

## THE YIRIMAN PROJECT: KEY COMMONWEALTH & STATE GOVERNMENT POLICY ALIGNMENTS – OVERVIEW DOCUMENT

### Introduction

There is a youth suicide crisis in the Kimberley. As a culturally-based initiative, the award-winning Yiriman Project is critically underfunded and yet has the potential to positively impact many more Aboriginal young people in the Kimberley than it currently does. This document:

- Outlines the current policy discourse regarding culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal youth within the State and Commonwealth Government spheres
- Demonstrates the Yiriman Project’s widely recognised success and alignment with current key Government policies
- Suggests possible ways forward towards eventual significant funding for the Yiriman Project

### About the Yiriman Project

Established in 2000 and auspiced by the Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre (KALACC), the Yiriman Project is an award-winning intergenerational, on-Country cultural program that aims to ‘build stories in young people’ and provides at-risk youths with pathways to improved health outcomes; training and educational opportunities; and enhanced community engagement. It is currently based out of Fitzroy Crossing, Western Australia.

Developed directly by the Cultural Bosses from four Kimberley language groups – Nyikina, Mangala, Karajarri and Walmajarri – the Yiriman Project has been recommended as a key example of best practice in Aboriginal culturally-based programs and in 2012 proudly won a Reconciliation Australia Indigenous Governance Award.

### Current Culture-Centred Policy Alignments for Yiriman

In early 2020, we are in the midst of a long-overdue yet promising ideological shift away from deficits discourses and towards Government policies and frameworks that recognise the primacy and centrality of Aboriginal culture while also focussing on Aboriginal empowerment.

The following three current macro policies demonstrate that, encouragingly, the State and Commonwealth attest to no longer viewing Aboriginal culture as being “both a barrier and a problem to improving outcomes for First Nations” (CAEPR p2):

- State Government development of an [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) (AES) – see also [A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government’s Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#)
- Commonwealth Government Department of Health’s [revision](#) of the [Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023](#)
- Collaboration between the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments on the Close the Gap Refresh, as explained in a National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) [press release](#)

### Yiriman: Exemplary & Highly Recommended

A plethora of reports have recommended funding the Yiriman Project – not to mention the many positive reviews, evaluations, profiles and articles about this highly successful cultural initiative. The citations from nine major Government reports across 2008–2019 are summarised in *Appendix 1*, namely:

- [Ways Forward – Beyond the Blame Game: Some Successful Initiatives in Remote Indigenous Communities in WA](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, May 2008
- [Alcohol Restrictions in the Kimberley: A Window of Opportunity for Improved Health, Education, Housing and Employment](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, March 2011
- [Doing Time – Time for Doing: Indigenous Youth in the Criminal Justice System](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, June 2011
- *Balgo Coronial Inquest Report* – WA State Coroner Alistair Hope, October 2011
- *Fitzroy Crossing Local Implementation Plan [for Closing the Gap]* – Commonwealth of Australia & Government of Western Australia, 2012
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2014 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014
- [Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2016 Report](#) – Commonwealth of Australia Productivity Commission, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2016
- [Message Stick Report](#) – WA Parliament Legislative Assembly Education and Health Standing Committee, November 2016
- [Coronial Inquest Report](#) – WA State Coroner Ros Fogliani, February 2019

## Opportunities to Fund the Yiriman Project

Below KALACC has outlined several opportunities for the Government to support the Yiriman Project:

- **July 2019 Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program** – which provides two options for a revised staffing matrix that would allow the Yiriman Project to consolidate its service delivery and ensure future sustainability (see *Appendix 2 – Proposed Yiriman Project Models*).
- **School collaboration** – as recommended by WA Coroner Fogliani on page 364 of her February 2019 [Coronial Inquest Report](#)
- **Redevelopment of a throughcare pathways model to support young people via interagency collaborations** – as previously provided and supported by the University of Western Australia’s Professor Harry Blagg then Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda in 2013 and 2015

## KALACC Recommendations for Government Action

The Yiriman Project is an established, evidence-based cultural program. Funding it will significantly recognise community and sector wishes; enact the recommendations of nine Government reports; and deliver on the Government strategic priorities of “putting culture at the centre”, empowering Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and investing in upstream, preventative programs.

In light of this and the above, KALACC provides the following single recommendation as a first step in what we hope will be an ongoing collaboration with the Government:

### **KALACC Recommendation**

That the Government responds favourably to our July 2019 *Proposal to Consolidate the Yiriman Youth Program* and invests in this endeavour.