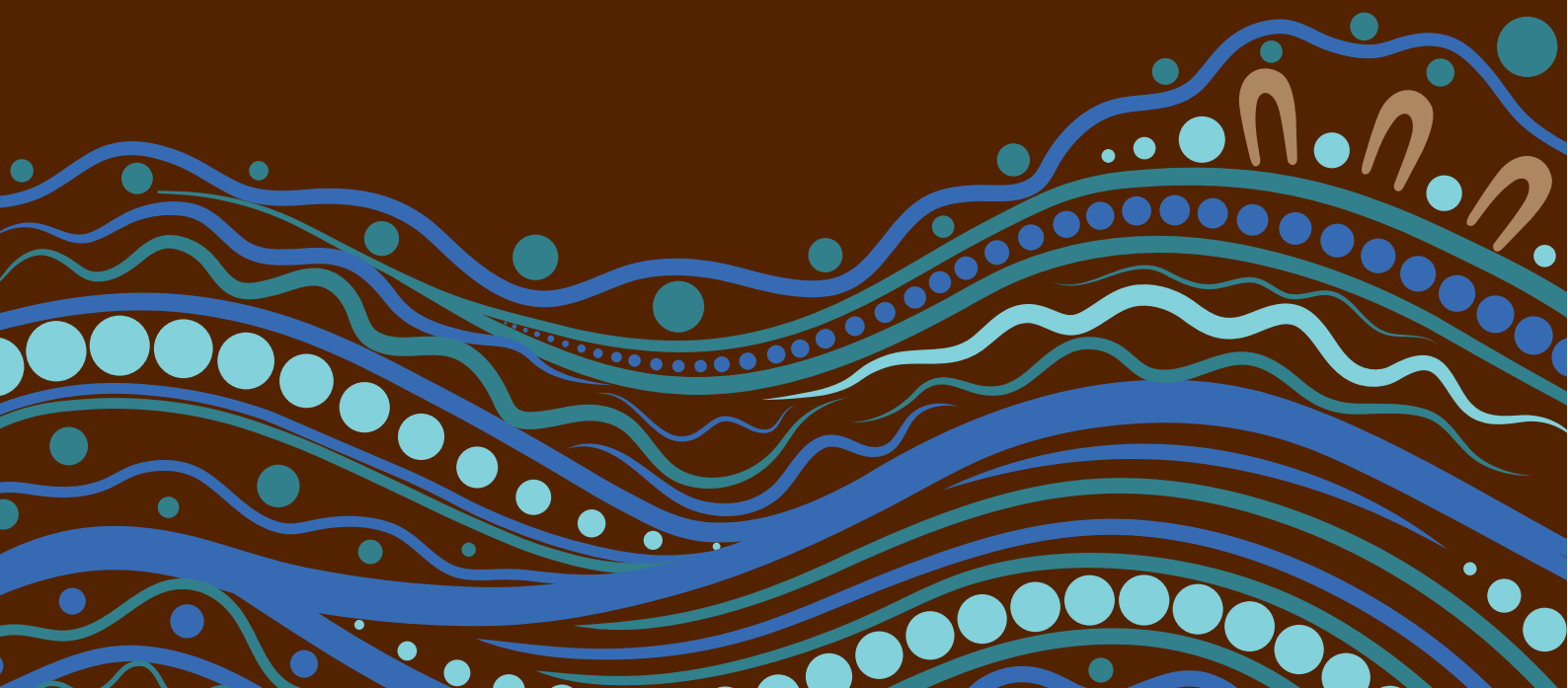
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Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations and the NSW Government acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we work and upon which this report was prepared.

We would like to acknowledge our Elders, past and present, and the contributions they have made to their communities.

We recognise and celebrate the profound cultural and spiritual relationship that Aboriginal people have with the land, seas, waterways and skies of this state.



Premier's statement

As we present the NSW Closing the Gap Annual Report 2023–24, I want to reaffirm the NSW Government's unwavering commitment to working collaboratively with the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) to achieve transformative outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

This year marks the fourth year of implementing the National Agreement in NSW – part of a 10-year journey that is not just a commitment but a moral obligation to improve the life outcomes of Aboriginal people across our state. We recognise that genuine change requires genuine partnership and shared decision-making, and we are dedicated to fostering an environment that empowers Aboriginal voices in the design and delivery of programs that matter most to them.

Throughout the past year, we have made significant strides in our partnership with NSW CAPO, evidenced by the signing of the NSW Partnership Agreement between state and local government and NSW CAPO on 12 February 2024. This agreement is a testament to our commitment to prioritise the initiatives aligned with the Priority Reforms, ensuring that our efforts are tailored to the unique context of NSW. It is crucial that we not only focus on immediate impacts but also ensure long-term systemic change. By placing the Priority Reforms at the heart of our initiatives, we are taking an integrated approach that spans healthcare, education, culture and justice, reaffirming our belief that every aspect of life is interconnected.

However, we acknowledge that there is still much work to be done. The recent review by the Productivity Commission has highlighted areas where we must increase accountability and ensure that our strategies are effectively implemented. We take these findings seriously and will integrate them into our future planning and reporting. In 2024–25, we will introduce a new governance model that streamlines our approach and enhances our ability to deliver on our commitments.

We must hold ourselves accountable, continuously engage in meaningful consultations, and remain steadfast in our commitment to achieving equitable outcomes. The 2023–24 Closing the Gap Annual Report demonstrates not only the progress we have made but also the path forward. Let us continue to work toward a future where Aboriginal people in NSW can thrive and realise their full potential.



The Hon Chris Minns MP
Premier of New South Wales

Minister's statement

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, I am proud to share the NSW Closing the Gap Annual Report 2023–24. This year marks a pivotal moment in our journey towards Closing the Gap in NSW, as we continue to forge a strong partnership between NSW CAPO and the NSW Government.

Together, we are not merely ticking boxes; we are dedicated to fostering meaningful change that resonates throughout Aboriginal communities. The progress we have achieved so far is a testament to the power of genuine collaboration, consultation and respect for the aspirations of Aboriginal peoples.

This annual report serves as an essential tool for accountability, offering a transparent overview of our collective efforts under the National Agreement. We recognise that while significant strides have been made, there are still crucial areas requiring our attention and commitment. As we delve into this report, we celebrate our successes, acknowledge the gaps that remain, and renew our resolve to work hand-in-hand with Aboriginal communities to implement transformative initiatives.

Looking ahead, we are excited to introduce a new governance structure that will enhance our accountability and drive integrated strategies across the NSW Government. The Productivity Commission's recent review reinforces the vital importance of these reforms and the need for robust reporting mechanisms. Together, we will continue to evolve our approach, fostering a culture of shared responsibility that will ultimately lead to a brighter future for Aboriginal peoples in NSW. Our commitment is unwavering, and we are resolute in our mission to close the gap.



The Hon David Harris MP
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty

NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations Co-Chairs' statement

The NSW Closing the Gap Annual Report 2023–24 plays a vital role in ensuring accountability and transparency towards the commitments made under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the NSW Implementation Plan. This third annual report allows us the opportunity to reflect on progress and build on strengthening accountability to drive meaningful change.

While there have been significant achievements over the past year, the 2024 Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap highlights that progress remains inconsistent and gradual. It reinforces the need for greater transparency, stronger alignment with community priorities, and sustained investment in capacity-building.

NSW CAPO acknowledges that more must be done to ensure Closing the Gap in NSW creates a better future for Aboriginal people and remains committed to ensuring transparency. In future Annual Reports we will consider the findings of the Productivity Commission Review, including the need to clearly articulate the concrete steps being taken to strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision-making with communities.

Achieving lasting change requires governments to shift power to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, embed the Priority Reforms, and support genuine shared decision-making. Communities across NSW have demonstrated strength and expertise, but more must be done to transform how we work and drive lasting progress. Meaningful change requires collective action and shared responsibility. We remain committed to strong partnerships that drive lasting impact.

NSW CAPO has worked closely with the NSW Government under the NSW Partnership on Closing the Gap to improve reporting and accountability on progress made towards the commitments under the National Agreement. Some vital steps that have been made to contribute to these improvements include the refreshed governance arrangements, which introduce Sector Committees that will serve as key decision makers through a 2-tiered model to enhance shared decision-making and provide sector-specific expertise and advice to the NSW Joint Council.

This annual report provides data to track progress; but this alone cannot capture the full impact of efforts on the ground. Real change is measured through meaningful improvements in the daily lives of our communities. NSW CAPO remains committed to holding governments accountable, advocating for community priorities, and working towards a future where Closing the Gap is not just a policy goal – but a lived reality.



**Councillor Charles Lynch and John Leha
NSW CAPO Co-Chairs**

Local Government NSW's statement

Local government is committed to the principles of equity, rights, access and participation, and recognises the unique place of Aboriginal people in NSW and the right of Aboriginal people to be involved in all decisions affecting Aboriginal communities. As the peak body for councils in our state, the Local Government NSW (LGNSW) Policy Platform sets out these principles and we are committed to supporting councils in delivering on them.

LGNSW is proud of our role supporting councils to understand and align with the goals and aims of Closing the Gap. We have seen a strengthening of relationships between LGNSW, NSW CAPO and the NSW Government with the signing of the NSW Partnership Agreement in February 2024. As new partners in the NSW Partnership Agreement, our involvement in the Closing the Gap Transformation Sector Committee is key to fulfilling our commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

We are grateful to the NSW Government for funding the ongoing work to develop the Closing the Gap toolkit for local government. This initiative is bringing the partnership to life and creating a resource that will help councils identify, showcase and build on their contribution to Closing the Gap.

I am excited that councils will be further engaging in Closing the Gap and that our work – alongside that of Aboriginal people and communities, and other spheres of government – is being recognised as pivotal in this task.



Councillor Phyllis Miller OAM
President, Local Government NSW



Executive summary

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Executive summary

The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the NSW Government are dedicated to the 10-year journey of Closing the Gap, focusing on reform at all levels of government. We are working together to engage with the community to create meaningful change. The reporting period, 2023–24, was the fourth year of implementing the National Agreement in NSW. We are focused on creating immediate impacts in the community as well as working towards the long-term changes required. We are committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal people to realise their aspirations and improve life outcomes.

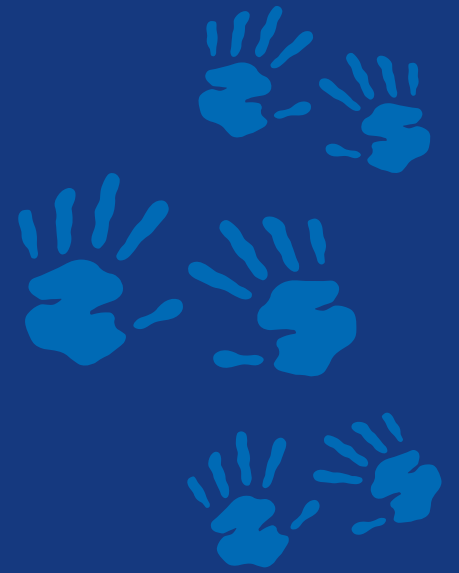
This 2023–24 Annual Report has been jointly developed by the NSW Government and NSW CAPO. The report meets the requirement of the National Agreement (Clause 118) to publicly and transparently report progress, demonstrating how Closing the Gap efforts have contributed toward Priority Reform implementation and alignment with the principles for action.

This report reviews the progress made in NSW in 2023–24, notes outcomes achieved, acknowledges where more work is needed, and tracks progress on commitments from the *2022–2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap*.

This report includes details of how Aboriginal people were actively involved in meaningful consultations led by NSW CAPO and how we continued to embed shared decision-making into the design and delivery of policy and programs across all parts of the National Agreement.

In addition to these positive examples, there remain areas where more needs to be done to embed partnership and shared decision-making. By working together, we can achieve more with Aboriginal people and communities.

We note that the full report of the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap was released in February 2024, and that more needs to be done to progress implementation of the Priority Reforms, including increasing accountability. The Productivity Commission report will continue to be considered in future NSW annual reports to ensure alignment with recommendations regarding reporting.



How we work in NSW

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How we work in NSW

Working in partnership

The NSW Government has been working in partnership with NSW CAPO to deliver initiatives under the *2022–2024 NSW Implementation Plan* to achieve targets for the Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes areas.

NSW CAPO is a member of the national Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks) and comprises the below member organisations:

- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW
- Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT)
- BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation
- First Peoples Disability Network Australia
- Link-Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation
- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)
- NSW Aboriginal Land Council
- AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
- NSW Aboriginal Culture, Heritage and Arts Association
- The Aboriginal Community Housing Industry Association (ACHIA).

One of the significant achievements of 2023–24 occurred on 12 February 2024, when the NSW Partnership Agreement was signed between the NSW Government, NSW CAPO and Local Government NSW (LGNSW). The NSW Agreement reflects and builds on the National Partnership Agreement by adding further definition and accuracy tailored to the NSW context and provides specific guidance on what partnership looks like in NSW.

The NSW Partnership Agreement places the Priority Reforms at the centre of Closing the Gap work in NSW.

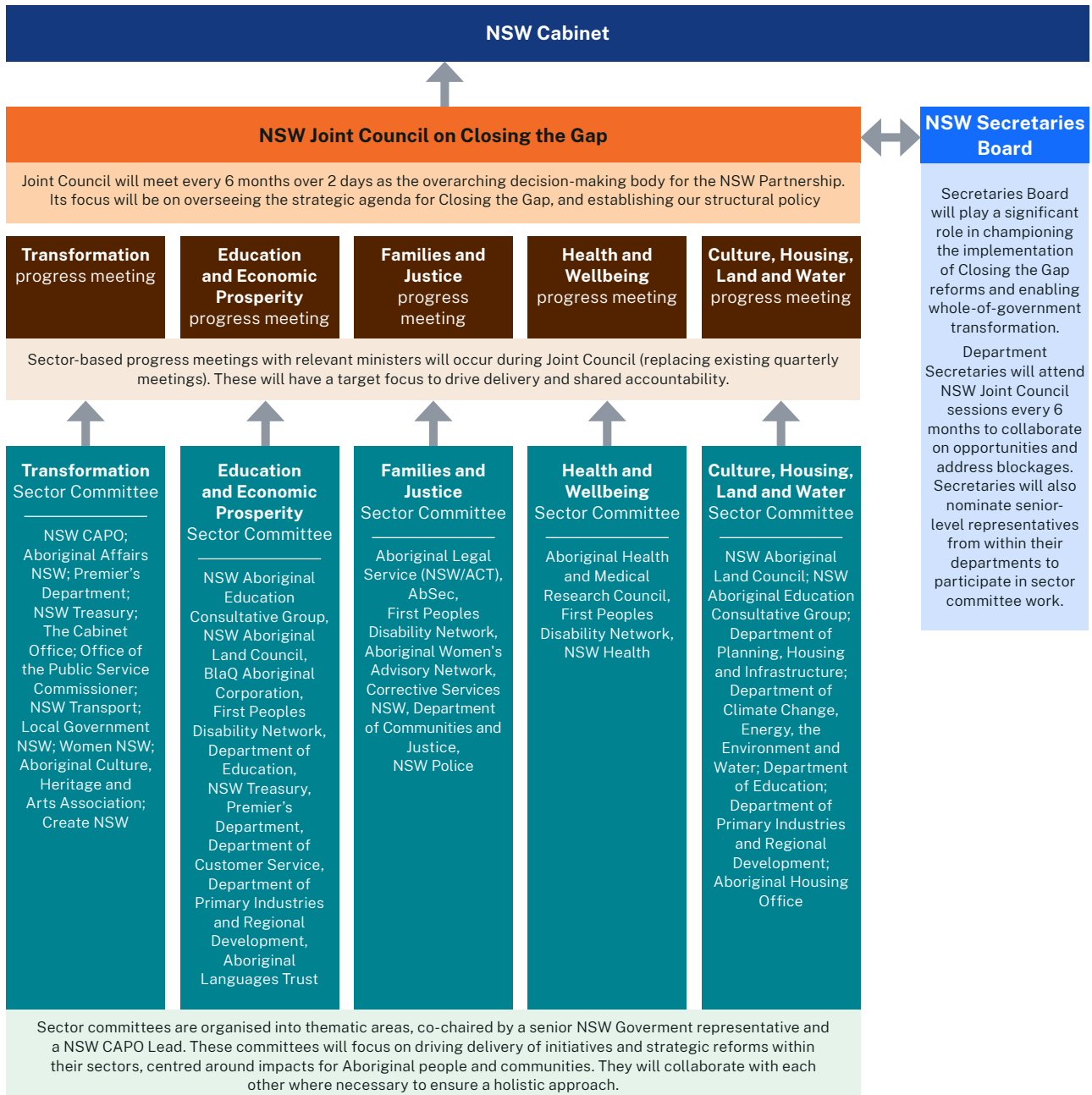
Giving priority to the initiatives that are in line with these reforms will drive systemic change that touches every aspect of our communities' socio-economic wellbeing. From healthcare to education, housing to justice, the implementation of the Priority Reforms will serve as a structure for holistic improvement across all indicators.

New ways of working together – looking ahead with revised governance arrangements

The Productivity Commission's *Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Study report* also highlighted the importance of senior leadership groups driving accountability and ensuring integrated strategic approaches to embedding whole-of-government change.

NSW CAPO and the NSW Government have worked in partnership over the last year to refine the future strategic direction of Closing the Gap in NSW. In 2024–25, the NSW Closing the Gap partnership will embed a new governance structure to support ambitious and effective delivery. This responds to the findings of the NSW Partnership Health Check (2022), the Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement (2024) and the evolving needs of the NSW Closing the Gap program.

The new NSW Partnership governance model (pictured below) reflects how the NSW Partnership embeds a shared decision-making approach between government and Aboriginal communities, and keeps the partnership connected and focused on delivering better outcomes in Aboriginal communities across all parts of NSW. The new governance structure will achieve this by streamlining shared decision-making through a 2-tiered model, establishing sector committees to drive strategic oversight and coordination of efforts within specific sectors, and strengthening the NSW Joint Council.



These changes are critical in achieving the NSW Partnership's commitment to improving reporting and accountability and will also amplify the existing mechanisms in place. Implementing these changes creates greater alignment, efficiency and effectiveness of reporting processes by:

- defining clear roles, expectations and responsibilities for all
- enhancing accountability and efficiency
- ensuring a higher level of risk management
- strengthening and aligning decision-making processes
- providing dedicated strategic and operational oversight
- improving communication and coordination
- ensuring more focused and effective meetings
- creating more streamlined reporting processes and strategic objectives.

The NSW Government, NSW CAPO and LGNSW are committed to building strong partnerships with Aboriginal communities in NSW. Our main aim is to ensure that everyone involved takes responsibility for their actions, which will lead to better outcomes for Aboriginal people in the state. A significant focus is on making sure that all parties are accountable for implementing the Priority Reforms, which aim to change how the government collaborates with Aboriginal communities.

A 10-year Strategic Planning Framework

The NSW Government and NSW CAPO recognise the importance of creating community-focused, evidence-based and sustainable strategies to effectively address the Closing the Gap initiative throughout the state. For meaningful change to happen within the government, it is essential to have a well-thought-out, interconnected and realistic approach that enhances the effectiveness of our efforts. To support this, the NSW Government introduced the Closing the Gap Strategic Planning Framework in 2020, which was developed with input from the community.

The Strategic Planning Framework will continue to steer initiatives in NSW throughout the duration of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It integrates the responsibilities associated with the National Agreement, ongoing projects, and future plans that relate to the transformative reform agenda aimed at Closing the Gap. This framework serves as a foundation for efforts related to Closing the Gap and improving outcomes for Aboriginal communities, including strategies for each Priority Reform, assessments of Aboriginal-specific programs, and policy prioritisation.

The Strategic Planning Framework complements the *Closing the Gap Change and Transformation Strategy*, as well as the First Nations Budget model from NSW Treasury. These combined strategies are crucial for fostering and establishing a new operational approach within the NSW Government, ensuring that there is long-term sustainability that extends beyond the National Agreement.

The Change and Transformation Strategy was implemented in September 2023 to ensure consistency in approach. The strategy takes an ambitious approach to working with community to set clear outcomes and the desired future state for the NSW Government by designing a robust change agenda to successfully transform government and realise the intent of the Priority Reforms.

These approaches are vital to establishing and embedding a new way of working within the NSW Government, providing sustainability into the future, beyond the National Agreement.



Implementation Plan progress

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Implementation Plan progress

Achievements in the 2022–24 Implementation Plan

The *2022–2024 NSW Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap* served as the main guiding document for the work of the NSW Government and NSW CAPO over the past 2 years, providing a clear structure for our vision and partnership approach.

The Implementation Plan outlined a new way of working that promoted shared decision-making and true collaboration with Aboriginal communities. It highlighted the importance of addressing the specific needs of different Aboriginal groups and ensuring that all initiatives are carried out in genuine partnership. The plan also incorporated and invested in the Priority Reforms, which aim to enhance focus on 17 Socio-Economic Outcome areas.

The Implementation Plan established 142 projects, developed in genuine collaboration with NSW CAPO and other Aboriginal groups and funded by a \$221 million commitment by the NSW Government. This funding provided support for 94 initiatives targeting the Socio-Economic Outcome areas, \$34.9 million for Community and Place Grants, \$9.5 million for improving access to government data, and \$1.7 million for creating an independent Aboriginal-led accountability mechanism.

These initiatives set the groundwork for our strategic direction and will inform the development and refinement of ambitious and transformative programs to be delivered under the 2025–2028 NSW Implementation Plan.

Productivity Commission Review

On 7 February 2024, the Productivity Commission released the first 3-yearly report on Closing the Gap. It highlighted the importance of the Closing the Gap Annual Report as an input for accountability, ensuring that every agency is making a substantive effort to implement the Priority Reforms and to track the outcomes it achieves for Aboriginal people.

The report identified 4 key requirements for annual reporting. Annual reports should address:

- how each of the Priority Reforms have been implemented in the agency
- how the agency has contributed to relevant Socio-Economic Outcomes
- how the agency tracks the outcomes it achieves for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- how the agency assessed the effectiveness of each of the above actions.

Accountability to our communities – in terms of achieving real change in Closing the Gap – is essential. That is why we have committed to enhancing our accountability mechanisms, such as the annual report, in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission.



The Priority Reforms

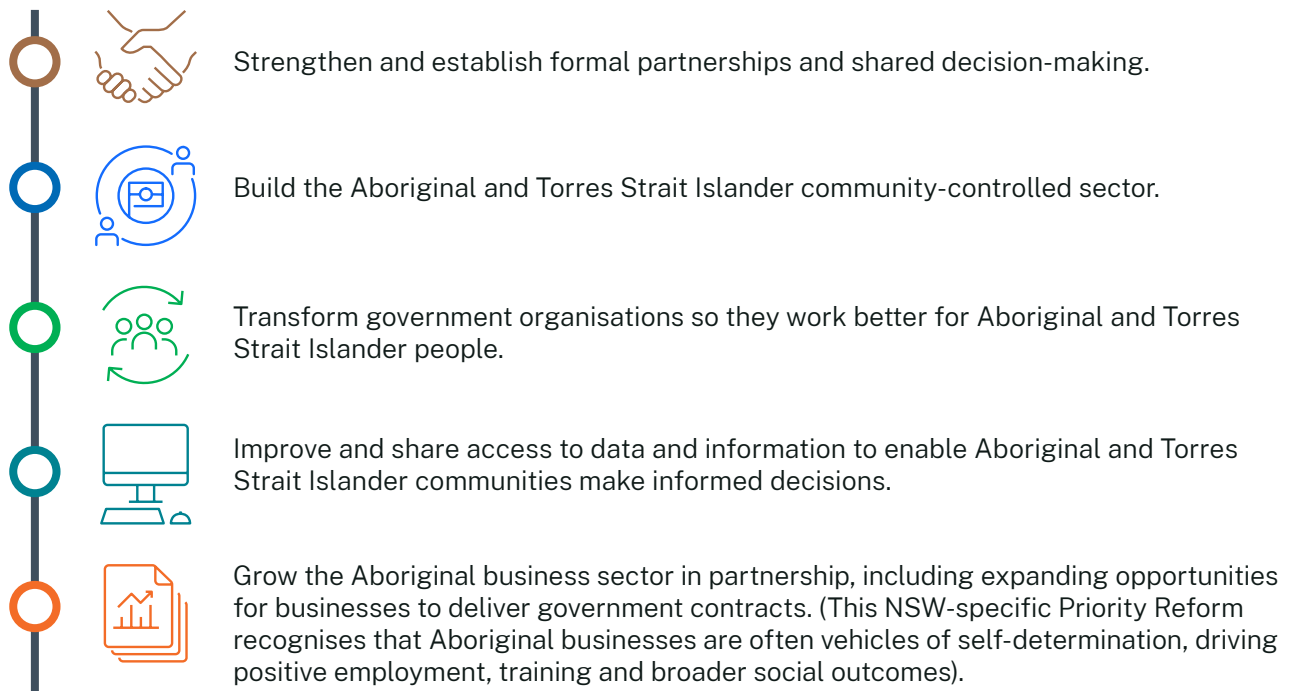
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The Priority Reforms

How we are embedding the Priority Reforms

The Priority Reforms (4 national and a fifth, NSW-specific reform) were informed through community consultations and are a central part of the National Agreement.

The Priority Reforms are:



Achieving these reforms will result in fundamental changes to how governments work with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, and function as the cornerstone for Closing the Gap work.

The aim of the reforms is to bring about systemic change to how the NSW Government interacts and engages with Aboriginal communities, people and organisations. This will enable the acceleration and solidification of progress made in the Socio-Economic Outcomes areas, such as health, education, justice and culture. Meaningful and lasting change comes only through partnership with Aboriginal people, transformation of government, strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, and allowing access to and control of necessary data.

While progress towards these outcomes will enhance quality of life for Aboriginal people, fully achieving them will ensure that these positive changes are sustainable, enabling Aboriginal communities to thrive long-term.

Progress on the targets

The Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcome areas are central to the National Agreement and will fundamentally change the way governments work with Aboriginal people and communities.

The 2022–2024 Implementation Plan included 48 initiatives related specifically to the Priority Reforms, including some that align with commitments under the National Agreement. The 48 initiatives were intended as immediate actions to enact the Priority Reforms; however, significant work remains to fully implement them.

For the past year, the Implementation Plan required quarterly update reports premised on promoting accountability and demonstrating the progress and maturing of the Closing the Gap program.

NSW continues to work in partnership with the Australian Government, other jurisdictions, and the Coalition of Peaks to develop indicators to measure data related to the Priority Reforms.

More streamlined reporting

Targets and outcomes have been grouped to reflect the need to develop actions holistically to advance the aspirations of Aboriginal people. This enables a more strategic and holistic oversight of progress through cross-collaboration, gathering the relevant expertise in each of the themes.

The Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic Outcomes have been categorised into the following themes:




- **Transformation:** Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3 and 4.
- **Health and Wellbeing:** Socio-Economic Outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 14
- **Education and Economic Prosperity:** Socio-Economic Outcomes 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 17, and Priority Reform 5
- **Culture, Housing, Land and Water:** Socio-Economic Outcomes 9, 15 and 16
- **Families and Justice:** Socio-Economic Outcomes 10, 11, 12 and 13

Each section includes the most recent data from the Productivity Commission to measure progress against the relevant target. We have included commentary to provide context and further information about progress, assessing whether the data has improved or worsened from the baseline (the data collected before the National Agreement was signed) and whether NSW is on track to achieve the target.

We have also included a progress update, as of July 2024, against initiatives committed to in the 2022–2024 Implementation Plan, including whether each initiative is completed, on track (under original timelines), in progress or still being planned.

Traffic light description

This report uses a traffic light system to indicate progress at a glance. The description of each traffic light indicator is shown below.

Light	Indication
 Green	Improvement/on track/in progress – the initiative is on schedule, has no significant issues, or has been completed.
 Amber	No progress/no change/delayed – a few milestones are slightly behind schedule and/or the initiative has some issues, but the team is confident that it can control the progress.
 Red	Worsening – the Socio-Economic Outcome may show worsening figures; be over budget, late, delayed in starting; or have unforeseen changes to the scope.

Performance summary

The performance data outlined below (current as of 31 July 2024) provides a snapshot of NSW's progress on the 17 Closing the Gap Socio-Economic Outcome areas. However, this summary data does not capture the breadth of activity contributing to Closing the Gap in NSW, nor those activities that have the most impact.

NSW performance summary	# targets ¹	% of targets
Target improving	10	52.6
No change from baseline	3	15.8
Target worsening	1	5.3
No assessment	5	26.3

Source: Productivity Commission Annual Data Compilation Report, 2024.

Transformation: Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3 and 4

Accountability for these Priority Reforms sits with Aboriginal Affairs NSW (Premier's Department).

Priority Reform	Progress	Light
Formal partnerships and shared decision-making	Delayed	 Amber
Building the Aboriginal community-controlled sector	Delayed	 Amber
Transforming government organisations	On track	 Green
Shared access to data and information at a regional level	On track	 Green

¹ Note: The total number of targets adds up to 19 as targets 9 and 15 each have 2 sub-targets. The Productivity Commission does not articulate state-level targets. To calculate the gap to target, this report makes the following assumptions:

- Where the target is to achieve a certain percentage – for example, 91% of babies born with a healthy birthweight – that same percentage target is used in the NSW context.
- Where a target is expressed as a percent increase or decrease – for example, a 15% reduction in incarceration – the target is calculated by applying the increase or decrease to the NSW baseline.

Priority Reform 1: Formal partnerships and shared decision-making



Outcome

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



Target

There will be formal partnership arrangements in place to support Closing the Gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments in each state and territory, enshrining agreed joint decision-making roles and responsibilities and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have chosen their own representatives.

The NSW Partnership Agreement

On 12 February 2024, the NSW Partnership Agreement was signed between the NSW Government, NSW CAPO and LGNSW. The NSW Agreement reflects and builds on the National Partnership Agreement by adding further definition and rigour tailored to the NSW context, and provides specific guidance on what partnership looks like in NSW.

The NSW Partnership Agreement was developed to provide the level of jurisdiction-specific detail lacking in the National Agreement. It acknowledges the landscape and dynamics specific to NSW and clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of all parties, and the nature and function of the partnership. The NSW Partnership Agreement emphasises the importance of an inclusive approach to the delivery of Closing the Gap commitments by ensuring full, informed and meaningful participation and representation of Aboriginal people, communities, organisations and businesses with interests in the Priority Reforms and Closing the Gap program.

The NSW Partnership Agreement

Builds on and complements the National Partnership Agreement

Provides definition and guidance around what working in partnership means on a practical level.

Sets clear expectations about the partnership principles of transparency, accountability, mutual respect and inclusivity.

Clearly articulates the roles and responsibilities of the parties.

Reiterates the importance of culturally responsible shared decision-making.

The NSW Partnership Agreement will be supported by a small number of addendums that provide guidance on specific operational topics. These will be developed separately and in close consultation with NSW CAPO and government departments. The addendums will provide guidance on the day-to-day function of the partnership and operationalise the Partnership Agreement in practice. In June 2024, 2 addendums (on shared decision-making and communication) were endorsed at the NSW Joint Council.

As the Closing the Gap program transitions its focus to delivery, the NSW Partnership Agreement builds on the strategic intent set out in the National Partnership Agreement and provides a focus on the operational level of partnership.

New governance structure

In 2024, the NSW Government undertook a refresh of Closing the Gap governance arrangements to streamline processes, focus on delivery, and enable a shift to embed the Priority Reforms across government.

The development of the proposed governance structure was a collaborative effort between NSW CAPO and the NSW Government, and responds to the findings of the Partnership Health Check, the Productivity Commission's Review of Closing the Gap and consultation with government and NSW CAPO stakeholders.

It includes moving from a 3-tier structure to a 2-tier structure, with enhanced shared accountability and responsibility with NSW CAPO and the NSW Government. It reorganises Socio-Economic Outcome and Priority Reform-related reporting and strategic oversight into themes by establishing sector committees.

The 2 tiers of the new governance structure are outlined below

NSW Joint Council:

The Joint Council will retain the same membership and chair responsibilities as well as its role as overarching decision-making body for the NSW Partnership. Its focus will be on overseeing the strategic agenda for Closing the Gap and establishing the structural policy direction.

Sector Committees:

The 5 committees are organised into thematic areas, co-chaired by a senior NSW Government representative and a NSW CAPO lead.

These committees will focus on driving the delivery of initiatives and strategic reforms within their sectors, centred around impacts for Aboriginal people and communities. They will collaborate with each other where necessary to ensure a holistic approach.

Shifting to sector-based groups allows for more efficient use of resources, focused discussion and decision-making, and greater flexibility and autonomy.

Officer-level working groups will not transfer to the new structure. The responsibility for overseeing and monitoring initiatives will be delegated by the relevant sector committees.

A key aspect of the new governance model is its emphasis on aligning all components of the reform program with the Priority Reforms. By leveraging existing ministerial progress meetings and other relevant forums, we will advance the Closing the Gap agenda across government in a more cohesive and integrated manner.

National place-based partnerships

As a party to the National Agreement, NSW has made a commitment to create a partnership focused on a specific location to make progress in addressing the disparities in a local community. The NSW Joint Council has approved Tamworth as the designated location for this partnership due to the enthusiastic interest shown by the Tamworth community, as well as the strong and effective leadership and regional governance that has been demonstrated. Efforts are currently being made to involve the Tamworth community in the process and to develop the operational framework for the place-based partnership.

NSW CAPO has been allocated \$9.8 million to establish the place-based partnership in Tamworth, as well as 3 additional partnership sites in NSW. This funding is part of ongoing work that aims to ensure that Aboriginal communities have access to partnership arrangements within their local community and can address policy issues that affect them.

Establishing the place-based partnership in Tamworth, along with the additional sites in NSW, is a significant step towards fulfilling the objectives set out in the National Agreement. By providing financial support and resources to these partnerships, we aim to empower local communities and address the specific challenges and needs that they face. This approach reflects a commitment to working closely with Aboriginal communities and addressing the issues that are most relevant to them.

NSW included the results of its Partnership Stocktake in its last annual report and will complete a partnership stocktake again next year. This year, the focus was on engaging LGNSW to develop a toolkit to support embedding partnerships at the local government level.

Case study: Partnership in NSW's approach to Priority Reform 4

In the 2022–23 Budget, the NSW Government and NSW CAPO together received \$18.8 million over 2 years to jointly deliver a reform program, as outlined in the *2022– 2024 NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*.

This initiative identified transformation needed in both government and community settings to improve access to government-held data and implement the principles of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance in line with commitments under the National Agreement and *NSW Government Data Strategy (2021)*.

NSW's joint approach to Priority Reform 4 highlights the value in taking a 'try, test, listen and learn' approach to support a partnership and dedicated system reform program of work. It also highlights the value of both government and community partners seeing joint reform work as an opportunity to learn from one another, and to create change along the way.

The government-based team has built on over a decade of policy thinking and work on sharing government-held data to consider what foundational barriers to sharing access to data particularly impact Aboriginal communities and organisations. This work has resulted in some more detailed reform proposals to take forward that could begin making tangible improvements in shared access to data by Aboriginal communities in the next 1 to 3 years.

NSW CAPO has facilitated a community-led approach to Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance that has enabled ground-truthing what these principles mean to Aboriginal communities in NSW in practice, the diversity of perspectives, and what community readiness could look like. This was essential given Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Governance has had a relatively recent introduction to the Australian context (in 2018 at the Indigenous Data Sovereignty Summit co-hosted by Maïam nayri Wingara).

It is important to understand that the Priority Reforms were adopted with the expectation that systemic changes would be needed to achieve them. Identifying a pathway to implement the commitments to Aboriginal communities in NSW will begin to build trust between government and Aboriginal communities around data. Importantly though, reform moves at the speed of trust; it takes time.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Establish new place-based partnerships	On track
Develop a funding approach and resources to support Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations' participation in partnerships	On track
Enhance how the NSW CAPO–NSW Government partnership on Closing the Gap operates	On track
Expand policy partnerships across all sectors	Delayed
Align partnerships with the National Agreement and community expectations	Delayed
Reform accountability and transparency measures in partnerships to ensure they are culturally appropriate	Delayed
Develop an overarching framework to coordinate all partnerships in NSW	Not started

Priority Reform 2: Building the Aboriginal community-controlled sector



Outcome

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



Target

Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Priority Reform 2 focuses on the enhancement of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, with the aim of providing sustainable and high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal people throughout the country.

This reform emphasises the importance of increasing the services offered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOS), as these organisations have proven to deliver better outcomes and are often the preferred choice for Aboriginal people when compared to mainstream service providers.

During the community consultations led by NSW CAPO in March 2022, numerous obstacles hindering ACCOs from expanding their service delivery were identified. These obstacles include challenging procurement processes, burdensome monitoring and reporting requirements, the necessity for longer-term funding contracts, and the need for assistance in staff recruitment and retention. Recognising the significance of the ACCO sector in driving positive change in the lives of Aboriginal people, NSW is dedicated to addressing these systemic issues and strengthening the ACCO sector.

To address these challenges and opportunities for increasing service delivery through ACCOs, a dedicated project team has been established under Priority Reform 2. This team will conduct a comprehensive study to gain a deeper understanding of the obstacles faced by ACCOs and to identify potential avenues for expanding service delivery through these organisations. By focusing on these initiatives, NSW aims to empower ACCOs and enable them to play a pivotal role in improving the lives of Aboriginal people.

Virtual Joint Fund and Sector Strengthening

The NSW contribution to Sector Strengthening and the delivery of the Virtual Joint Fund is \$7.4 million over 4 years from 2020–21 to 2025. These funds enable the delivery of capacity building and specific activities noted in Sector Strengthening Plans. The NSW Joint Council will continue to have oversight, and ACCOs will provide quarterly updates on their projects. Four sectors were identified in the first iteration of funding: early childhood care and development, housing, health and disability.

Sector Strengthening Plans that include actions were also developed to support the community-controlled sector covering 4 elements: workforce, capital infrastructure, service provision and governance.

NSW and national Aboriginal Community Controlled Peak Organisations, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council, SNAICC and First Peoples Disability Network were funded in 2023 to deliver this work. Each is delivering against a range of actions centred on building strong community-controlled sectors and joined-up delivery against all sector elements, including building capacity and developing consistent funding models.

Forward evaluation

The primary objective of assessing Aboriginal-specific programs is to determine the effectiveness of our current strategies and resources in achieving positive outcomes for the Aboriginal population. To do this, NSW has developed a Forward Evaluation Schedule. Through the evaluation of relevant initiatives, we can identify whether the current approach of the NSW Government is effectively meeting the needs of Aboriginal communities, as well as pinpoint areas that require improvement to enhance outcomes for Aboriginal people.

In late 2022 and early 2023, work commenced on guidelines to identify the scope of this work, including Aboriginal-targeted initiatives and core business. The guidance for this was endorsed by the NSW Joint Council and will require all Aboriginal initiatives to be evaluated in a culturally appropriate way by 2031.

As a result, the guidelines have been updated to clarify that all Aboriginal-specific initiatives are and should be within scope regardless of core business, unless they have limited, non-recurring funding or are a payment for a discrete one-off service or goods.

The 2022–2024 Implementation Plan emphasises the importance of evaluating Aboriginal-specific initiatives to support the implementation of prioritisation policies aimed at improving program design. By ensuring that efforts and investments are yielding meaningful results, and by allocating resources to ACCOs with the necessary expertise, we can drive better outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW.

The 2021 *Interim Indigenous Expenditure Report* from NSW Treasury revealed that a significant portion of Aboriginal-specific initiatives had not undergone evaluation, despite substantial investment of over \$1.1 billion in 2021–22. By increasing the evaluation of government investments in Aboriginal communities, we can ensure that initiatives are delivering the best possible outcomes and maximising the return on investment for Aboriginal people.

Community and Place Grants funding

The Community and Place Grants Funding is an initiative targeted at providing support to one-off projects that have been developed by local Aboriginal communities, to promote growth and transformation in alignment with the National Agreement.

In the first round of grants, \$19.2 million was distributed during the 2022–23 financial year, with 136 applications approved. The second round saw \$15.7 million distributed during the 2023–24 financial year, with 77 applications approved (2 of which were later withdrawn).

There is more work needed to improve how grants are managed, approved and distributed to applicants.

The NSW Government and NSW CAPO will work together to progress this work and determine new and improved ways for this funding to be administered for future rounds.

Prioritisation policy

NSW has committed to scoping policy options to prioritise funding to ACCOs. This work is underway in close engagement with relevant stakeholders. In practice, this may mean ensuring services provided to Aboriginal communities are provided by an ACCO. Sector strengthening work will occur at the same time, to ensure the ACCO sector can increase service delivery and meet the required outcomes.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Regularly report on proportion of services delivered through ACCOs	Complete
Deliver Community and Place Grant funding	On track
Establish an Aboriginal-led commissioning model	On track
Aboriginal community sector support package project	Delayed
Reform the funding arrangements for ACCOs	Delayed
Increase accessibility of grant opportunities and appropriateness of reporting processes	Delayed
Prioritise ACCOs in service delivery to Aboriginal communities	Delayed
Improve capability and retention through improved training and support for ACCO employees	Delayed
Build on current ACCO strengths and opportunities to ensure strong organisational processes	Delayed
Support ACCO partnerships at local and regional levels	Delayed
Improve recruitment by supporting students to work in the ACCO sector	Delayed

Priority Reform 3: Transforming government organisations



Outcome

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



Target

Decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have experiences of racism.

Priority Reform 3 focuses on reshaping the operations of governments to enhance responsiveness and better cater to the requirements of Aboriginal communities. The National Agreement outlines 6 key components that need to be tackled in order to bring about this significant shift:

- addressing racism
- integrating cultural safety
- providing services in collaboration
- enhancing transparency and accountability in funding
- supporting the empowerment of Aboriginal communities
- boosting engagement with Aboriginal individuals.

It is evident that there is still much work to be done across all these aspects to fully integrate Priority Reform 3, drive transformative progress, and ultimately eradicate racism in NSW. NSW remains dedicated to delivering services – which are founded on strengths and are culturally appropriate – to effectively address the needs of Aboriginal populations. By prioritising these elements, NSW aims to create a more inclusive and supportive environment for Aboriginal communities.

By actively engaging with Aboriginal people, increasing transparency in funding allocation and fostering cultural safety, NSW is taking crucial steps towards achieving the goals outlined in Priority Reform 3. Through ongoing commitment and collaboration, we can work towards a future where Aboriginal individuals are provided with the necessary support and resources to thrive. It is imperative to continue striving for progress in all 6 areas to bring about lasting positive change and ensure the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities in NSW.

Change and Transformation Strategy

The *Closing the Gap Change and Transformation Strategy* outlines an approach to embedding the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms across NSW Government, from defining the future state and gap analysis to change plan implementation. The high-level strategy, developed in 2023, is being implemented by a newly established working group comprising relevant government and NSW CAPO organisations.

The working group is responsible for overseeing and implementing the strategy, and unpacking the current state of the sector and operating environment to understand what needs to change. The working group is centred around principles including greater knowledge sharing, a broader perspective, collaborative outcomes and all voices being valued.

The working group has spent time defining:

- the enablers and barriers to embedding all Priority Reforms
- the different components of the Change and Transformation Strategy
- the outcomes and outputs that are needed to achieve the goals of the strategy
- best practice regarding engagement with community and across government.

People Matter Employee Survey results

The annual NSW People Matter Employee Survey (PMES) asks NSW Government employees about their experiences and perceptions in relation to a range of workplace issues and practices, including management and leadership, service delivery, employee engagement, diversity and inclusion, public sector values and unacceptable conduct.

In 2023, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents' engagement score remained stable at 65 and continued to be slightly higher than the overall sector score of 64.5. Job satisfaction increased by 1 pp to 69%, which was 1 pp higher than the sector score. However, compared to the sector, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents had less favourable scores for wellbeing, burnout, and inclusion and diversity.

The survey found that 70% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents reported accessing flexible working arrangements. The most-accessed flexible working arrangements were flexible start and finish times (44%) and working from home (37%).

There was significant variation in results relating to negative workplace experiences, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents more likely to report experiencing negative workplace behaviour including experiences of bullying, racism and discrimination.

The negative workplace behaviour results are displayed in the table below:

Negative workplace behaviour	2023 score for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents	Difference from 2022 score for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survey respondents	Difference from sector score
Experienced bullying	19%	-1 pp	+6 pp
Experienced sexual harassment	7%	0	+2 pp
Experienced threats or physical harm	13%	+2 pp	+3 pp
Experienced discrimination	20%	0	+10 pp
Experienced racism	17%	+1 pp	+12 pp

Independent Accountability Mechanism

A key focus under Priority Reform 3 is the development of the Independent Accountability Mechanism. Options for what this mechanism could look like are being developed in partnership with NSW CAPO.

The NSW CAPO project team developed initial draft options for the features, functions, tools and structures of the mechanism. These options were informed by research and consultation input from Phase 1 engagements across government and Aboriginal communities (including a forum with community).

A draft summary report of community feedback in Phase 1 was completed and circulated to government for written feedback ahead of the NSW CAPO leads' workshop to finalise the draft options to be proposed.

In 2024, the draft options and draft report were shared for formal engagement with Closing the Gap stakeholders.

Strengthening community engagement

Community engagement led by NSW CAPO has highlighted consultation fatigue as a major issue within Aboriginal communities. In response to this, the NSW Partnership has created a set of guidelines for government agencies to follow when interacting with Aboriginal communities. These guidelines are designed to guarantee that requests for the input and knowledge of Aboriginal communities are made in a respectful manner, and that communities are kept informed about the purpose and use of the information provided.

The development of these guidelines is crucial in ensuring that Aboriginal communities are not overburdened with constant requests for their time and expertise. By establishing clear protocols for engagement, government agencies can build trust and foster positive relationships with Aboriginal communities. This approach will help alleviate consultation fatigue and create a more inclusive and transparent process for all parties involved.

Ultimately, the goal of these guidelines is to promote meaningful and productive interactions between government agencies and Aboriginal communities. By respecting the time and expertise of community members, agencies can work towards building stronger partnerships and achieving more effective outcomes. It is essential that all parties involved in the consultation process adhere to these guidelines to ensure that engagement is conducted in a culturally sensitive and respectful manner.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Enhance the cultural safety of recruitment processes	Completed
Design an independent Aboriginal-led accountability mechanism to monitor government accountability	On track
Develop and implement guidelines to support work in partnership with Aboriginal people	On track
Government organisations are well coordinated in their engagement with Aboriginal communities	On track
Strengthen the Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) to increase Aboriginal employment in the public service	On track
Embed Aboriginal perspectives into program evaluation and report to communities on funding for and the impact of programs for Aboriginal communities	On track
Reform government budget processes to better capture the perspectives of Aboriginal communities on where funding should be directed	On track
Incorporate Aboriginal perspectives and involve Aboriginal stakeholders in assessing outcomes achieved through government funding	On track
Government organisations and services are coordinated effectively to ensure that Aboriginal communities are centred in policy and program decisions	On track
Address structural racism in government organisations and services, and work towards culturally safe service delivery	On track
Improving cultural capability training and standards in government (known as Everyone's Business trauma-informed training on the Stolen Generations)	On track
Implement a zero-tolerance approach to racism	Delayed
Cultural audits and complaints	Delayed
Improve complaints and feedback mechanisms	Delayed

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



Outcome

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



Target

Increase the number of regional data projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap and their development.

Three key action areas have been committed to in the 2022–2024 Implementation Plan for this Priority Reform:

1. Aboriginal communities have access to government data and insights in formats that enable local decision-making and shared decision-making with government.
2. An Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Indigenous Data Governance model increases Aboriginal communities' sovereignty over data about Aboriginal people.
3. Community data projects and capacity building enable Aboriginal analysis of data.

In NSW, Priority Reform 4 commits to ensuring Aboriginal people have shared access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information. The *NSW Government Data Strategy (2021)* also commits to implementing the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

In 2023–24, the reform program for Priority Reform 4 was delivered by a joint team across NSW CAPO and multiple NSW Government agencies, with shared project governance. This design recognised that the knowledge needed to effectively deliver this ambitious program of work was dispersed across both the community and government sectors. It also recognised that driving change across different agencies – and supporting diverse NSW communities to build knowledge and develop data governance – involved extensive coordination requiring adequate resourcing, time and a breadth of expertise.

NSW's joint approach to Priority Reform 4 highlights the significance of both community and government partners seeing joint reform work as an opportunity to learn from one another. The program approach of engaging communities and piloting a practical service has sought to create change along the way by trying different approaches to responding to what Aboriginal people have identified they would like to see.

In taking a 'try, test, listen, learn' approach, with shared resourcing to support joint delivery, NSW has undertaken what we understand is Australia's only dedicated Priority Reform 4 program of work. The focus of this work as it enters its bridging year of 2024–25 is to develop a set of reforms for consideration by the NSW Joint Council, anchored in the shared evidence base the program has developed.



Key Action Area 1: Aboriginal communities have access to government data and insights in formats that enable local decision-making and shared decision-making with government

Pilot NSW data connector service

The pilot data connector service, established in 2023, is made up of 14 data connectors, many of whom are Aboriginal, who work across 7 government agencies. A central coordination team, based in The Cabinet Office supports, coordinates and monitors the service. At 30 June 2024, the NSW data connector pilot service had received more than 70 requests for data and information from Aboriginal communities and responded to approximately two thirds of these.

In addition to facilitating the sharing of data with Aboriginal communities, the pilot service has been integral in understanding the barriers and enablers to providing Aboriginal communities and organisations with access to government-held data. By working through the requests, data connectors have systematically identified opportunities to improve current agency data practices and identified barriers to inform the development of broader reforms through the program.

Case study – Aboriginal community member data request

In 2023, an Aboriginal community member who attended a rural NSW CAPO-led community engagement contacted the data connector service, concerned about the health of their local community. The community member made a request for statistics and information at LGA level by Aboriginality (where possible) related to the several specific health issues.

The data connector:

- took time to deeply understand the community member's needs and concerns for the local community, using a culturally informed approach
- discussed types of data that might be relevant and made suggestions using their subject matter expertise
- provided relevant information in what the requester determined as a useful format to support them using the data for their intended purpose (advocacy) and connected them to local contacts to discuss their concerns.

Outcome: The community member received tailored information including links to publicly available data sources and 72 statistical measures relating to 8 health topics (31 sub-topics).

Understanding barriers to shared access to data by Aboriginal communities

In 2023–24, The Cabinet Office took a comprehensive approach to understanding current barriers using a range of inputs, including a review of literature, expert interviews and analysis on policies and legislation, and whole-of-NSW Government surveys.

These insights, along with NSW CAPO's community engagement and research insights, were used by NSW CAPO, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and The Cabinet Office to consider and develop system reform proposals to address barriers to data access, and to support the operationalisation of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Aboriginal Data Governance principles in NSW.



Key Action Area 2: An Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Aboriginal Data Governance model increases Aboriginal communities' sovereignty over data about Aboriginal people

To support the community-led, community engagement approach of Key Priority Area 2 and the holistic approach to gathering stories and evidence, we undertook a body of research to further understand options for the practical implementation of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance principles in NSW.

Literature review

A literature review was conducted in 2023–24 to explore existing research and resources regarding Aboriginal community data projects in Australia and international models/examples that provide valuable insights into data access and governance.

Discussion paper

In 2023, NSW CAPO produced the paper *Aboriginal Data Governance in Practice in NSW*. The paper invited dialogue and reflection, highlighting the importance of Aboriginal Data Governance. The paper also explored the 5 principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty,² which have guided the Priority Reform 4 partnership and work program.

2024 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Summit

NSW CAPO participated in the summit alongside Aboriginal community members, professionals, researchers and academics, and representatives from institutions and other government jurisdictions. NSW CAPO produced 2 abstracts:

- *Reclaiming Data, Rebuilding Resilience: First Nations Strengthening through Data Sovereignty & Data Governance in NSW*
- *Advancing Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Self-determination in NSW: A Collaborative Approach for First Nation Communities.*

Community engagements

During the first series of community engagements (September 2023 to February 2024), NSW CAPO facilitated 11 in-person and 2 online engagements with Aboriginal communities in NSW, including one for the Stolen Generations. These sessions focused on raising awareness of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance, exploring local data priorities and discussing practical needs for implementation. Communities were introduced to the NSW Government data connector service and data map concept to enhance transparency around government-held data.

The second series (April 2024 to May 2024) expanded to 19 regions, revisiting previous locations and engaging new communities.

Based on community input, learning modes were identified as important for creating data-related training opportunities and career pathways for Aboriginal people. Progress has been made in building knowledge about the concepts of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance.³

These community engagement activities facilitated substantial input from Aboriginal people, directly informing the reform proposal ideas and ensuring that the approach taken by the pilot service and technical trials was continuously informed by community input.

² Miaim Nayri Wingara Principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, www.maiamnayriwingara.org/mnw-principles

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Learnings from community engagements have been shared with those involved in the adjacent AECG/ Department of Education Priority Reform 4 initiative, who have noted their support of the topics and confirmed their alignment with their own related insights.

The AECG/ Department of Education Priority Reform 4 initiative has been informed by its own consultation phase, where the Department of Education and AECG conducted engagements with internal and external stakeholders. During the consultation phase, several training options were discussed for consideration in 2024–25.

Consultations also identified the need for Aboriginal people to be able to access any data courses/ knowledge building on Country; this was particularly relevant for young people in rural and remote areas.



Key Action Area 3: Community data projects and capacity building enable Aboriginal analysis of data

Blacktown LGA Community Data Project

The National Agreement commits to the establishment of data projects in up to 6 locations across Australia to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to access and use location-specific data on the Closing the Gap outcome areas. In NSW, a community data project was established in the Blacktown Local Government Area.

In 2023–24, several challenges emerged during the Blacktown project pilot, which have served as learnings for the development of broader reform proposals.

Knowledge and capacity building

Progress has been made in building knowledge about the concepts of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance.

Summary of progress against NSW Implementation Plan actions

Key Action Area 1

Action	Progress
Establish a ‘data connector’ service to support communities to more easily find and access the government-held data they need	On track
Share data and insights with Aboriginal communities in a useful form	Delayed Expenditure on digital tools and insights was deferred to 2024–25 to consider data priorities being shared at NSW CAPO-led community engagements during 2023–24, and to learn from the Blacktown LGA Aboriginal Community Data Project.
Investigate reform of NSW data systems and the ongoing operating model to address systemic barriers to useful data collection and data/insight sharing	On track
Investigate what steps are needed to deliver a service mapping capability to provide local-level information about services and funding relevant to the needs of Aboriginal communities	Delayed As above.

Key Action Area 2

Action	Progress
Develop a roadmap that sets out a shared understanding of what Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance means in NSW	Delayed During consultations, Aboriginal community members emphasised that more time for input and knowledge building is needed, and that this aspect of the Priority Reform should not be rushed toward potential failure. Communities asserted that they do not want to be left behind; ongoing consultation and knowledge building are vital to progress and success.
Design a model to implement the principles of Aboriginal Data Sovereignty and Governance in practice	Delayed As above.

Key Action Area 3

Action	Progress
Fund community data projects to support community data aspirations	Delayed
Promote data-related career pathways and opportunities for Aboriginal students and communities	Delayed Joint scoping of the project by AECG and the Department of Education was undertaken and following that, it was decided that workforce development and career pathways are cross-cutting issues that are relevant across all our Socio-Economic Outcomes and, therefore, need to be approached in a more strategic and coherent way. We expect to address these issues in the context of our Education and Economic Prosperity Sector Committee transformation strategy and future implementation plans.

Health and Wellbeing: Socio-Economic Outcomes 1, 2, 4 and 14

Accountability for these Socio-Economic Outcomes sits with NSW Health and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW.

Socio-Economic Outcomes

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years
14. Aboriginal people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

Overview of progress

Due to the important recent changes to the data used for these Health and Wellbeing targets, we have not used the traffic light system for this section of the Annual Report.

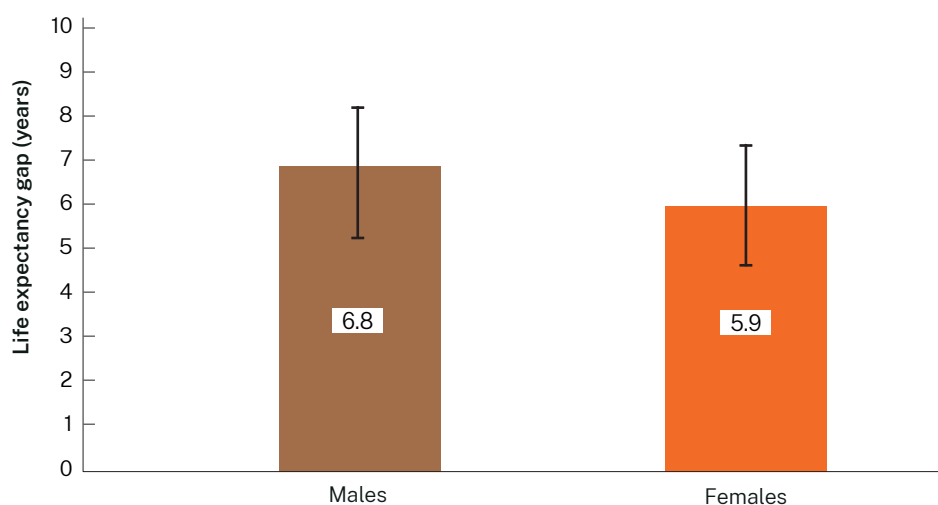
The status of each of the Health and Wellbeing targets and initiative delivery plans in NSW is presented below.

SEO 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives

National target	Latest NSW data	NSW progress from baseline
Target 1: Close the Gap in life expectancy within a generation, by 2031.	During 2020–2022, the gap in estimated life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children at birth was 6.8 years for males and 5.9 years for females.	Target not met Note: The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recommends not to compare life expectancy estimates over time. See footnote 4 for details.

Overview of progress

NSW measure:⁴ Difference in estimated life expectancy in NSW for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children at birth, 2020–2022, with 95% confidence intervals



Data source: ABS

Commentary on progress

- In NSW during 2020–2022, the gap in estimated life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children at birth was 6.8 years for males and 5.9 years for females.
- Life expectancy at birth is a summary indicator of overall population health and reflects all Closing the Gap Socioeconomic Outcome areas. Closing the Gap responses may take years to translate into improvements in life expectancy. Social, cultural and environmental factors are the key determinants influencing progress. Whole-of-government action on these determinants (e.g. improving housing, reducing unemployment, increasing educational attainment) will be critical to improving life expectancy.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Review and Refresh of the NSW Aboriginal Health Plan	Complete
Develop new 24-hour Aboriginal Health Practitioner in Emergency Departments Model of Care	Complete
Develop the NSW Aboriginal Health Governance, Shared Decision Making and Accountability Framework	On track
Implement new sector strengthening initiatives for workforce development	On track
Deliver the NSW Aboriginal Primary Care Cancer Pathways Program: 715 Health Assessments and Model of Care	In progress

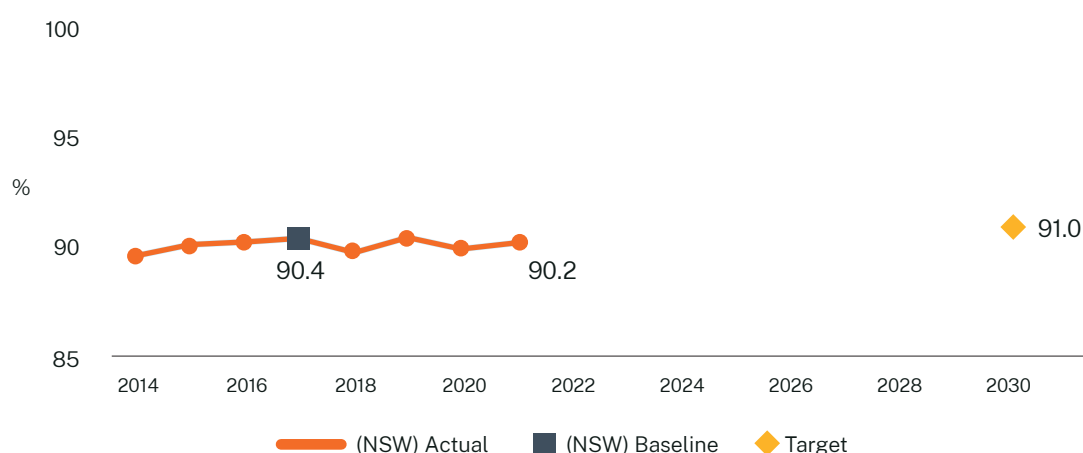
⁴ As recommended by the ABS, 2020–2022 life expectancy estimates are deliberately not compared to those from 2015–2017. The significant increase in the identified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population between the 2016 and 2021 censuses, and improvements to identification of deaths in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, have contributed to changes in the estimates, and these are unable to be distinguished from genuine change in the health of the population.

SEO 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong

National target	Latest NSW data	NSW progress from baseline
Target 2: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91%.	In 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight is stable at 90.2%.	No change

Overview of progress

NSW measure:⁵ Proportion of live-born singleton Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies of healthy birthweight in NSW



Data source: National Perinatal Data Collection, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Commentary on progress

- In NSW, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight is stable at 90.2%. To achieve this target, an absolute increase of 0.8% is needed.
- Birthweight is an important indicator of infant health. Healthy birthweight is associated with better health and social outcomes.
- Social, cultural and environmental factors influence birthweight. Health-related determinants of low birthweight include inadequate antenatal care, maternal nutritional status, and harmful behaviours during pregnancy, such as smoking and alcohol consumption. Pre-term births account for a large proportion of low birthweight babies, and many of the risk factors for low birthweight are also associated with pre-term birth.

⁵ Data reported by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and sourced from the National Perinatal Data Collection only includes live singleton births where the mother's usual residence is within NSW. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies and mothers are under-reported on the Perinatal Data Collection.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

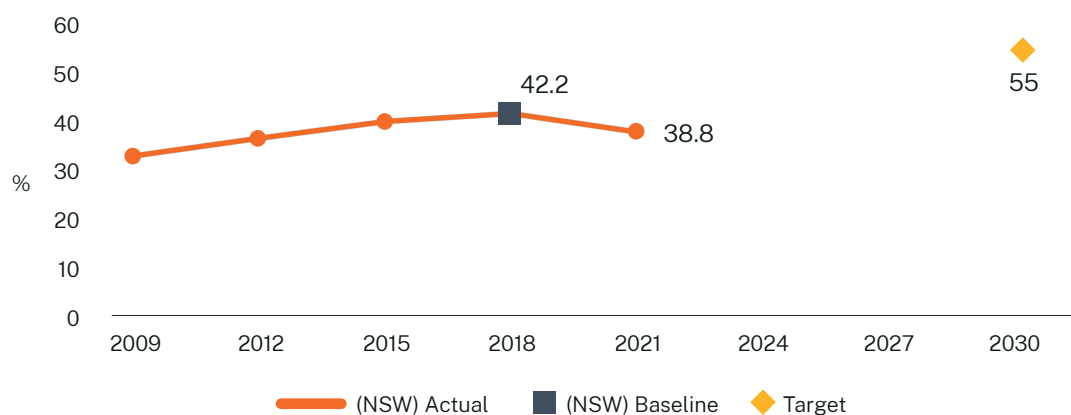
Action	Progress
Explore opportunities for the expansion of the Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Health Service to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and other models of maternity care to Aboriginal families	In progress
Explore and develop innovative Birthing on Country Models of Care	In progress
Embed programs that aim to reduce incidences of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder	In progress

SEO 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years

National target	Latest NSW data	NSW progress from baseline
Target 4: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.	In 2021, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are developmentally on track when starting school is 38.8%.	Worsening

Overview of progress

NSW measure:⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the AEDC



Data source: Australian Early Development Census, Australian Government Department of Education

⁶ Across Australia, 10.3% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who participated in the 2021 AEDC did not have domain scores calculated.

Commentary on progress

- In NSW, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who are developmentally on track when starting school has increased slightly since 2009 but has decreased from baseline (i.e. from 42.2% in 2018 to 38.8% in 2021). To achieve the target, an absolute increase of 16.2% is needed.
- In NSW, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in a preschool program in the year before full-time schooling (YBFS) is high (96% in 2022) and has increased substantially since 2016.
- In 2022, there were 47 Aboriginal-focused integrated early years education services in NSW; most of these (45) were Aboriginal community-controlled services. This number has increased since 2017, when there were 41 Aboriginal community-controlled early years education services.
- Socioeconomic factors are the main determinants of child development outcomes. Closing the Gap responses may take years to translate into improvements in early childhood development.
- The AEDC measures are designed for use across entire populations. It's important to analyse community-level data in relation to these measures, while also accounting for the social, cultural and environmental factors that affect Aboriginal child development.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

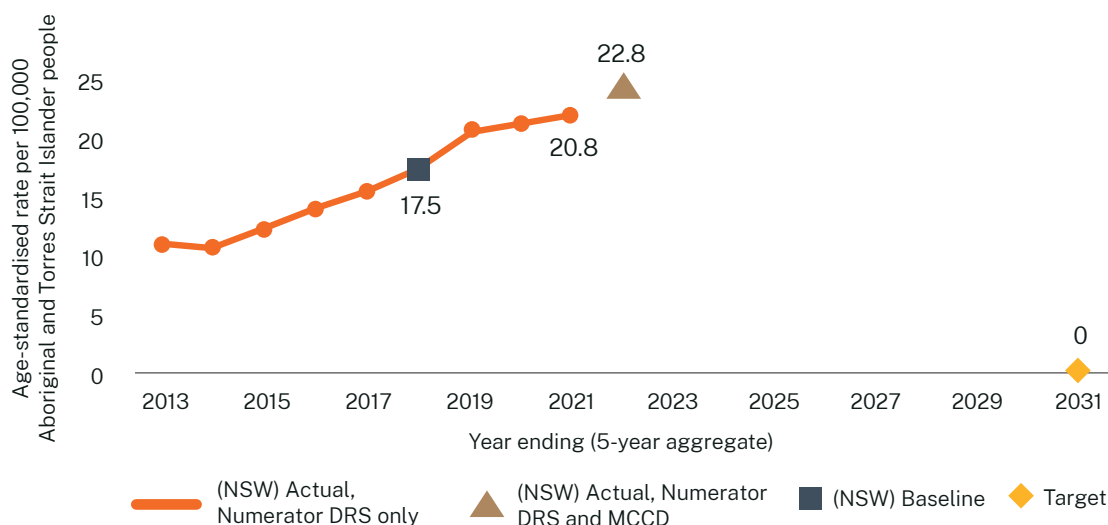
Action	Progress
Brighter Beginnings accelerator initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pregnancy Family Conferencing (PFC) • Health and Development Checks in Early Childhood Education and Care (HDC) • Sustaining NSW Families (SNF) 	On track

SEO 14: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

National target	Latest NSW data	NSW progress from baseline
Target 14: Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.	During 2018–2022, the suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW was 22.8 per 100,000 population.	Target not met

Overview of progress

NSW measure:⁷ Rate of mortality due to suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW (5-year aggregate)



Data source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare National Mortality Database and ABS

Commentary on progress

- During 2018–2022, the suicide rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW was 22.8 per 100,000 population, with 276 suicides recorded, which is an increase from previous years. The latest data includes more complete reporting on deaths in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for NSW in 2022, so the trend needs to be interpreted with caution (see footnote 5).
- Achieving a significant and lasting reduction in suicide rates for Aboriginal people requires increased investment in Aboriginal-led suicide prevention strategies. This includes culturally safe mental health services, holistic models of care, and wellbeing initiatives, alongside coordinated government action to address the historical, political, social and cultural determinants of health affecting Aboriginal communities and their wellbeing.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Expand the Building on Aboriginal Communities' Resilience initiative	On track
Develop new Aboriginal Mental Health Models of Care	On track

⁷ There is a substantial, step change increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths reported by the ABS for the 2022 calendar year and ongoing. The ABS released updated information on Deaths and Cause of Death for 2022 and noted a significant change to the derivation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status for deaths registered in NSW. For deaths registered in 2022, the ABS now has access to Aboriginal status information from the Medical Certificate Cause of Death (MCCD) form in addition to information reported on the Death Registration Statement (DRS). Use of this additional data source represents an important improvement in data quality and completeness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths registered in NSW; however, it increases the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths reported for NSW residents in 2022 by 24% compared to DRS alone. This impact will be even more substantial for certain categories of deaths, such as those from intentional self-harm, including suicide, with an increase of 57% for these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths in 2022. This change has introduced a break in time series in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander death statistics in NSW and Australia. Historical data for NSW has been under-reporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths to 2021. Trends cannot currently be accurately assessed through to 2022 unless deaths records for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW prior to 2022 are updated using the information available from the MCCD.

Education and Economic Prosperity: Socio-Economic Outcomes 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 17, and Priority Reform 5

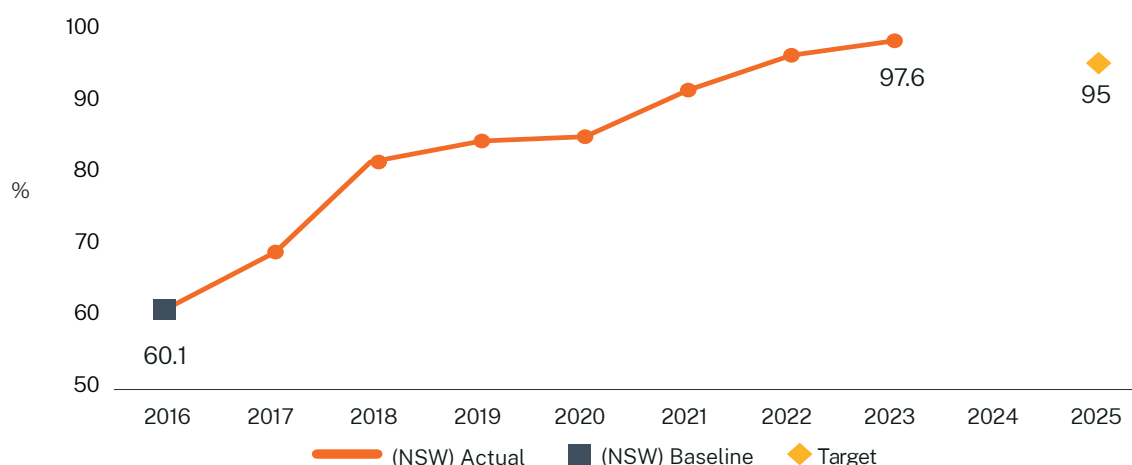
Accountability for these Socio-Economic Outcomes and Priority Reform sits with the Department of Education and the Department of Enterprise, Investment and Trade.

Socio-Economic Outcome	Progress	Light
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years	Improvement	● Green
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential	Improvement	● Green
6. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways	Improvement	● Green
7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education	Improvement	● Green
8. Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities	Improvement	● Green
17. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives	Improvement	● Green
Priority Reform		
5. Employment, business growth and economic prosperity (NSW)	On track	● Green

SEO 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high-quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years

Overview of progress

NSW measure: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in NSW in the year before full-time schooling (YBFS) age cohort who are enrolled in a preschool program.



Data source: ABS

Commentary on progress

Enrolment in 600 hours of quality early childhood education in the 2 years before school is strongly linked to better outcomes for children. According to 2023 Productivity Commission data, 97.6% of NSW Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in preschool, from 60.1% in 2016.

While this marks important progress, challenges persist around preschool affordability, accessibility and cultural inclusivity. Aboriginal families continue to experience racism, and the lack of cultural responsiveness in some early childhood services can limit further engagement.

To build on enrolment success, it is essential to strengthen cultural responsiveness and address systemic racism within these services. Ensuring that Aboriginal children and families feel respected and supported is key to maintaining progress and achieving the long-term success of enrolment targets.

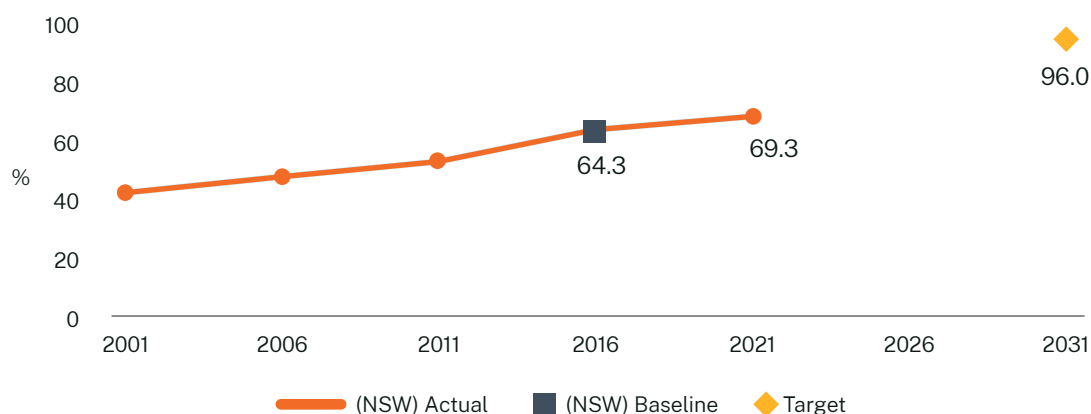
Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Develop a Cultural Safety Framework	On track
Deliver Connecting to Country training for early childhood educators	Not started/planning
Establish early childhood Aboriginal engagement officers	Not started/planning

SEO 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students achieve their full learning potential

Overview of progress

NSW measure: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders in NSW who have attained Year 12 or equivalent; or Certificate III or above, 20–24 years



Data source: ABS

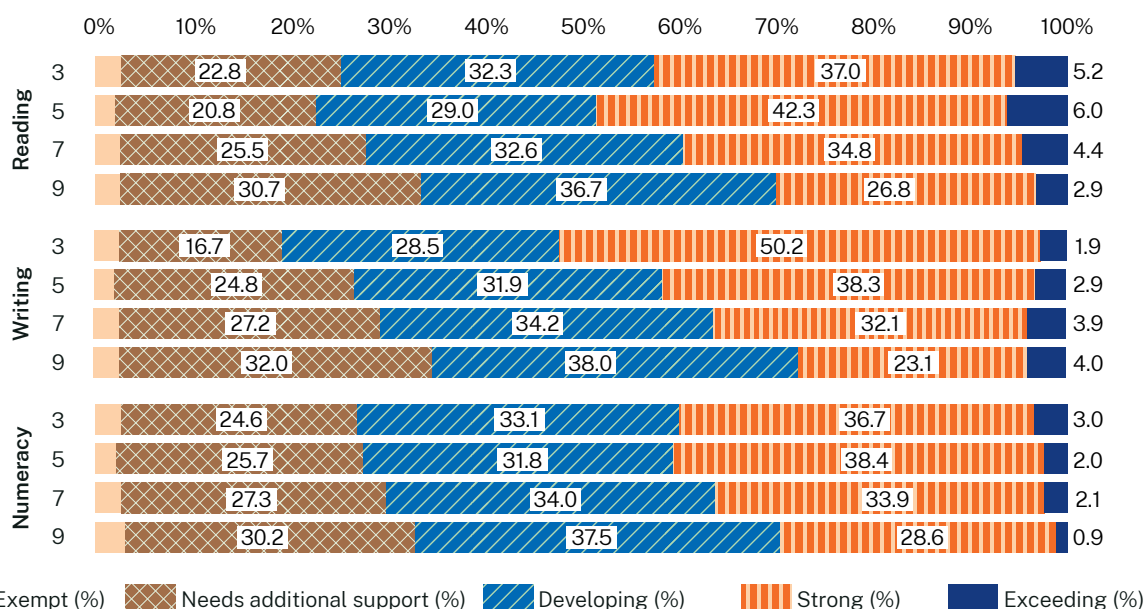
Commentary on progress

The proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (aged 20 to 24) in NSW who have attained a Year 12 or equivalent qualification has risen by 5 pp, from 64.3% in 2016 to 69.3% in 2021.

However, to meet the 2031 target, an additional increase of 27 pp is required, a target that appears unlikely based on current trends.

The interim 2023 HSC attainment rate for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW schools (including both NSW Government and non-government schools) was 40%. This figure reflects the percentage of students from the Year 9 cohort in 2020 who attained their HSC 3 years later. Final results, allowing an extra year for the HSC completion, will be available in early 2025.

NSW student achievement in reading, writing and numeracy, by year of schooling, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 2023



Data source: National Assessment Program: Literary and Numeracy (NAPLAN), Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

In 2023, reading proficiency for Aboriginal students in NSW ranged from 66.5% in Year 9 to 77.2% in Year 5, with students assessed as developing, strong or exceeding. Writing proficiency ranged from 65.1% in Year 9 to 80.6% in Year 3, while numeracy proficiency ranged from 66.9% in Year 9 to 72.8% in Year 3. Approximately 30% of Year 9 Aboriginal students were identified as needing additional support in reading, writing and numeracy.

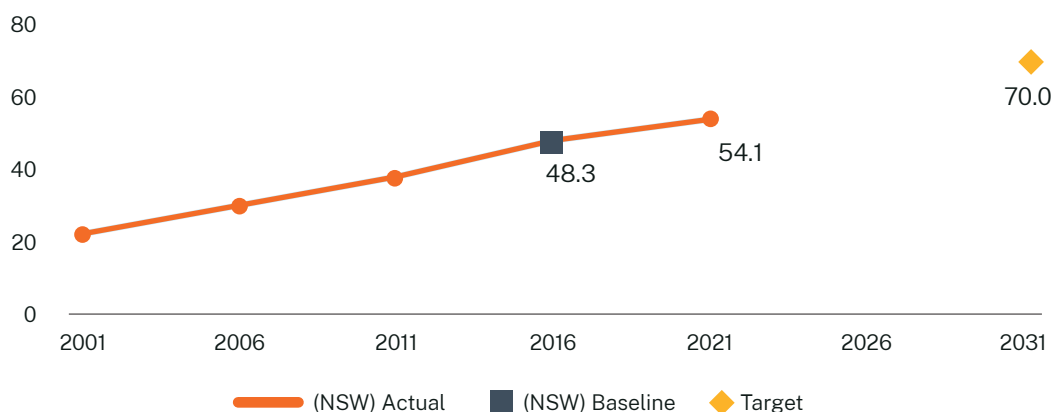
Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Deliver My Future, My Culture, My Way	Complete
Support the Anti-Racism Policy	Complete
Expand on proven local NSW AECG Aboriginal curricula	On track
Develop a Culturally Responsive Evaluation Framework	On track
Deliver the Perfect Presence Pilot Program	On track
Review Personalised Learning Pathways guidelines	On track
Establish a NSW AECG Regional Operations Model	On track
Expand the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests	On track
Promote support and resources for Aboriginal families for making complaints	On track
Review suspension centres	Delayed
Explore the expansion of Pirru Thangkurray Cultural Engagement and Goal Setting Program	Delayed

SEO 6: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways

Overview of progress

NSW measure: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in NSW who have completed AQF Certificate III or above, 25–34 years



Data source: ABS

Commentary on progress

If the growth rate observed over the most recent 5-year period continues, this measure is projected to fall slightly short of the 2031 target. However, the larger growth seen in the previous 5-year period indicates that a return to that pace could help meet the target.

The number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW aged 34 or under who commenced VET qualifications (Certificate III or above) dropped from 22,225 in 2019 to 14,155 in 2020. However, commencements rebounded in 2021 to 14,939, and increased by 9% in 2022, reaching 16,345 (Productivity Commission, 2022). The decline in 2020 coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, before the Job Trainer program, which began in September 2020 but did not scale up until early 2021. During this period, VET engagement was driven by uncertain job prospects and provider adjustments to their intakes.

Additionally, of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in NSW who began a bachelor's degree in 2014, 50.6% had completed their degree by 2022 (Productivity Commission, 2024).

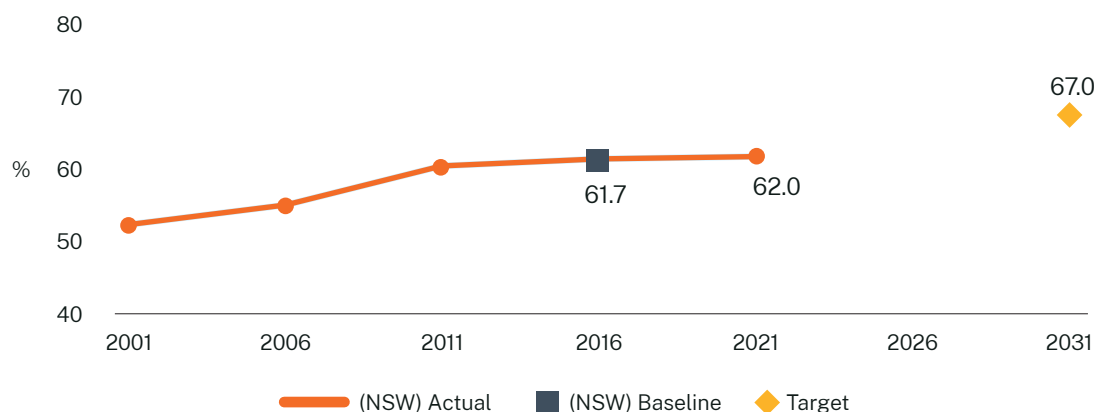
Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Ensure that the Barranggirra – Skilling for Employment Initiative is optimally effective	On track
Expand the Career Guidance Service, Careers NSW	On track

SEO 7: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education

Overview of progress

NSW measure: Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders in NSW, aged 15 to 24 years, who are fully engaged in employment, education or training



Data source: ABS

Commentary on progress

After significant growth in this measure between 2001 and 2011, progress has stalled over the past decade, and a significant increase is needed to meet the 2031 target.

In 2023, the proportion of Year 12 completers in employment, education or training remained consistent with 2022 levels. However, the percentage of early school leavers in these areas dropped from 74.5% in 2022 to 68.5% in 2023.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Develop the 2022–2025 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan	On track
Expand the Career Guidance Service, Careers NSW	On track
Ensure that the Barranggirra – Skilling for Employment Initiative is optimally effective	On track
Develop an Aboriginal Workforce and Leadership Strategy	Delayed
Expand the Elsa Dixon Aboriginal Employment Grant	Not started

SEO 8: Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities

The percentage of Aboriginal people aged 25 to 64 in NSW who are employed has risen by 5 pp, from 54.6% in 2016 to 59.6% in 2021.

Although this increase is encouraging, there are still opportunities to boost employment rates for Aboriginal people. This can be achieved by tackling racism in the job market, enhancing job opportunities in regional areas, and improving educational levels, especially in training that leads to stable jobs.

Additionally, future economic conditions may affect the employment of Aboriginal people more than others, especially Aboriginal people working in low-skilled and less secure positions. The younger demographic of the Aboriginal workforce also means that their job prospects are more vulnerable to economic changes.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Roadmap for Aboriginal Economic Advancement	Complete
Review access to public liability insurance	Complete
Review access to capital for Aboriginal businesses	Complete
Establish a one-stop shop for business support	On track
Implement the Aboriginal Tourism Business Activation Program	On track
Aboriginal Employment and Enterprise Strategic Framework	On track
Review the NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy	On track
Scope a training review	In progress

SEO 17: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives

BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation (BlaQ) and the Department of Customer Service (DCS) are co-leading on Socio-Economic Outcome 17. There is currently insufficient data to measure progress on Socio-Economic Outcome 17 in NSW. A research and evaluation project (Phase 1) was funded under the 2022–2024 Implementation Plan to get a shared understanding of digital inclusion, address data gaps and establish a baseline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW.

BlaQ and DCS engaged Nous Group as research partner to assist with establishing a digital inclusion baseline and measurement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW for Phase 1: Research and Evaluation.

The research for Phase 1 has been designed in line with best-practice approaches to Indigenous research and data sovereignty. The approach received ethics endorsement by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS).

To support this key piece of work, 11 nominated communities across NSW participated in yarning circles. Consultations were held in Broken Hill, Deniliquin, Dubbo, Walgett, Sydney, Gunnedah, Tamworth, Kempsey, Wyong, Gosford and Nowra. Common themes arising from the community consultations were digital affordability, education (digital ability) and e-security (cyber security).

The consultations have provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding about what digital inclusion means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW. As of 30 June 2024, 135 community members have participated in 17 yarning circles.

A survey to assess levels of digital inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been developed and circulated through various networks and distribution channels. As of 30 June 2024, 186 surveys were completed.

In the next financial year, additional community consultations will be held in nominated regional and remote communities. This will expand the data collection and ensure the research is representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander demographic cohorts.

Once consultations have concluded, a final report and roadmap highlighting key findings and recommendations will be published.

BlaQ and DCS continue to work closely with other government departments and jurisdictions to collaborate where possible to reduce duplication of work in the digital space.

Action	Progress
Undertake a research and evaluation project to inform the design of better digital inclusion initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage a research partner • Undertake a literature review and seek ethics approval • Establish a baseline for NSW and test through community and stakeholder consultation • Publish a roadmap and provide ongoing measurement for digital inclusion in NSW • Publish a final report and accessible community report on the research and evaluation 	On track
Digital Inclusion Pilot Hubs and Vouchers Program	Delayed

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

The National Agreement encompasses 4 Priority Reforms, with the NSW Partnership recognising the necessity of a fifth Priority Reform to stimulate economic prosperity, employment and enterprise for Aboriginal individuals and communities.

This strategy acknowledges the significant contribution of Aboriginal businesses in advancing self-determination, ultimately resulting in favourable economic results. By identifying the need for an additional Priority Reform, the NSW Partnership aims to further support Aboriginal people and communities in achieving sustainable economic growth and empowerment.

Aboriginal Business Taskforce

The Aboriginal Business Taskforce provides the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty with strong, independent advice on issues relating to the Aboriginal business sector, with a focus on enterprise, employment and economic prosperity. Members bring broad and extensive experience from across the NSW business sector, which will help to realise the vision of Priority Reform 5 in a strategic and cohesive way.

NSW Roadmap for Aboriginal Business Growth 2023–2026

The *NSW Roadmap for Aboriginal Business Growth* was developed based on the content of a series of Aboriginal Business Roundtables, a public consultation phase and direct engagement with key stakeholders in the sector. The Roadmap aligns with the work under Priority Reform 5 and is broken into 3 thematic ‘pathways’:

1. Strengthening accountability
2. Supporting businesses
3. Recognising potential.

There is also an ‘enabling delivery’ pathway, which will create the necessary mechanism to guide and drive the work under the other 3 pathways. Each pathway contains specific initiatives that will target challenges identified by Aboriginal businesses.

These initiatives include short-term, immediate-impact actions and long-term pieces of work aimed at creating a robust and sustainable Aboriginal business sector.

By the end of the 2023–24 financial year, 2 Aboriginal sector advocates were successful in obtaining grants to deliver projects under the Roadmap, including to:

- work to raise awareness of ‘black cladding’ across government
- develop place-based approaches to promote Aboriginal businesses in a local area
- develop independent informal mentoring networks to allow Aboriginal entrepreneurs to start and grow businesses.

Aboriginal Business Roundtables

The Aboriginal Business Roundtables are a key initiative of the NSW Government’s Closing the Gap commitment to support economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and communities.

They provide opportunities for Aboriginal business owners and operators to network, collaborate, and gain valuable insights from other Aboriginal businesses. Participants receive the latest updates on the *NSW Roadmap for Aboriginal Business Growth*, connect with financial institutions and hear inspiring personal stories from fellow Aboriginal businesses.

The October 2023 Roundtable took the form of the Aboriginal Business Networking Luncheon, held at the National Centre for Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) on Gadigal land in Redfern. The theme, 'Looking Abroad: Aboriginal and Māori Businesses', centred on building solid, supportive networks; encouraging the sharing of knowledge and insights; and exploring and navigating the paths to business expansion and success in global markets.

In total, 94 participants – including 48 businesses – attended the luncheon, which included a marketplace that provided the opportunity for Aboriginal and Māori businesses to exhibit their products and services.

The Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty, The Hon David Harris MP, opened the event by laying out the NSW Government's foundational commitment to the Aboriginal business sector under Closing the Gap Priority Reform 5. Other speakers included New Zealand Consul-General Bill Dobbie, David Lawson from Austrade, Georgia Richards and Greg Harrison from New Zealand-founded Height Project Management, and Terri-Anne Daniel of Cooee Cookies.

The April 2024 Aboriginal Business Roundtable was hosted in the vibrant community of Wagga Wagga. Its theme, 'Access to Capital', underscored the NSW Government's dedication to overcoming barriers hindering the success of Aboriginal businesses, including access to financial resources.

The day centred around panel discussions featuring financial experts and successful entrepreneurs. The panellists – Noel Prakash, NAB's National Head of Indigenous Business Banking; Mutta Deng, Executive Manager of Indigenous Business Banking at Westpac; and Simone Kenmore, Executive Manager of Indigenous Business Banking at Commonwealth Bank – shared insights and strategies tailored to support the capital needs of Aboriginal businesses. They emphasised the significance of understanding cultural nuances, engaging with Indigenous communities, and leveraging partnerships to maximise impact.

During the discussion, the audience asked questions that touched on a range of issues, including:

- increased lending commitments by major banks
- the establishment of dedicated Indigenous banking teams
- the importance of cultural awareness and sensitivity
- community engagement and financial literacy programs
- collaboration and partnerships to foster an inclusive financial ecosystem for Indigenous entrepreneurs.

The Roundtable convened a diverse group of 77 participants who hailed from a wide range of industries and sectors, showcasing the richness and diversity of Aboriginal entrepreneurship.

Aboriginal Employment and Enterprise Strategy

This initiative aimed to co-develop place-based strategies with Aboriginal communities to improve sustainable employment outcomes for a range of Aboriginal people.

A key focus of the strategy was new job and business opportunities emerging from established precincts and zones in NSW, including Special Activation Precincts, Renewable Energy Zones, Regional Job Precincts and State Significant Precincts.

This initiative resulted in the creation of a Development Guide, providing tools to support localised action and the creation of place-based strategies.

The Development Guide was endorsed by NSW CAPO, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the Closing the Gap working group in May 2024.



The Development Guide recommends Aboriginal community-led pilots test the approach in Western Sydney, Dubbo and Tamworth, with outcomes from culturally appropriate evaluation to inform revisions to the guide.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Review the NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy	Complete
Hold ongoing Aboriginal Business Roundtables to support Aboriginal economic advancement	On track
Scoping a training review	On track
Review access to public liability insurance	On track
Review access to capital for Aboriginal businesses	On track
Establish a one-stop-shop for business support	Delayed
Implement the Aboriginal Tourism Business Activation Program: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Aboriginal Tourism Development WorkshopsMedia Training ProgramTrade Events Participation Program	On track
Develop an Aboriginal Enterprise Strategy	Completed

Culture, Housing, Land and Water: Socio-Economic Outcomes 9, 15 and 16

Accountability for these Socio-Economic Outcomes sits with the Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, Homes NSW, and the Aboriginal Languages Trust.

Socio-Economic Outcome	Progress	Light
<p>9. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need:</p> <p>9a. By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing to 88%</p> <p>9b. By 2031, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - within discrete Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities receive essential services that meet or exceed the relevant jurisdictional standard - in or near to a town receive essential services that meet or exceed the same standard as applies generally within the town (including if the household might be classified for other purposes as a part of a discrete settlement such as a ‘town camp’ or ‘town-based reserve’) 	Improvement	 Green
<p>15. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters:</p> <p>15a. By 2030, a 15% increase in Australia’s landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s legal rights or interests (improvement)</p> <p>15b. By 2030, a 15% increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s legal rights or interests in the sea (no change)</p>	No change	 Amber
<p>16. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing</p>	No assessment	

SEO 9: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need

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

Current trends indicate that NSW is on track to exceed the target. Data from 2021 indicated that in NSW, the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in appropriately sized (not overcrowded) housing was 87.5%. As ABS data for this measure is only available every 5 years, the Department of Communities and Justice will monitor the proportion of Aboriginal households in social housing that are appropriately sized (not overcrowded) by housing program (public housing, Aboriginal Housing Office, and community housing) on a more frequent basis. While this measure will not have a target set, monitoring its trajectory will provide some insight on performance. However, this method, has limitations and may not yield accurate data on Aboriginal housing in NSW.

While Target 9a is on track, we know that Aboriginal communities are facing a housing crisis. The 'appropriately sized' housing standard as described by the ABS does not reflect the actual housing needs or aspirations of communities.

Additionally, the crowding measures used are based on the Canadian National Occupancy Standard. We know that any measure of crowding needs to be culturally responsive and recognise Aboriginal mobility and kinship obligations. We also recognise that while some households may not consider themselves 'overcrowded,' they may not have as many people in the house if more housing stock were available. We are working towards a strengths-based, culturally informed approach to redefine 'housing of an acceptable standard' for Aboriginal communities.

To support this and Aboriginal housing delivery more broadly, we are working on strengthening the Aboriginal community-controlled sector to provide culturally safe housing delivery and services.

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

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

As a newly developed target, 9b does not yet have an agreed data source to measure progress against. Work is underway to identify and formalise indicators to measure this target in future.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Provide an additional construction stimulus program for the Aboriginal Community Housing Provider (ACHP) sector to provide new supply of dedicated Aboriginal housing stock	On track
Expand home ownership programs and investigate opportunities to build on existing models	On track
Research and understand mobility as a key driver of overcrowding and other housing issues	Complete
Support the aspirations for growth of the Aboriginal Community Housing Provider sector	Delayed

Action	Progress
Develop culturally responsive building standards and design principles for Aboriginal housing in partnership with Aboriginal communities	On track
Develop the Aboriginal Wellbeing Framework for Aboriginal people living in social housing in NSW	On track
Embed flexible asset responses for families providing accommodation to support kin	On track
Trial ACHP delivery of outcomes-focused housing model	Delayed
Expand ACCO services to strengthen Aboriginal tenancies (social and private)	Delayed
Maintain the hardware of community housing impacting on health outcomes through Aboriginal Community Housing Provider asset management	Delayed
Design a framework for expanding outcomes-focused housing model	Not started

SEO 15: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters

Land mass subject to Aboriginal people's access in NSW has increased by 4.1% over the 2023–24 financial year, from 57,382 km² in Q1⁸ to 59,758 km². This is largely driven by new Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) and native title determined in Q2 and Q3, respectively.

The majority of land mass subject to Aboriginal peoples' legal rights and interests in NSW is ILUA (47%). Ten per cent of NSW is national park and of this, a third is jointly managed with Aboriginal people. There was an increase in land subject to Aboriginal people's legal rights or interests, from 6,382 km² in 2020 to 6,443 km² in 2022–23.

Evidence shows that there are significant advantages for Aboriginal communities in leveraging their land and water into economic opportunities. Currently, these opportunities are impacted by a large backlog in both land claim and native title determinations, and a more ambitious approach to improve these processes is required.

There has been no increase in Sea Country that is subject to Aboriginal peoples' legal rights. Aboriginal communities have long been advocating for Aboriginal community-owned cultural and economic flows, and increased water rights and entitlements. NSW CAPO and the NSW Government are working in genuine partnership to progress this work.

The NSW indicator for land mass differs from the reported Productivity Commission figure, which only measures native title determinations, providing a limited view of progress.

⁸ There is a possibility that ILUA data has been duplicated when calculating National Park Joint Management Agreements. Any discrepancies will be corrected in future reporting.

Drivers reported by NSW are listed in the following table:

Driver	Description	Area (km ²)
Aboriginal land claims granted (including part-granted)	Area of land granted to Local Aboriginal Land Councils	1,732.19
ILUAs	Area of total ILUAs between native title parties and other people or bodies about the use and management of areas of land and/or waters	27,306.77
Native title determinations	Land area subject to determinations for recognition of native title rights	4,966.21
National Parks Joint Management Agreements	Area of national park under Aboriginal joint management	Part 4A Agreement: 1,737.94 Indigenous Land Use Agreement: 5,889.72 Memoranda of Understanding: 15,727.78

Further work needs to be undertaken between the Australian Government and NSW to determine a target and baseline for NSW that considers and accurately reflects the varied drivers of the rights and interests that Aboriginal people have available to them in NSW (i.e. land claims, co-management agreements, ILUAs).

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

There are 7 initiatives committed to under the 2022–2024 Implementation Plan related to Socio-Economic Outcome 15. As of June 2023, 5 initiatives are in progress or planned with work underway to progress the initiatives. Agreement is yet to be reached on how 2 initiatives are to be delivered. We anticipate that the initiation of funded initiatives will increase the amount of land subject to the rights and interests of Aboriginal communities in NSW, supporting NSW to meet target 15a.

Action	Progress
Improve and enhance joint management arrangements	Not started
Establish a taskforce to negotiate a redesign of the native title and land rights systems	Delayed
Pilot models for increasing Aboriginal land ownership and management	On track
Support increased access to cultural fishing rights	Delayed
Increase Aboriginal ownership of Sea Country and inland water through reimagined models of water management	On track
Provide improved support following land transfers	On track
Establish a Coordination and Delivery Framework to support Aboriginal landowners	Delayed

Work on inland water through the reimagined models of water management is progressing with some minor delays in the delivery of reports. NSW is working within the agreed Australian Government timelines to establish a jurisdictional inland water target for NSW.

SEO 16: Aboriginal cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing

There is no current baseline data or measurement for Socio-Economic Outcome 16.

The 2022–2024 Implementation Plan includes a commitment to establish this baseline and a way to measure the target, informed by how NSW Aboriginal communities define ‘strong, supported and flourishing’ languages.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Develop Aboriginal languages data sovereignty principles	Complete
Pilot place-based agreement-making for establishing the languages baseline	Complete
Grow communities’ capability and capacity	On track
Build the Aboriginal archive workforce	On track
Commence a search and discovery of the State Archives collection (Phase 1)	On track
Complete Community Language Centres research paper	On track
Complete an Access to Country research paper and establish supporting partnerships	On track
Develop an Aboriginal Languages Policy Partnership to support the Access to Archive Material Project	Not started

Families and Justice: Socio-Economic Outcomes 10, 11, 12 and 13

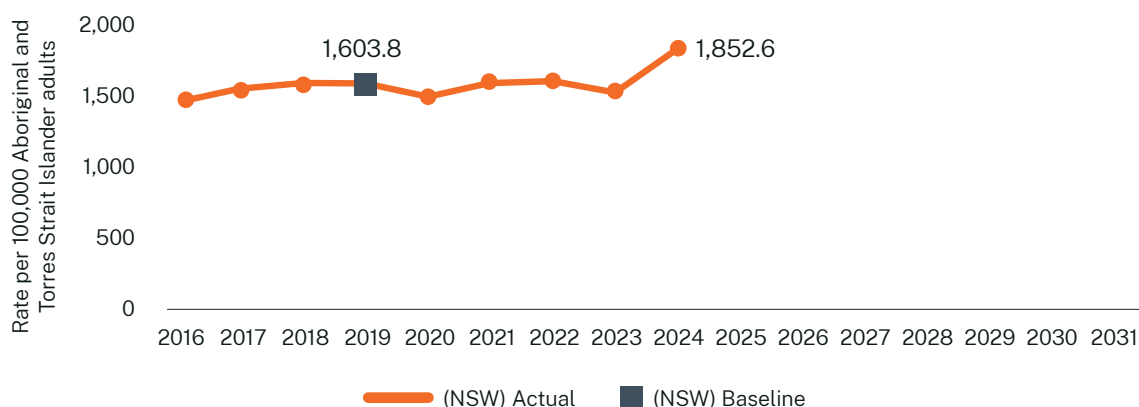
Accountability for these Socio-Economic Outcomes sits with the Department of Communities and Justice.

Socio-Economic Outcome	Progress*	Light
10. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system	Worsening	Red
11. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system	No change	Amber
12. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system	Improvement	Green
13. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe	No assessment	N/A

* Progress reflects Productivity Commission assessments¹ and compares current rates to the baseline year of 2018–19

SEO 10: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system

Measure: Age-standardised imprisonment rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in NSW



Source: ABS

If current trends continue, this target will not be achieved by 2031. The rate of Aboriginal people in custody was 1,603.8 people per 100,000 in the baseline year (June 2019). This has increased to 1,852.6 per 100,000 in June 2024.⁹

In June 2024, there were 4,039 Aboriginal adults in custody, which is 31.3% of the adult custody population¹⁰ – both figures are the highest on record.

⁹ www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area10. Note that the Productivity Commission has revised historical population rates for this socio-economic target based on revised population estimates published by the ABS in its 24 July 2024 release, available here: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-and-projections-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/2011-2031

¹⁰ See June 2024 quarterly report: <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/documents/publications/aboriginal-or/aor-2024/cjs-aboriginal-over-representation-quarterly-jun-2024.pdf>

The number of Aboriginal people in custody increased by 343 or 9.3% in the 12 months to June 2024. Both the number of Aboriginal men (up 294 or 8.7%) and Aboriginal women (up 49 or 15.3%) increased from June 2023 to June 2024. The increase is solely due to a higher number of Aboriginal people being remanded in custody after bail refusal. In June 2024, the number of Aboriginal people on remand in NSW was the highest on record (1,891). The number of Aboriginal people on remand increased by 425 or 29.0% since June 2023.

As at June 2024, almost half (46.8%) of Aboriginal adults in custody were on remand.

By comparison, Aboriginal people in sentenced custody fell by 82 from June 2023 to 2,148 in June 2024 (or down 3.7%).

The main drivers contributing to the increase in the number of Aboriginal people on remand are an increase in the number of charges by police against Aboriginal people, and an increase in the number of bail refusals for Aboriginal defendants by police and by the courts.¹¹

Through NSW CAPO-led consultations, Aboriginal communities across NSW have continually reinforced their deep levels of frustration that there has been little meaningful progress towards the necessary government transformation and structural changes required to make progress towards this target. This includes:

- legislative, policy and practice changes to reduce reliance on policing, bail refusal and imprisonment
- increased investment in communities, including in basic infrastructure, housing, family support, education, health and disability support
- holistic and culturally safe legal assistance provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services
- strengthening the ACCO sector to deliver more services, by providers preferred and trusted by Aboriginal people, which deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Further engagement is encouraged from the NSW Police Force, Corrective Services NSW, Youth Justice NSW, Justice Health and other key agencies that directly influence contact between Aboriginal people and the criminal legal system.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

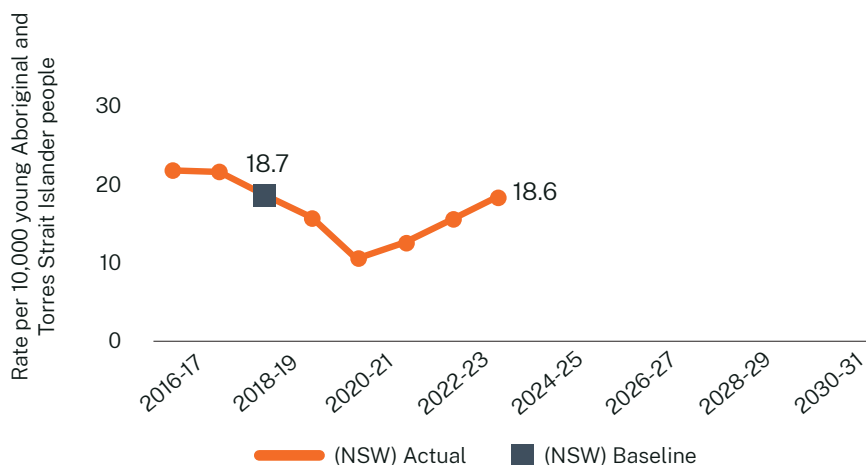
Action	Progress
Expand the Justice Reinvestment Program to address underlying causes of crime for Aboriginal people	On track
Identify gaps in existing diversion programs and implement a program/s to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal defendants	On track
Implement performance targets and management processes for existing court diversion programs	On track
Implement a program to support Aboriginal people on bail	On track
Expand and strengthen Circle Sentencing	On track
Improve the engagement of Aboriginal offenders on supervised order	On track
Improve the current framework for engaging Aboriginal people on community-based orders on the Balund-a Program	On track

¹¹ <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/documents/publications/aboriginal-or/aor-2024/cjs-aboriginal-over-representation-quarterly-jun-2024.pdf>

Action	Progress
Increase the role of Aboriginal communities and organisations, including Elders and respected community members, in decision-making for corrections programs and policies	On track
Co-design and test a culturally appropriate, trauma-informed corrections model	On track
Develop a Throughcare model to reduce the number of Aboriginal people returning to prison	On track
ALS Bail Advocacy and Support Program	On track
Conduct a jurisdictional scan to identify diversion programs that could be implemented to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW	Delayed
Optimise existing court diversion programs to increase successful diversion	Delayed
Design a young adult problem-solving court model, including learnings from the Youth Jurisdiction and staged response options	Delayed
Implement new ways to include the particular circumstances of Aboriginal offenders in the sentencing exercise	Delayed
Co-design a place-based community policing model involving local service coordination to provide diversion options for Aboriginal adults	Not started
Align the next iteration of the NSW Police Force Aboriginal Strategic Direction with the Stronger Partnerships elements of the National Agreement, in partnership with Aboriginal communities and organisations	Not started
Enhance the cultural capabilities of the NSW Police Force through a project to be developed in partnership with the Aboriginal Legal Service and other community stakeholders	Not started
Exploration of initiatives to divert people from arrest, including mental health diversion	Not started
Optimise the current bail system to remove barriers to bail with a focus on the impact of remand	Planning
Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people obtaining parole at their earliest release date	Not started
Establish a Short-term Remand Project in the Local Court	Not started
Undertake a cultural audit of Community Corrections policies and procedures	Planning
Include Aboriginal Elders and respected community members in decision-making across diversion, bail determinations, sentencing, parole, monitoring of orders and breach proceedings	Not started
Test new and improved ways of administering bail in one court location	Not started
Test new ways of sentencing Aboriginal defendants	Not started
Increase the use of community-based sentences	Planning

SEO 11: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system

Measure: Rate of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in detention in NSW on an average day



Source: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

The rate of Aboriginal young people in detention has increased from 15.8 per 10,000 young people in June 2019 to 18.6 per 10,000 young people in June 2024.¹²

NSW is not on track to meet the Closing the Gap target to reduce the rate of Aboriginal children in detention by 2031. In 2024, NSW imprisoned the highest number of Aboriginal children since the Closing the Gap target was set in June 2019.

In June 2024, there were 145 Aboriginal children in detention, which is 58.7% of the youth detention population.¹³ The number of Aboriginal children in detention is now 45 more than in June 2023 (an increase of 45.0%).

The overwhelming majority of Aboriginal children in detention are on remand (78.6%). In June 2024, there were 114 Aboriginal children on remand (up 35 or 44.3% since June 2023) and 31 Aboriginal children in sentenced custody (up 10 or 47.6%).

The main drivers contributing to the increase in the number of Aboriginal children on remand are an increase in the number of Aboriginal children being proceeded against to court by police, and a decrease in the number of Aboriginal children being diverted from the formal criminal process by police.¹⁴ The offences most commonly proceeded against by police resulting in Aboriginal children being imprisoned on remand include car theft (29.8%) and break and enter (21.1%). As at June 2024, more than half (50.9%) of incarcerated Aboriginal children in NSW were in detention for these offences.

Three-quarters (75.4%) of Aboriginal children on remand are from regional NSW (up 53.6% or 30 children in the 12 months from June 2023).

Through NSW CAPO-led consultation, Aboriginal communities have voiced concerns that NSW is off track to reduce the rate of Aboriginal children in prison for the first time. NSW CAPO representatives also reiterate concerns that the NSW Government's legislative changes this year, including laws that restrict access to bail for young people, and policing practices conflict with the commitments of the NSW Government under the National Agreement and the NSW Partnership Agreement.

¹² www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area11. Note that the Productivity Commission has revised historical population rates for this socio-economic target based on revised population estimates published by the ABS in its 24 July 2024 release, available here: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-and-projections-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/2011-2031>

¹³ <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/documents/publications/aboriginal-or/aor-2024/cjs-aboriginal-over-representation-quarterly-jun-2024.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/research-evaluations/2024/cjs-aboriginal-over-representation-quarterly-jun-2024.html>

NSW CAPO representatives are also concerned that diversion under the *Young Offenders Act 1997* is decreasing, and Aboriginal children continue to fail to benefit from diversion to the same extent as non-Aboriginal children. There is also concern about the ongoing disparity in access for children in regional areas to the Youth Koori Court, specialist Children’s Court Magistrates, and adolescent community and health services.

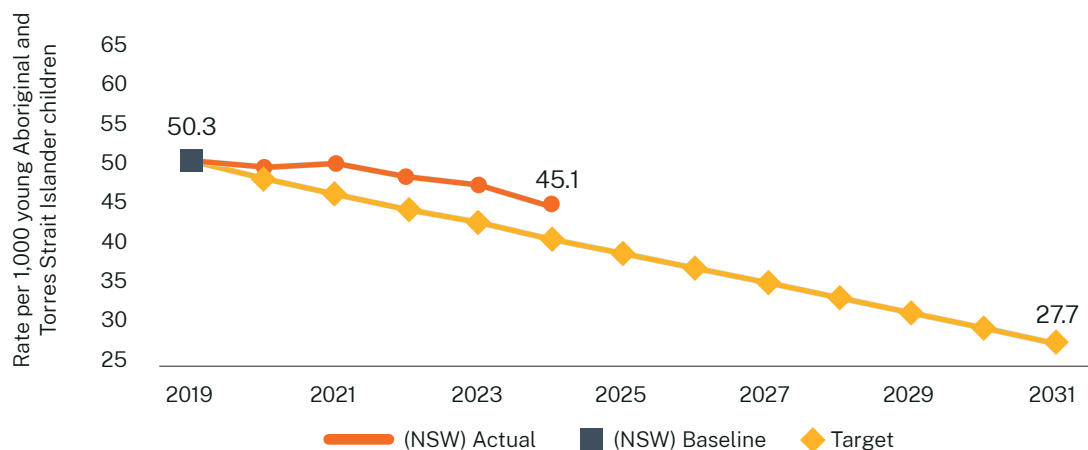
Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Develop therapeutic pathways for young people	On track
Aboriginal Legal Service Bail Advocacy Program	On track
Strengthen and expand the Short-Term Remand project in the Children’s Court	On track
Develop an Aboriginal Throughcare Strategy to better support Aboriginal children and young people leaving custody	On track
Develop an Aboriginal Justice Partnership that includes building the Aboriginal justice sector, addressing systemic racism and sharing of data and information regionally ¹⁵	On track
Develop a cultural safety and inclusivity approach for Closing the Gap activities	Planning
Co-design a service integration model with the Department of Education, NSW Police Force and other key agencies and services to prevent entry into the criminal justice system	Planning
Strengthen community-led early assistance and support programs across NSW	Planning
Reduce the number of young people arrested, including through increased diversionary actions	Planning
Explore options to identify and support the children with parents/primary carers and kin in custody	Planning
Optimise legislation to offer alternatives to criminal offence charging for non-violence offences	Planning
Divert children and young people into relevant supports and services	Planning
Identify and implement actions to reduce the number of bail refusals, breaches and bail revocations for Aboriginal young people	Planning
Explore how to improve diversion under the <i>Young Offenders Act 1997</i> , including identifying barriers and alternatives	Planning
Cultural therapeutic model for the Children’s Court	Planning
Co-design a family-centred residential/outreach model	Planning
Co-design and implement an early magistrates bail determination pilot	Not started
Co-design a youth community reintegration panel pilot (informed by the Throughcare Strategy)	Planning
Co-design community-led local initiatives with young people to reduce reoffending (informed by the Throughcare Strategy)	Planning

¹⁵ The Aboriginal Justice Partnership supports shared decision-making and partnership across targets 10, 11 and 13 and is relevant to all 3 work programs.

SEO 12: Aboriginal children are not over-represented in the child protection system

Measure: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–17 in out-of-home care in NSW



Data source: NSW Government, ABS

NSW is showing some improvement in this Socio-Economic Outcome area, but is not on track to deliver the target. The rate of Aboriginal children in out-of-home care (OOHC) at June 2024 was 45.1 per 1,000, compared with 50.3 per 1,000 in June 2019.¹⁶

In 2023–24, Aboriginal children were removed and placed in OOHC at 10 times the rate of non-Aboriginal children.¹⁷

The rate of Aboriginal children in OOHC has shown a minor decrease from 47.3 per 1,000 as at 30 June 2023. The number of Aboriginal children entering OOHC (807) was lower than the number of Aboriginal children exiting OOHC (1,067) in 2023–24,¹⁸ leading to an overall decline in the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC. However, the number of Aboriginal children being restored has declined. The number of Aboriginal children restored to their parents in 2023–24 was 159, which is a decrease of 3% compared with 2022–23, when 164 children were restored. This is also 21% fewer than the number of children restored to their parents in 2018–19, when 202 Aboriginal children were restored.¹⁹

The proportion of Aboriginal children in OOHC (of total children in OOHC) has increased to 45.1%, a 0.5 pp increase compared to 2022–23 and up 4 pp from 2019–20.²⁰ While the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC has decreased during the period, the number of non-Aboriginal children in OOHC is declining at a faster rate than Aboriginal children.

Significant structural reform and additional family supports are required to meet the target of 27.7 per 1,000 Aboriginal children aged 0–17 years in OOHC and address the unacceptably high rates of Aboriginal children in OOHC.

16 www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area12. Note that the Productivity Commission has revised historical population rates for this socio-economic target based on revised population estimates published by the ABS in its 24 July 2024 release, available here: www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-and-projections-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/2011-2031

17 <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/dcj.statistics/viz/Aboriginal-ledDataSharingChildProtectionandOut-of-homeCareStatistics/Tableofcontents?publish=yes>

18 <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/families-and-communities-statistics/annual-statistical-reports.html>

19 <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/dcj.statistics/viz/Aboriginal-ledDataSharingChildProtectionandOut-of-homeCareStatistics/Tableofcontents?publish=yes>

20 <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/about-us/families-and-communities-statistics/annual-statistical-reports/asr-landing-page/asr-cft-oohc.html>

Costs and funding

The overall cost of the OOHC sector is increasing. The Audit Office of NSW found that from 2018–19 to 2022–23, the costs of OOHC increased from \$1.39 billion annually, to \$1.9 billion annually, a 36% increase in the 5-year period, or an average increase of just over 7% each year.²¹ The funding commitment for ACCOs to support targeted early intervention (TEI) services decreased from \$13.8 million in 2022–23 to \$13.5 million in 2023–24. There was a slight increase in the funding commitment for family preservation, from \$13.4 million to \$15.1 million over the same period.²² However, without a major shift in investment at the front end to enable ACCOs to provide TEI and family preservation services, we will not prevent more children entering OOHC. In 2024–25, the funding commitment to ACCOs for both programs increased (\$19.7 million for TEI and \$15.4 million for family preservation).²³

Although the data indicates significant challenges to reducing the overall number of Aboriginal children entering care, there are opportunities for the NSW Government to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal families, ACCOs and communities to facilitate system-wide transformation and progress self-determination.

Key priorities identified through NSW CAPO consultations and regular community engagements include the following:

1. Aboriginal communities and ACCOs must lead child protection decision-making at a local and regional level, and the government must recognise the importance of Aboriginal community leadership in the process.
2. Governments must invest in needs-based, flexible funding for ACCOs – for instance, in early intervention and family preservation services. Plans to increase investment to 30% for TEI services funding are currently unrealised (at 7.2% for 2023–24).
3. There is strong community support for the establishment of a NSW Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People. This independent role would operate outside existing government structures, with the power to investigate, oversee and monitor crucial reforms to the child protection system. It would be a crucial form of system accountability.
4. There must be greater accountability and transparency in the ways government engages with the community to achieve real change for Aboriginal children, young people and families.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Aboriginal Legal Service Child & Family Advocacy Support	On track
NSW Human Services Investment Plan	On track
Casework quality assurance	On track
Cultural capability training	On track
Aboriginal Family Preservation Model	On track
Reallocation of Family Preservation Permanency Support Program funding	On track

21 www.audit.nsw.gov.au/our-work/reports/oversight-of-the-child-protection-system#:~:text=Findings,in%20the%20child%20protection%20process.

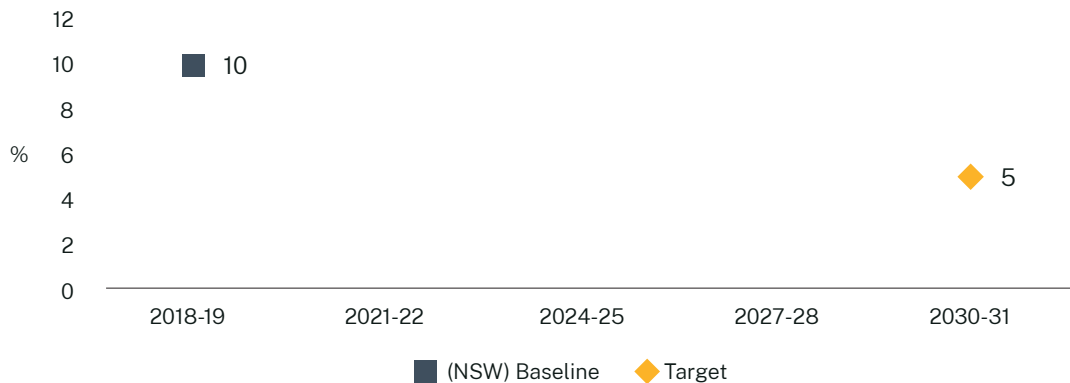
22 <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/dcj.statistics/viz/Aboriginal-ledDataSharingChildProtectionandOut-of-homeCareStatistics/Tableofcontents?publish=yes>

23 <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/dcj.statistics/viz/Aboriginal-ledDataSharingChildProtectionandOut-of-homeCareStatistics/Tableofcontents?publish=yes>

Action	Progress
Holistic partnerships	On track
Strong Families, Our Way	On track
Aboriginal-led commissioning model	On track
Aboriginal Guardian Support Model	Delayed
Review Child Wellbeing Units	Delayed
Transition investment from crisis to early intervention and prevention	Delayed
Develop a new approach to assessment (formerly Structured Decision Making)	Delayed
Case management transfer to ACCOs	Delayed
Family is Culture implementation	Delayed
Full implementation of the Aboriginal Case Management Policy	Delayed

SEO 13: Aboriginal families and households are safe

Measure: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island females 15+ years old in NSW who experienced domestic physical or threatened physical harm



Data source: ABS

There is no new data on the official Closing the Gap measure for this target, which is based on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey. The NSW proxy measure (an alternative measure used to indicate progress against the outcome) is the number of domestic violence-related assault victims (women and children) reported to NSW Police.

NSW is not on track to achieve this target. The number of Aboriginal women and child victim-survivors of domestic violence-related assault for the latest 12-month period (July 2023 to June 2024) was 5,768. Of this cohort, 76.9% are Aboriginal women and 23.1% are Aboriginal children. The number of Aboriginal women and child victim-survivors of domestic violence-related assault in the 12 months to June 2024 is higher than the previous year by 8.3% and 12.3% respectively.

Through NSW CAPO-led consultation, Aboriginal communities and stakeholders have expressed concern that the NSW Government’s emphasis on punitive, carceral responses to domestic and family violence, in the form of tougher bail laws, new criminal offences, and an unprecedented civil order scheme, will do little to improve safety for Aboriginal women and children and will, on the contrary, have unintended perverse effects. This includes increasing the criminalisation of Aboriginal women who are misidentified as primary users of domestic and family violence by police and courts, and further deterring Aboriginal victim-survivors from making a report for fear that a partner will be incarcerated, with the potential to lead to loss of income, housing and the involvement of child protection.

These laws and policies were not introduced in partnership through shared decision-making. There must be investment in early intervention and primary prevention through investment in communities, including in:

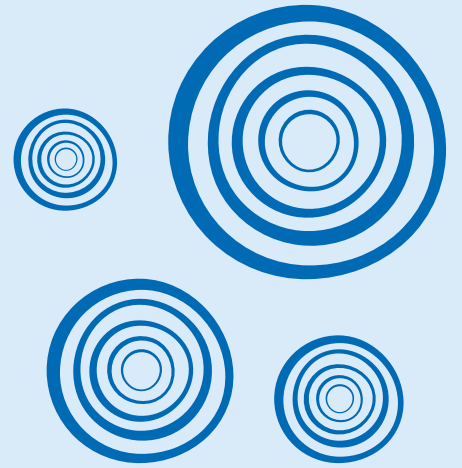
- basic infrastructure, housing, family support, education, health and disability support
- legal assistance provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services
- strengthening of the ACCO sector to deliver more services by providers preferred and trusted by Aboriginal people, which deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

In particular, there must be investment in ACCOs to provide more family law services to Aboriginal people, and in men’s and boys’ programs that adopt a culturally safe healing approach.

Progress on NSW Implementation Plan actions

Action	Progress
Establishment of Aboriginal Women’s Advisory Network (AWAN)	Completed
Development and implementation of a plan to hold statewide conference in 2023	Completed
Develop a specific Aboriginal Domestic, Family and Sexual Violence Plan for NSW to act as a framework, resource and practice guide for ACCOs, government and the non-government sector (formerly named ‘Co-design a plan for early intervention and prevention focused on recovery and healing’)	On track





National Agreement reporting requirements

5

National Agreement reporting requirements

Annual report requirements	Relevant sections
Parties will include in their annual reports (Clauses 118 and 119) information on partnerships, including the number of partnerships, those that have been reviewed, for each partnership which strong partnership elements are met and unmet, and what has been achieved through the partnerships. (Clause 37)	Priority Reform 1
Parties will include in their Jurisdictional annual reports information on action taken to strengthen the community-controlled sector based on the elements of a strong sector, as outlined in Clauses 118 and 119. (Clause 47)	Priority Reform 2
Parties will include in their annual reports information on how they are undertaking and meeting the transformation elements. (Clause 65)	Priority Reform 3
Parties will include in their annual reports information on action taken to improve access to data and information by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations. (Clause 73)	Priority Reform 4
Parties, by July 2022, agree to review and identify current spending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services to identify reprioritisation opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly to community-controlled organisations. Actions taken to implement the outcomes of these reviews will be included in Jurisdictional implementation plans and annual reports. (Clause 113)	Priority Reform 2
<p>The Parties agree to make public information on their progress on the Agreement and their Implementation Plans through annual public reports. The annual public reports will: (Clause 118)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> draw from the dashboard and annual Productivity Commission data compilation report, to ensure consistency of measures of progress include information on efforts to implement this Agreement's 4 Priority Reform areas, particularly outlining how implementation aligns with the principles for action demonstrate how efforts, investment and actions are aligned and support the achievement of Closing the Gap goals list the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that have been allocated funding for the purposes of Clause 24, 55a and 55b, and 135 of this Agreement; and subject to confidentiality requirements, also list the names of the organisations and the amount allocated. (Clause 118) 	<p>Socio-Economic Outcomes</p> <p>Priority Reforms</p> <p>Throughout</p> <p>Information on spending with ACCOs is included under Priority Reform 2</p>
Be tabled in parliament (Clause 119)	Tabled in 2025

Appendix A: Key terms



Appendix A: Key terms

Aboriginal Data: Aboriginal Data can include Lore, knowledges, stories, customs, art and ways of life. It can be these things and much more, including any ‘information or knowledge, in any format or medium, which is about and may affect Indigenous peoples both collectively and individually’.

Aboriginal Data Sovereignty (ADS): The right of Aboriginal people to ‘exercise ownership over [Aboriginal] Data. Ownership of data can be expressed through the creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse of [Aboriginal] Data’ (taken from Maiam nayri Wingara’s definition of the broader Indigenous Data Sovereignty).

Aboriginal Data Governance (ADG): This is ‘the enactment of [Aboriginal] Data Sovereignty and refers to the mechanisms that support [Aboriginal] decision-making on how data are controlled, collected, interpreted, accessed, stored’. This can include policies and practices pertaining to the management of Aboriginal Data by Aboriginal people.

Source: NSW CAPO; Gage L. (2023), reviewed and feedback sourced by Closing the Gap Priority Reform 4 Joint NSW CAPO/ NSW Government Team, edited by Neon Marketing; Wahlin, L., Aboriginal Data Governance in NSW in Practice. <https://linktr.ee/aboriginaldatasovereignty>

Note: The 2022–2024 Implementation Plan used the terminology of ‘Indigenous Data Sovereignty’, a global term that is also used by some in Australia. Following direct consultation with Aboriginal communities and relevant stakeholders, NSW CAPO formed the position that the term ‘Aboriginal’ most accurately reflects the communities, lands, cultures and rightsholders that will be directly involved in our work, the scope of which is limited to the state of NSW. In NSW, the partnership now refers to relevant aspects of Priority Reform 4 as ‘Aboriginal Data Sovereignty’. It is hoped that this terminology is foremostly respectful and appropriate, and it is not intended to preclude Torres Strait Islander people living and/or working in NSW.

More information

aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/closingthegap

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