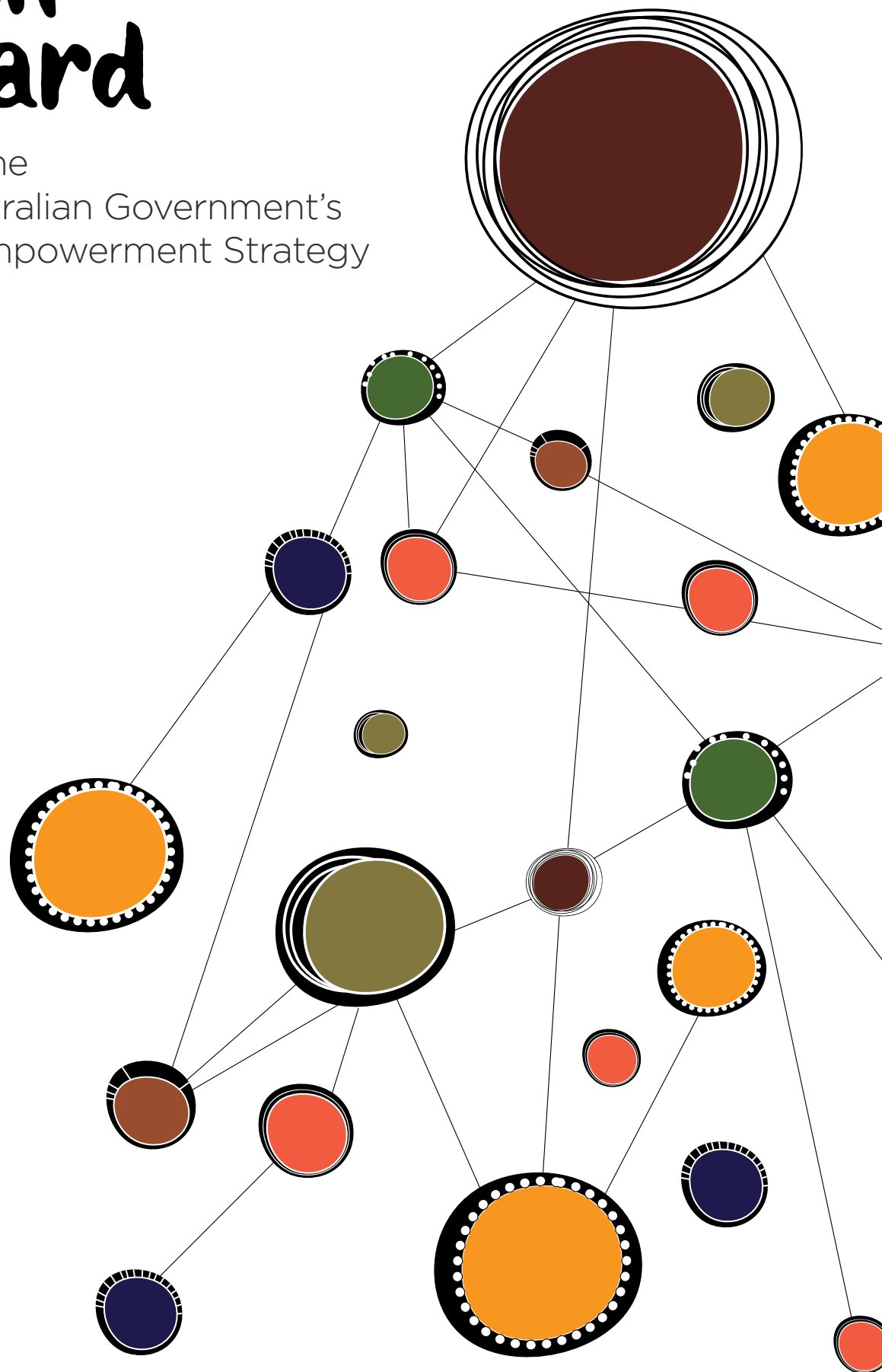


A Path Forward

Developing the
Western Australian Government's
Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy





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A path forward

About this discussion paper

The Western Australian Government is committed to working with Aboriginal people for better social, economic, health and cultural outcomes. This will be most effective if the State Government's agencies are all united by a shared strategic vision.

All parts of our society, and not just the State Government, have a role in improving these outcomes. It is nevertheless important for State agencies to have a clear common direction and consistent logic.

This strategic foundation will enable the State Government to work more coherently as a whole, and allow it to work better with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations; Commonwealth and local governments; the private and philanthropic sectors and the broader society. A whole-of-government strategy will also ensure transparency and accountability to the Western Australian community.

While the Government already has a range of relevant strategies, frameworks, policies and plans, these generally focus on a single agency or subject area. A whole-of-government strategy can strengthen these by showing how they fit into the bigger picture.

The strategy's focus must span generations to see through the sustained changes that will be required. This means it must use high-level concepts that will stay relevant across changes of government. Action planning around specific programs and initiatives will occur on shorter time frames and at a regional level. Across its lifespan, the strategy will need to be flexible and responsive to changes in circumstances.

What is in this discussion paper

This discussion paper begins with a description of the engagement and research that has guided the State Government's thinking so far.

It then explores the potential goals and principles for the strategy.

The main body of the paper proposes some key elements for the strategy, describing how these would contribute to the overall goal.

The paper goes on to outline the framework that the strategy will fit into, including governance, implementation, accountability, measurement, evaluation and review.

Lastly, the paper describes the next steps in developing the final strategy.



Aboriginal rangers working on a crocodile fence at Ord River Nature Reserve (Department of Biodiversity, Conservations and Attractions)

We want to hear from you

A strategy about outcomes for Aboriginal people must be built around Aboriginal people's views, priorities, voices, and aspirations.

The starting point for this discussion paper was to listen to what Aboriginal people have told Government already. In recognition of the problem of 'consultation fatigue', the Government reviewed a significant body of existing advocacy, engagement and research, as detailed in the next section.

Aboriginal people have also played key roles in each step of developing the discussion paper.

To develop a strategy that reflects a broad shared sense of purpose and direction, the Government is seeking input from Aboriginal people and a range of other stakeholders, based on the following three key questions:

1. Are the main ideas right?

Do you agree with the description of the overall goal, principles, strategic elements and framework? Would you change or add anything?

2. Are we using the right words?

You might broadly agree with the main ideas, but want to see them expressed using different language. We welcome your recommendations. In particular, we are interested in whether the term "Aboriginal people" should be used or whether other terms such as "First Nations" would be more appropriate.

3. What else should we be thinking about?

You may have a view on how the strategy should be implemented in a particular region or subject area, or examples of current good practice. Your ideas are valuable to us.

How to get in contact

Please send written submissions to:



aboriginalpolicy@dpc.wa.gov.au



(08) 6552 5001



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West Perth WA 6005**



**or call the
Aboriginal Policy and
Coordination Unit**

(08) 6552 5000

Submissions are open until **Friday 28 February 2020**. Please note that, unless you request confidentiality, your views may be published in part or in full and will be subject to Freedom of Information laws.

Engagement and research to date

This discussion paper brings together key messages from Aboriginal people across the State, as well as other research, reviews and reports. Initial work towards a State Government strategy began when the Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit was established within the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) in July 2017.

DPC considered a large range of reports and advocacy documents in which Aboriginal people had previously told the Government what needed to change, as well as other significant reports and reviews that made relevant recommendations (p7).

Current State policies, frameworks, and strategies were reviewed, along with experiences from other parts of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States. Lessons were drawn from a range of innovative place-based approaches to Aboriginal wellbeing (p7).

DPC officers also attended and listened carefully at meetings where Aboriginal people came together to speak about their priorities (p14).

In 2017-18, as part of the refresh of the national Closing the Gap agenda, the State Government undertook a series of community workshops in locations across the State, hosted by local Aboriginal organisations. In addition, a submission process sought advice about the critical issues facing Aboriginal people and key priorities for the future.

This discussion paper also reflects the State Government's ongoing engagement with Aboriginal communities and organisations in relation to its Statement of Intent on Aboriginal youth suicide, released in May 2019.

In developing this discussion paper, approximately 100 key Aboriginal organisations around the State were approached for their initial views on the core concepts and proposed strategic elements. Their feedback has been critical in shaping and refining this discussion paper.

Finally, the Government has been working closely with the Interim Aboriginal Working Group, a 13-member group appointed by representatives of a broad field of Aboriginal organisations at the WA Closing the Gap Partnership Design Forum in March 2019. The Working Group members are diverse in terms of region, gender, age and subject-matter expertise, and have provided invaluable insights and guidance to DPC in developing this discussion paper. In June 2019, the Working Group and DPC held a joint workshop to develop the concepts and proposed goal for the strategy.

Members of the Working Group have subsequently been appointed by the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (WAAAC), to enable these key leaders to continue playing a central role in developing and implementing the final strategy.



Yule River Annual On-Country Bush Meeting, 2018 (Department of the Premier and Cabinet)



Aboriginal advocacy reports included:

- Crocodile Hole Report (1991) Kimberley Land Council and Waringarri Resource Centre
- A New Dreaming: Noongar Dialogue 24-25 February 2010 (2010) South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council
- Final report of the Indigenous Implementation Board (2011) Indigenous Implementation Board (WA)
- WAAAC 2014 Summit Final Report (2015) Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council
- Redfern Statement (2016) National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and 17 other Indigenous Peak Bodies
- Cultural Solutions: Shared Pathways for Engagement in the Kimberley (2017)
- Uluru Statement from the Heart (2017)
- Martu Leadership Program (2017) Kanyirninpa Jukurrpa and SVA Consulting
- Pilbara Aboriginal Voice (Kakurrka Muri) Meeting Outcomes Report (2018) Pilbara Aboriginal Voice
- Change in wellbeing indicators of Pilbara Aboriginal people: 2001-2016 (2018) John Taylor
- Kimberley Aboriginal Caring for Culture Plan (2019) Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

Engagement meetings included:

- Yule River Meeting (2018, 2019)
- Kimberley combined AGM (2017, 2018)
- National Native Title Conference (2018)
- North-West Aboriginal Women's Leadership Conference (2018)
- Desert PBC Alliance (2018)
- South West forum on accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs (2018)
- Commissioner for Children and Young People – Aboriginal Forum (2018)
- WA Closing the Gap Partnership Design Forum (2019)
- East Kimberley workshop on pooled funding for Aboriginal development (2019)

Official reports and reviews included:

- Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991)
- Bringing Them Home (1997) Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
- Western Australian Parliament's Apology to the Stolen Generations (1997)
- Gordon Report – Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities (2002)
- Law Reform Commission of Western Australia's report on Aboriginal Customary Laws (2006)
- Casey Review (2007) Department of Indigenous Affairs
- Australian Parliament's Apology to Australia's Indigenous Peoples (2008)
- Hope Report into the suicides of Kimberley people (2008)
- Holman Review: A Promising Future: WA Aboriginal Health Progress (2014) Department of Health
- Empowered Communities: Design Report (2015)
- Learnings from the Message Stick (2016) Education and Health Standing Committee
- Bringing Them Home: 20 Years On (2017) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
- Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2017)
- Commonwealth Department of Health's My Life My Lead: Report on the national consultations (2017)
- Report on outcomes for Stolen Generations and descendants (2018) Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
- Sustainable Health Review (2019)
- Coronial Inquest into the suicides of young Kimberley people (2019)

Examples of place-based approaches

- Roebourne 6718 Advantage and West Pilbara Plan
- Dampier Peninsula Family Empowerment Partnership
- South West Native Title Settlement and others currently under negotiation
- Family law services and driver licencing in Martu country
- Empowered Communities in East Kimberley, West Kimberley and Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
- Murdi Paaki regional assembly and Bourke Justice Reinvestment in NSW



Overall goal

Aboriginal people have consistently said the Government should focus on a positive, strength-based vision, with the overall goal defined on Aboriginal people's own terms.

The Government has heard many different ways of describing the goal we should be striving to achieve together – wellbeing, prosperity, flourishing, healthy lives, freedom, equality, development, walking in two worlds, healing, advancement, self-determination, and more. Aboriginal people have spoken about the right to 'take back care, control and responsibility for our communities', and the aspiration to create 'safe families, clever families, working families and healthy families'.

A joint workshop between Government officers and the Interim Aboriginal Working Group was held in June 2019 to refine the concepts and language for this discussion paper. There was consensus about the importance of healthy and safe communities that support Aboriginal people to live a culturally rich way of life. Working Group members spoke about Aboriginal people being guardians of their own futures, in partnership with government. An important insight was that it is not for the Government, or anyone else, to define what 'success' looks like – Aboriginal people must be free to make their own decisions about what makes a 'good life' and how to achieve it.

Drawing on the outcomes of the June workshop, and the subsequent work of the Interim Aboriginal Working Group, the overall goal for the strategy is proposed below.

Aboriginal people, families and communities being empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.

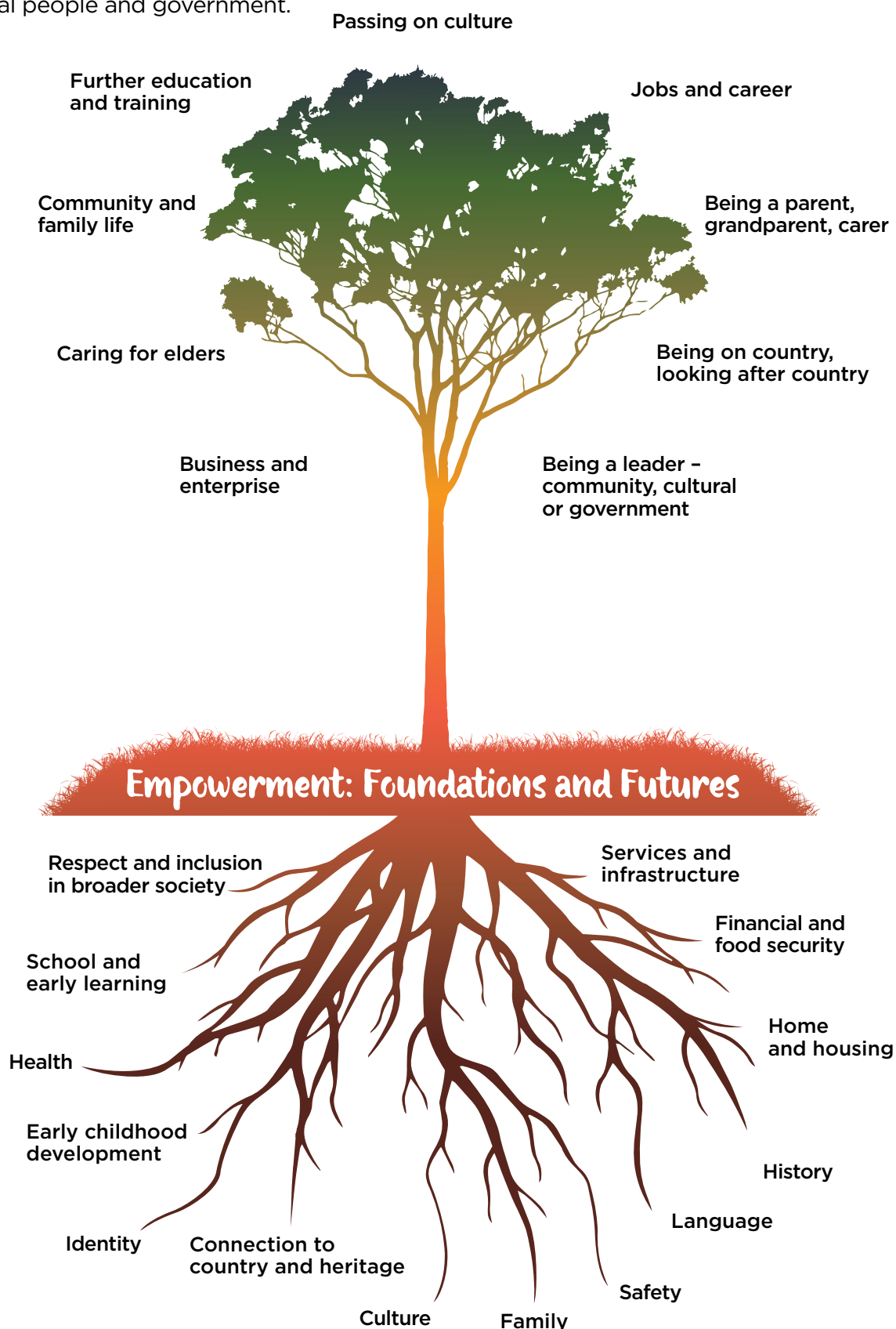
While this goal may appear modest, it presents a tremendous challenge – addressing the ongoing effects of Western Australia's history. European settlement and the policies of successive governments have had enormous impacts on Aboriginal people. These impacts, particularly dispossession and the stolen generations, have left a legacy of trauma and loss that continues to affect Aboriginal people, their families and their communities.

Even today, systems and policies that attempt to respect the principle of equality may have unintended discriminatory effects. Racial discrimination and implicit racial bias continue to hold back progress within government and the broader society, despite considerable improvements in recent years.

Achieving the goal described above will be a multi-generational undertaking and require real and lasting change in the relationship between Aboriginal people and government.

It will benefit not just Aboriginal people, families and communities, but Western Australia as a whole. Healing the wounds of the past – and the present – will make our society fairer, and all of our lives richer.

The diagram below is intended to capture the essential idea of the goal by showing a person's freedom to choose their own futures, starting from a secure foundation:



Principles

A set of principles will underpin the strategy. Some proposed principles that have emerged from previous engagement and research are set out below.

Empowerment and self-determination

- Government systems, structures, policies and programs should contribute to Aboriginal people's empowerment and self-determination.
- The government's primary role is to support Aboriginal people, families and communities to solve their own problems.

Culture and country

- Culture is central to Aboriginal people's wellbeing.
- Aboriginal cultures across the State have important differences, as well as similarities.
- Many Aboriginal people have been disconnected from their country and culture by past government policies and actions.
- Aboriginal peoples' relationships to lands and waters – to country – are a key source of cultural and economic value, which can be further enhanced through agreement-making.

Diversity of people and places

- The challenges and opportunities for Aboriginal people can be very different between urban, regional and remote locations, and between different communities.
- Policies and programs should be made as close to the local or regional level as possible; State-wide or national policies and programs should be used only where necessary to achieve their objectives.

Services

- Aboriginal people must be involved in designing and improving systems and initiatives that primarily, or especially, affect Aboriginal people.
- Services to Aboriginal people should be:
 - culturally appropriate and responsive, recognising that in many situations this will be best achieved through service-delivery by Aboriginal people;
 - accessible, so that people are not disadvantaged by geographic location, cultural and language background, or access to technology;
 - place-based and flexible, taking into account the interconnected nature of social, economic and health issues; and
 - family-focused, and responsive to the intergenerational impacts of trauma.
- The government as a whole is accountable for delivering results through coordination between State agencies, Federal and local governments, the private sector and the broader community. Cross-agency flexibility is necessary to address issues that do not fit within traditional agency responsibilities.

Evidence

- Policy should be informed by relevant evidence, including program evaluations from Western Australia and elsewhere, academic research, and Aboriginal people's own experiences, interpreted in an Aboriginal cultural context.
- Evidence should be made available to all participants in decision-making.
- Innovation and flexibility are critical to success; evidence-informed policy does not mean doing only what has been previously proven to work.
- The impact of initiatives must be evaluated over realistic time frames; investment and services should be sustained for long enough to produce measurable results.

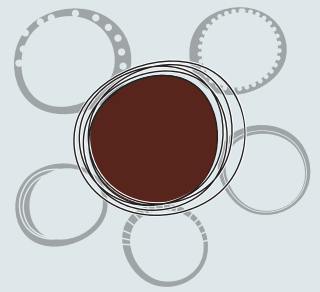
Strategic elements

In all of the engagement and research for developing this discussion paper, the key strategic message is the Government must make room for solutions to emerge from collaborative engagement with Aboriginal people.

In practice, this basic idea can be broken down into the following six strategic elements, which are described in more detail in the next sections.



1. Putting culture at the centre



Supporting Aboriginal people's cultural identities, cultural continuity and cultural authority

Culture is at the heart of a secure foundation for life, and forms the bridge between a person's identity and the futures they might choose.

It can also be seen as a people's entire way of life, including values, beliefs, language, concepts, behaviours, and – crucially – identities. It shapes the way people understand the world and their place in it, how they interact with others, and the aspirations they have for the future. Culture is passed down between generations, with some things changing while others staying constant over time. The history of colonisation and subsequent government policies in Western Australia produced significant, and in some cases deliberate, barriers to the continuity of Aboriginal cultures.

Language, connection to and caring for country, parenting, marriage, religious beliefs, ritual practices, community authority structures, and many other aspects of culture were disrupted, controlled, devalued or prohibited.

This has had profound and lasting impacts which are evident across a range of social, health and economic issues. In particular, recent reports on suicide by young Aboriginal people have identified cultural continuity as a critical protective factor that contributes to resilience and wellbeing.

“When young people know where they belong and who they belong to, they have the ability to understand their cultural ties, they can be whole and have the strength to move forward with sound mental, physical and spiritual belonging.”

**Mark Bin Bakar,
Kimberley Stolen Generations
Aboriginal Corporation.**

Because of this history and its ongoing effects, the Government has an important role to play in supporting Aboriginal people's cultural identities, cultural continuity and cultural authority.



Students at a remote community school learning with an Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (Department of Education)

In addition, Government services and systems must be equally effective and accessible to people of all cultural backgrounds. Aboriginal people often speak about ‘walking in two worlds’, and evidence shows initiatives and services that work from a cultural perspective, in both design and implementation, are generally more effective for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal cultures are also a vital asset that can provide the foundation for Aboriginal peoples’ sustainable economic development, as well as being a significant driver in the State’s broader tourism and arts sectors.

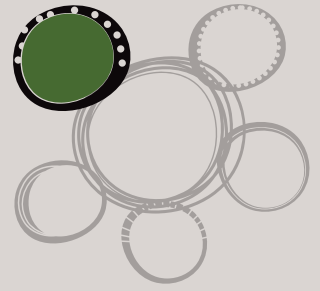
Key ideas:

- a) Valuing, celebrating and promoting Aboriginal peoples’ cultures, languages, relationships to country, knowledge, and heritage.
- b) Recognising the importance of culture to people’s wellbeing and resilience, and the impacts of past government actions on Aboriginal people’s connection to culture and country.
- c) Using agreements between the Government and traditional owner groups to recognise and support Aboriginal people’s cultural identity, cultural continuity, and connection to country and heritage.
- d) Improving the public sector workforces cultural competence and responsiveness, and ensuring Aboriginal people are well-represented and supported at all levels of the public sector, including management and executive.
- e) Reviewing and making necessary changes to systems and services to ensure they build on Aboriginal people’s cultural strengths to improve outcomes.
- f) Investing in initiatives that support cultural identity, continuity and authority – including through native title and land settlements, language and heritage.



WA Police officers and Baldja Moort dancers with patrol cars showcasing artwork by Noongar artist Justin Martin for NAIDOC week (Reconciliation WA).

2. Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement-making



Strengthening or developing structures to enable more decisions to be made at the regional or local level, enabling greater involvement by Aboriginal people in decision-making, and using negotiated agreements to further Aboriginal people's priorities.

Achieving the goal of empowerment does not just require more or better services, but rather a change in the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Government.

This requires a shift from structures that falsely position Aboriginal people as passive, individual consumers of services, to structures that empower Aboriginal people and communities to solve their own problems. Self-determination, while meaning different things to different people, captures the essence of this idea.

Making this change will require structural and system reforms.

Structures that bring decision-making closer to communities allows the decisions to be more responsive to realities on the ground, and to incorporate local knowledge about local conditions. Importantly, it creates space for culturally-informed solutions.

Empowering regions is also a way of answering the long-repeated calls for better coordination – coordination between State government agencies, and coordination between State, Commonwealth and local governments. A regional decision-making structure can act as a centre of gravity capable of bringing all of the other players into its orbit. Decision-makers who live in the area affected by those decisions have better visibility and greater accountability for the outcomes of coordinated actions. This means the best results will come if the State, Commonwealth and local governments all use the same regional structures.



Dampier Peninsula Working Group planning for opportunities and impacts of sealing the Broome-Cape Leveque Road (Department of the Premier and Cabinet)

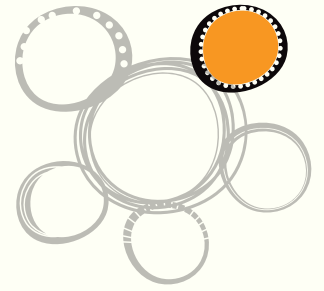
Negotiated agreements between the Government and traditional owner groups offer a powerful, additional mechanism for Aboriginal people to clearly state their priorities and link these to resourcing and other government actions.

The negotiation process can provide a unique platform for engaging with a broad range of State agencies and developing creative and collaborative approaches to economic development and wellbeing.

Key ideas

- a)** Improving government processes and structures to allow more decisions to be made at the regional or local level, including decisions about:
 - developing policy and system reforms;
 - commissioning services, including shared with other agencies; and
 - coordinating service delivery,
 - and ensuring data (including expenditure data) is available at the relevant scale.
- b)** Ensuring Aboriginal people have a formal and systematic role in decision-making processes, encompassing:
 - clear identification of who should be involved and why;
 - different levels of involvement for different types of decisions, from advisory to participation to partnership;
 - different roles for subject-matter expertise (eg health, education, economic development, trauma and healing etc), cultural authority, and community representation; and
 - appropriate supports or processes to accommodate language or cultural barriers to participation.
- c)** Recognising and supporting Aboriginal leadership, representation and engagement, including through:
 - formal recognition of, and where necessary establishment of, regional structures that represent Aboriginal people; and
 - supporting strong and accountable governance in remote communities.
- d)** Using negotiated agreements between the Government and traditional owner groups as a collaborative platform for linking Aboriginal people's priorities to resourcing and other cross-government actions.

3. Enabling Aboriginal-led solutions through improved service commissioning and grant-making



Changing the way services are designed, funded, and procured to:

- i) significantly increase the involvement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations; and**
- ii) support the development of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations' capacity to deliver services to their communities**

For people, families and communities to develop a secure foundation, and choose their own futures, support and assistance may be required from a range of services.

Certain types of services to Aboriginal people are more effective when designed and delivered by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOs).

This is generally true, even recognising that some Aboriginal people may prefer not to use ACCO services because they want to use a mainstream service. For these people, the cultural responsiveness of mainstream services is critical (see page 12, Putting culture at the centre).

The greater effectiveness of ACCOs is clearest for services that depend on voluntary engagement – such as maternal health check-ups, play groups, etc – and services that support clients to make personal changes in their lives – such as healthy lifestyles, youth mentoring, family and domestic violence behaviour change, etc. These services are most effective when clients see the service provider as trusted, legitimate, and culturally safe, and believe the service provider understands them and where they are coming from. ACCOs have unique strengths in these areas.

A vibrant ACCO sector also contributes to communities' broader experience of empowerment and self-determination. ACCOs have a proud history of embodying the principle of 'Aboriginal people, families and communities solving their own problems'.



Blood pressure testing at a health check-up (Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service Aboriginal Corporation)

Currently, many services of this kind are provided by non-Aboriginal organisations through State Government contracts or grants. In some cases, providers form close partnerships with local Aboriginal organisations but, in others, the level of engagement is low. Even where services are delivered by Aboriginal front-line staff, decisions about service design are often

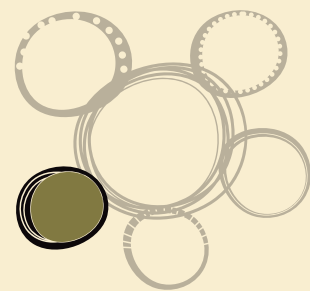
made by non-Aboriginal people who do not have direct experience of the local context.

Changes can be made to policy, practice and systems to significantly increase the involvement of ACCOs in the relevant service areas, and support the development of ACCOs' capacity to deliver services to their communities.

Key ideas

- a)** Improving service-commissioning and grant-making processes to significantly increase the involvement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the types of services mentioned above.
 - Areas to explore include the size, scope and geographic coverage of contracts, the lead-time for new contracts and grant rounds, the processes for advertising contracts and grants, pre-qualification requirements, restricted tenders, and weighted factors for procurement decisions.
 - Where partnership or consortium approaches are used, commissioning agencies can take active steps during the commissioning and contract-management stages to ensure that ACCO partners have sufficient influence to deliver the effectiveness and self-determination objectives described above.
- b)** Supporting the development of Aboriginal providers' organisational capacity.
 - This may include consideration of the length of contracts and sequencing of work across contracts, and in some cases partnership with larger non-Aboriginal providers.
 - Where services are delivered by ACCOs and non-ACCOs in partnership, commissioning agencies should seek information about the partners' plans for gradually increasing ACCO capacity, including plans for transitioning to ACCO-only delivery (where appropriate).
 - It is also recognised that ACCOs are well-placed to improve the capacity of government and non-ACCO service providers in delivering culturally responsive services to Aboriginal clients.

4. Investing more in preventative and early-intervention initiatives

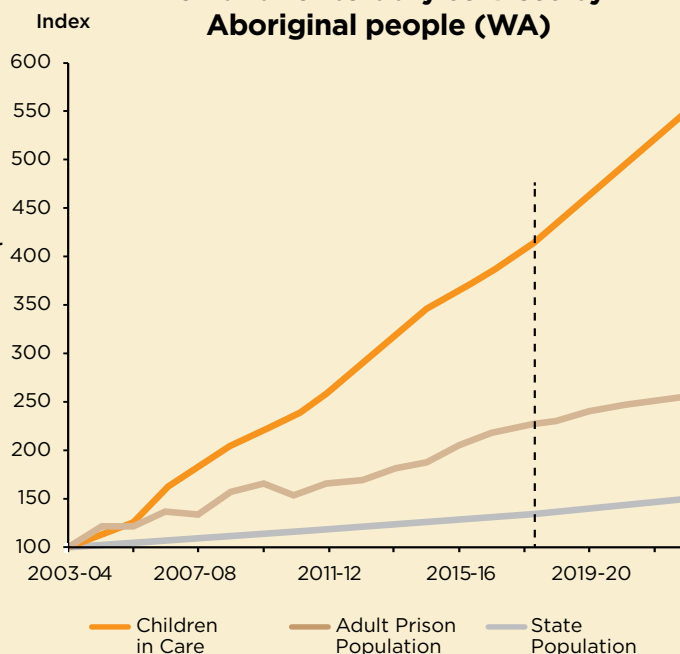


Increasing expenditure on initiatives that improve wellbeing and resilience and thereby reduce the likelihood of contact with acute or crisis services

The impacts of Western Australia's history are such that investment is needed to build up the secure foundations necessary for all Aboriginal people, families and communities to choose their own futures and live good lives.

Currently, State government expenditure in relation to Aboriginal people is skewed towards tertiary, acute or statutory services, including prisons, hospitals, and out-of-home care for children. As well as being more cost-intensive, these services depend more on involuntary or coercive engagement, and involve higher risks.

Demand for tertiary services by Aboriginal people (WA)



Girls learning with technology at an after school program (Roebourne PCYC)

If current trends continue, demand for these 'downstream' services is set to increase significantly in coming years.

Initiatives that can broadly be called 'preventative and early-intervention' can bring about positive changes to reduce Aboriginal people's need to engage with tertiary health services, the child protection system, the justice system, and other acute/crisis services. Initiatives in this category proactively build up resilience, capability, healing, and independence – in short, self-determination.

In many policy areas, there are ways of using existing expenditure more effectively, for example through better and place-based program design, more coordination, pooled funding and strategic budget bids, greater involvement of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, more rigorous outcomes-based management and more efficient administrative processes.

However, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of existing programs will not be sufficient to meet this significant challenge. Intergenerational disadvantage and trauma

have a compounding effect over time, leading to a growing population of at-risk people and a higher level of need per person. Addressing this will require an increase in the scale, reach and variety of preventative services.

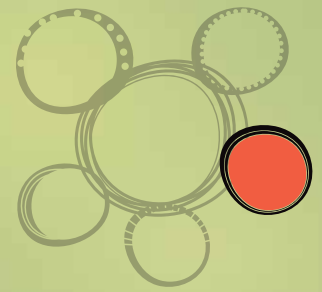
Clearly, any boost to investment must be matched with robust evaluation to ensure that the additional activity is effective. The principles outlined earlier in this paper apply; in particular, the principle that initiatives must be evaluated over realistic time frames that are long enough to produce measurable results. The identified need for increased investment in preventative and early-intervention initiatives can be met in different ways. As well as using standard State Government budget measures, other potential options include:

- innovations in social investment such as social impact bonds;
- greater strategic alignment with corporate and philanthropic investment; and
- negotiating new Commonwealth funding in targeted areas.

Key ideas

- a)** Shifting the balance in expenditure between tertiary or acute services and strength-building, preventative, early-intervention initiatives.
- b)** Robust evaluation of program evaluation to ensure effectiveness of investment.
- c)** In the short-to-medium term, an overall increase in investment in prevention or early-intervention – including (but not limited to) programs focused on strengthening cultural identity and continuity, healing and empowerment initiatives, youth engagement programs, preventative health measures, economic development initiatives, programs focusing on the early years, and initiatives focused on safe and stable housing.
- d)** In remote communities, the investment needs are broader, encompassing infrastructure and service models for essential, municipal and housing services; land tenure changes; community governance and administration; and enterprise assistance. This represents not only an investment in the secure foundation for community residents to choose their own futures, but also an investment in the strength and continuity of cultural identity – a key ingredient for success in other areas.

5. Boosting economic opportunities across all areas of Government activity



Finding innovative ways of boosting Aboriginal people's participation and success in employment and business, with a particular focus on the potential role of land, culture and agreement-making.

Economic participation is critical to the strategy, providing both a secure foundation and rewarding futures.

Every State Government agency and portfolio has a role in supporting Aboriginal people's economic opportunities. This role may be as employer, procurer, regulator, land-holder, funder, educator, facilitator, market-influencer, or champion – the possibilities are enormous. In particular, the transformative potential of land, native title and agreement-making in achieving this goal is only beginning to be realised.

Some policy areas are within the control of Commonwealth or local governments; for these, the State's role lies in advocating for change. More broadly, coordination and cooperation between all levels of government and the private and community sectors are essential for maximising opportunities.

Across remote, regional and urban areas, there are opportunities to build and expand cultural economies. This includes creative artistic outputs (eg visual arts, performance, storytelling, multimedia), cultural maintenance (eg environmental services, language interpreting, cross-cultural consulting), and applied cultural activities (eg producing medicine or cosmetics) – all of which can be further enhanced by tourism. The State Government has a role to play in supporting cultural economies, using the full range of approaches outlined below.

Remote areas face considerable economic challenges, but are also able to draw on impressive strengths, including cultural heritage, environmental values, and a large land base. Over time, with the right supports and a flexible and imaginative approach from government, remote areas can achieve increasing economic independence. Under current conditions, many communities in remote Western Australia are heavily reliant on unemployment payments and programs administered by the Commonwealth government. The systems and rules governing these payments and programs are not working well for remote Aboriginal people. The State Government will therefore need to continue collaborating with the Commonwealth government and Aboriginal communities to bring about positive change.



Award-winning sandalwood joint venture in the Goldfields region

Photographer: Jody D'Arcy

Photo courtesy of Dutjahn Sandalwood Oils (WA Sandalwood)

Key ideas

a) Supply – Support Aboriginal people's employment and business aspirations.

- **Opening horizons** – eg showcasing career options and role models for young people; school-to-work transitions; student mentoring.
- **Lowering barriers** – eg land tenure system and land-use approvals; streamlining regulatory approvals; commercial use of natural resources; addressing infrastructure gaps; residential support for study away from home; ensuring means-tested benefits and services do not penalise or discourage participation.
- **Building capacity** – eg skills, training, formal education, apprenticeships, scholarships, prison-based initiatives; business assistance and support; enterprise development; corporate capacity building; governance of PBCs and community corporations.
- **Facilitating access to capital** – eg leveraging native title settlements; incentives for private investment; divesting land assets; direct public investment; assistance in developing finance applications; supporting corporate and philanthropic opportunities.

b) Demand – Expand markets for Aboriginal employees and businesses.

• **Direct government demand** –

- Government employment policies and practices (including recruiting, retaining, supporting and promoting Aboriginal employees; work experience and training pathways into the public sector; workforce management policy and industrial relations; providing supportive workplaces and monitoring agency performance, including the number of Aboriginal people in management, executive, and entry-level roles, retention rates, and the reasons people give for leaving their position).
- Reviewing the scope of certain public sector functions in regional and remote areas, to identify opportunities for “unbundling” work that can be done by local people on country.

- Government procurement policies and practices, including procurement targets for Aboriginal businesses, both annually and in relation to key projects; and engagement of local contractors or subcontractors for infrastructure and services in remote communities.
- Expanding opportunities for culturally driven on-country work including environmental services, land management, heritage management, and visitor management.

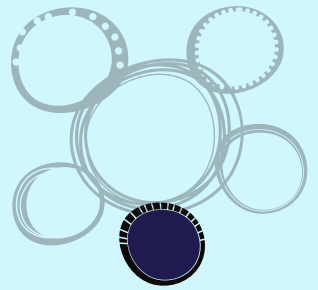
• **Indirect and third party demand** – incentives and information for the private sector to increase Aboriginal employment and procurement.

• **Broader market stimulation** – eg promoting industries with strong potential for Aboriginal participation; regional infrastructure and tourism investment.

c) Connect – Connect Aboriginal people with employers and markets.

- **Championing, promoting** – eg promoting Aboriginal peoples' unique cultural heritage on the national and international stage; helping businesses recruit, retain and promote Aboriginal workers; helping customers find Aboriginal businesses and vice versa.
- **Coordinating** – eg strategic infrastructure investment; regional economic planning; work pipelines across projects and agencies; joined-up tourism experiences; providing guidance to corporate/philanthropic funders.
- **Brokering or facilitating alternative forms of Aboriginal economic participation and partnerships** – eg supporting new alternative business models, partnerships and diversified activities that provide work and income opportunities aligned to community capacity and aspirations.

6. Building cultural understanding and respect



Taking steps to build understanding and promote respect for Aboriginal peoples' cultures, within government and the broader society.

In conversations with Aboriginal people, and in a substantial body of empirical research, racism has been consistently identified as a key barrier to improving outcomes.

Racism can manifest both in the attitudes and behaviours of individuals, and in the way that systems and institutions operate.

It can be conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit. Structural or systemic racism can exist even when the individuals who make up the system are actively trying to prevent racially discriminatory outcomes.



School group learning about Noongar culture and history (Reconciliation WA)

Within government and the broader society, racism can negatively affect Aboriginal people in a number of ways:

- it can have direct impacts on health, mental health, and well-being;
- it may dissuade Aboriginal people from accessing services, or may make those services less effective in improving outcomes;
- it can impact Aboriginal people's economic opportunities, through direct discrimination or by discouraging participation due to anticipated racism; and

- overall, it can act as a barrier to Aboriginal people's full inclusion in Western Australian society, undermining trust and social cohesion with negative consequences for all.

As well as reducing these negative impacts, the Government also has an important positive role in promoting greater understanding, both within State agencies and the broader public, of the State's history and the cultures of its First Peoples.

Key ideas

Public sector

Public sector workforce – cultural responsiveness training and standards

Aboriginal public sector workforce – recruiting, retaining, supporting, advancing and empowering

Identifying and remedy laws, procedures and policies that have discriminatory effects

Countering unconscious bias with training and other mechanisms such as Aboriginal employment and procurement targets

Monitoring data on the experiences of Aboriginal public servants and users of publicly funded services

Improving the accessibility and people's awareness of mechanisms for complaints and rights-enforcement

Broader society

Strong leadership from the Government, promoting positive stories

Public campaigns

Schools embedding Aboriginal histories, cultures and languages into classroom practice, and creating learning environments that build respect for the cultures, experiences and worldviews of Aboriginal people

Sports, recreation, arts and culture providing opportunities for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people to interact and build mutual trust and understanding

Monitoring data on experiences of racism by Aboriginal members of the public

Accessibility and awareness of mechanisms for complaints and rights-enforcement

Framework

A whole-of-government strategy, while valuable, will not by itself be sufficient to achieve the overall goal of empowering Aboriginal people, families and communities to choose their own futures and live good lives.

For this, a comprehensive framework will be required to provide for governance, implementation, accountability, measurement and evaluation, and review of the strategy overall.

Not all of these components can be set out in detail at this stage. Now is a time of unprecedented change in Aboriginal affairs, both at the State and national levels. The structures and systems are likely to evolve considerably in coming years, and so the framework will need to be flexible.

The information below sets out an indication of current and likely future components of the framework. Your feedback on how to make these as effective as possible is welcomed.



Relationship to other strategies, frameworks and policies

There are already a range of Government strategies, frameworks, policies and initiatives, either in place or in development, that will have some overlap with the proposed whole-of-government strategy. It is important the new strategy aligns with these, rather than adding to the complexity. The strategy is therefore intended to:

- guide the Government's approach to native title and agreement-making with traditional owners;
- inform the Government's approach to the Closing the Gap refresh;
- form part of the Government's response to Aboriginal youth suicide;
- inform and support delivery of outcomes for Aboriginal people across the Our Priorities targets;
- provide the proposed office for accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs with a benchmark for reviewing performance and decision-making;
- give effect to elements of the Service Priority Review and the Sustainable Health Review;
- work with the Community Services Outcomes Measurement Framework and supplement the Delivering Community Services in Partnership policy, providing additional guidance in respect of services to Aboriginal people; and
- complement existing frameworks, policies and strategies (for example, but not limited to the Department of Communities' Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation Strategy, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Aboriginal Economic Development Strategy, the WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015-2030, the Department of Education's Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework and the South West Settlement Community Development and Economic Participation Frameworks) and guide the development of future frameworks, strategies and policies.

Governance

The governance landscape in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia is in a period of significant change.

In 2017, the policy and coordination functions of the former Department of Aboriginal Affairs were transferred to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. As a central agency, this Department is well placed to find linkages across initiatives, help solve complex coordination problems, and support a culture of collaboration across government.

The Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee (AACC) was established under the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972 to coordinate the provision of services to Aboriginal people. Its membership includes the heads of relevant State Government Departments and representation from the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council.

In the two years since its chair and secretariat roles have shifted to the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, the AACC's role and prominence have been enhanced, and it has taken on a more strategic and proactive approach.

Currently, the primary mechanism for the formal engagement of Aboriginal people in the State government's policy and strategy processes is the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (WAAAC), also established under the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972. The Government is committed to working with Aboriginal people to develop stronger and more representative mechanisms for formal engagement. As a first step in this process, the Government has appointed a new WAAAC, comprising 13 Aboriginal leaders chosen by their peers, rather than through a standard selection panel process. This new membership represents diversity in terms of region, gender, age and subject-matter expertise.

The newly-appointed WAAAC will lead a process to co-design a new model for Aboriginal people to engage with government at the regional and State levels. The particular structures are likely to differ from region to region, responding to local conditions and existing arrangements.

At the same time as these State-level reforms, two significant developments at the national level have direct implications for Western Australia. First, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has committed to a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to refresh the Closing the Gap agenda, underpinned by an agreement signed on behalf of COAG members and the National Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations.

The newly established Joint Council on Closing the Gap, with ministers from each jurisdiction and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, will finalise the refreshed Closing the Gap framework and targets, and review the 2008 National Indigenous Reform Agreement. It will have an ongoing role in monitoring and implementation.

Secondly, the Australian Government has committed \$7.3 million to 'the co-design of options for a Voice to Parliament for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and 'a model to improve local and regional decision-making'. Whether or not these new structures are entrenched in the Commonwealth Constitution, they will have clear implications for governance and representation arrangements in Western Australia.



Representatives of Aboriginal organisations, WA Closing the Gap Partnership Design Forum, March 2019 (Department of the Premier and Cabinet)



Youth leaders presenting at the Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing workshop in Broome, August 2019 (Department of the Premier and Cabinet)

Implementation

Implementing the strategy will be the responsibility of the State Government as a whole – all agencies, working together. The central agencies – the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Department of Treasury, Department of Finance, and Public Sector Commission – will have additional responsibilities for leadership, stewardship and coordination.

During 2020, the Government will partner with Aboriginal people to develop a State action plan and regional action plans under the strategy. In many regions, Aboriginal people have already taken the lead in telling the Government what their key priorities and preferred approaches are. That work will form the starting point for planning conversations.

These action plans will also form part of the Government's Closing the Gap commitments. A refreshed Closing the Gap framework, including targets and implementation principles, is expected to be finalised by the end of 2019. Each State and Territory government has committed to develop an action plan to achieve the agreed targets. The Western Australian Government intends to meet this commitment through the same planning process used for implementing the State strategy.

Specific subject-areas will also require more detailed plans, strategies or frameworks. In some areas these are already well-established, for example the WA Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Framework 2015-2030, the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy, or the Department of Education's Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework. In other areas, plans and strategies are still in development, for example around homelessness, commissioning services

from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, or the prevention of Aboriginal youth suicide.

An important component of improving outcomes for Aboriginal people is the Our Priorities program. The State Government has set twelve targets for delivery by Government to address a range of complex challenges for our community. One of the targets specifically relates to Aboriginal people, seeking at least a 23% reduction in the number of Aboriginal adults in prison by 2028-29. The broader outcomes of the other targets are also aligned with the proposed elements of the strategy, in particular targets to:

- Create jobs
- Deliver stronger regional economies
- Improve the health and wellbeing of children in the early years, student reading and numeracy, and participation in STEM
- Increase conservation for future generations
- Reduce youth reoffending and illicit drug use

None of these challenges neatly fit within a single agency's responsibility, and so cross-agency Outcome Activity Groups responsible for delivery of the targets have been established. These groups are enabled by a specialist delivery unit to support and coordinate efforts across government. Monitoring and evaluation will enable proactive identification of what is working, and not working, to achieve the priority outcomes. A key input in the identification, design and evaluation of activities will be the voices of Aboriginal people through the WAAAC and through conversations with relevant groups during implementation.

Accountability, Measurement and Evaluation

The State Government is proposing to establish a statutory office of accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs. A strong and transparent accountability mechanism, with statutory powers, independence, and a focus on Aboriginal people, will keep decision-makers focused on getting the best outcomes.

The Government sought feedback about this proposal in mid-to-late 2018 and released a Community Feedback Report in July 2019, which showed widespread support for the proposal. As the next stage in this process, a report will be released providing details on the preferred model as informed by the feedback received during the first consultation process.

A potential function of the proposed statutory office is to promote accountability for the implementation of the whole-of-government strategy. Once the strategy is finalised, a performance measurement framework will be established, enabling the statutory office to track the Government's performance.

As well as monitoring performance – what Government is doing – it will be important to evaluate impact – how effectively the strategy is changing outcomes on the ground.

In recent years there have been two main mechanisms nationally for collecting data about Aboriginal people's social, health and economic outcomes: the annual Closing the Gap report and the less frequent Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators report. Both of these mechanisms are currently under review, as part of the Closing the Gap refresh and following the recent appointment of an Indigenous Policy Evaluation Commissioner to the Productivity Commission.

As part of the refreshed Closing the Gap framework, it is envisaged the State Government will report annually on indicators identified in partnership with Aboriginal people, including region-level data. In addition to this, relevant outcomes data will be captured through annual reporting under the Our Priorities program.

The evaluation of individual programs will remain the responsibility of each agency, with guidance and support provided by the Department of Treasury.



Community information materials about the proposed independent statutory office for accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal Affairs, September 2018 (Department of the Premier and Cabinet).

Reviewing the Strategy

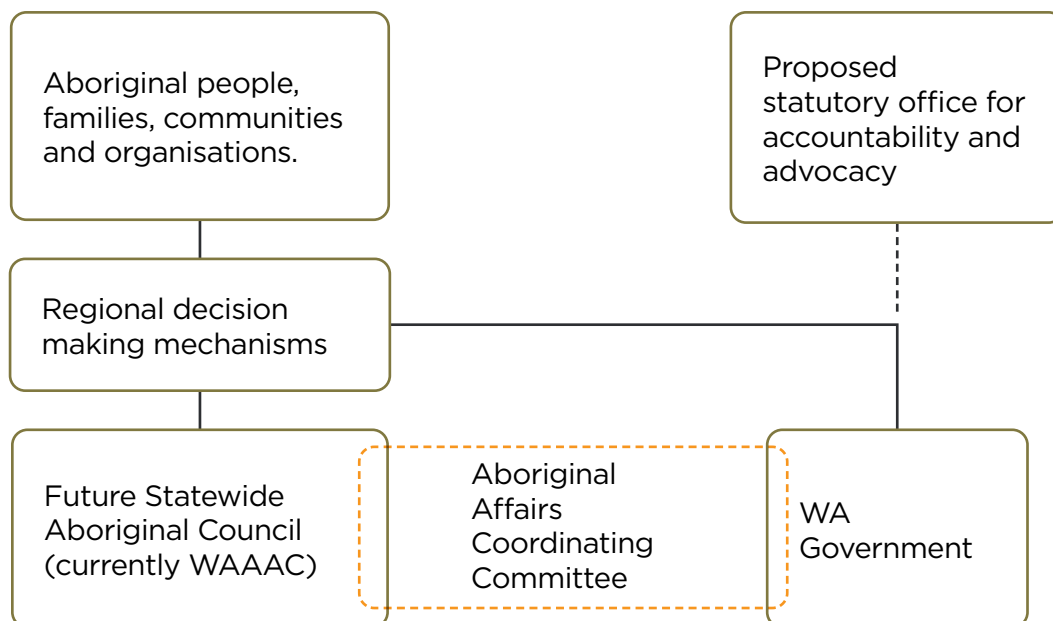
The strategy will be periodically reviewed, both to assess how successfully it is being implemented and to determine whether the strategy itself requires adjusting. It is most appropriate for this review to be Aboriginal-led and independent from the government of the day. The proposed statutory office for accountability and advocacy in Aboriginal affairs could be well placed to lead this review, incorporating community input.

Framework Summary

Goal What we want to achieve	Aboriginal people, families and communities being empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.		
Strategy What will we do	Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy		
Implementation How will we do it	State action plan	Regional action plans	Subject specific plans and strategies
Accountability How to make sure it's working	Statutory office for accountability and advocacy		Closing the Gap data and reporting

Governance

How decisions will be made



Next steps in developing the Strategy

The Government is seeking the views of Aboriginal people and organisations, government agencies at the State, Commonwealth and local levels, and the broader community, in relation to this discussion paper.

All of that feedback will be reviewed by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet working closely with the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council.

It is intended that a formal government-endorsed strategy will be finalised in early 2020, with implementation planning beginning soon after.

1. Are the main ideas right?

Do you agree with the description of the overall goal, principles, strategic elements and framework? Would you change or add anything?

2. Are we using the right words?

You might broadly agree with the main ideas, but want to see them expressed using different language. We welcome your recommendations.

In particular, we are interested in whether the term “Aboriginal people” should be used or whether other terms such as “First Nations” would be more appropriate.

3. What else should we be thinking about?

You may have a view on how the strategy should be implemented in a particular region or subject area, or examples of current good practice. Your ideas are valuable to us.

How to get in contact

Please send written submissions to:



aboriginalpolicy@dpc.wa.gov.au



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(08) 6552 5000**

Submissions are open until Friday **28 February 2020**. Please note that, unless you request confidentiality, your views may be published in part or in full and will be subject to Freedom of Information laws.



