

Kimberley District Leadership Group
submission in response to the WA Government
Discussion Paper: 'A Path Forward'

Background:

A Path Forward - Developing and Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy for the WA Government is the first step in designing a whole-of-government strategy to make the commitment of working with Aboriginal people for better outcomes a reality.

The Discussion Paper sets out the key messages the WA Government have heard from Aboriginal people previously, and suggests strategic directions for the future, towards ensuring:

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

A set of **Principles** have been identified, covering:

- Empowerment and self-determination
- Culture and country
- Diversity of people and places
- Services – Aboriginal involvement, cultural responsiveness, family focus, place-based, trauma-informed, flexibility, accessibility, accountability
- Evidence and Data

A key message from the engagement process, was that Government must make room for solutions to emerge from collaborative engagement with Aboriginal people. This has been broken down into the following six **Strategic elements**:

1. Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement-making
2. Enabling Aboriginal-led solutions through improved service commissioning and grant-making
3. Putting culture at the centre
4. Building cultural understanding and respect
5. Investing more in preventative and early intervention initiatives
6. Boosting economic opportunities across all areas of Government activity

It is intended that the strategy will support existing Government frameworks and policies, and shape future ones. The strategy's impact in improving Aboriginal people's wellbeing will be measured through the refreshed Closing the Gap framework.

Kimberley District Leadership Group Response:

Introduction:

The District Leadership Groups were established in the Kimberley in 2016, as a mechanism to work collectively with the government, services providers, Aboriginal organisations and local leadership to find solutions to complex local issues and to help improve the well-being of families in the Kimberley.

The two Groups, based in the East and West Kimberley, identified three regional priority areas to collaborate on to deliver responsive, integrated place-based solutions, including:

- Collectively addressing family violence – the groups will locally lead the implementation of the Kimberley Family Violence Regional Plan 2015-2020,
- Supporting the early years – the groups will provide leadership to early learning and development initiatives at key locations, and
- Targeted support for vulnerable children and young people – the groups will lead the development of integrated and tailored earlier support services for young people and their families.

The Groups use the established approach of collective impact to develop community-driven, place-based initiatives for each of the regional priority areas.

Consultation and Consent:

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups met on 27-28 February 2020, and identified several key strategic priorities that are relevant to the Discussion Paper, including:

- the importance of Self-determination of Aboriginal people, communities and corporations; and
- offering the appropriate authorising environment at a regional and local level that allow for the collective impact, integrated place-based solutions to be implemented.



This submission to the Discussion Paper was an agreed approach supported by members of both the East and West Kimberley District Leadership Groups.

Overview:

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups acknowledge the volume of reports, research and previous engagement that has been used to ensure key messages from Aboriginal people, including those in the Kimberley, have been heard. The information available to date, has very valuable insight into the key issues faced by Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and the solutions that have been identified by local people, to achieve local results.

The goal of the *Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy for the WA Government* is aligned with the strategic priorities and vision of the Kimberley, developed at both the District Leadership Groups; by member organisations of the Empowered Communities model; and from a range of service providers and community leaders.

Alignment of goals:

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy	District Leadership Groups	Empowered Communities
<p>Aboriginal people, families and communities are being empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.</p> 	<p>To work collaboratively to deliver responsive, effective and integrated human services, to improve the wellbeing of Kimberley children, families and communities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Addressing family violence in the Kimberley, • Support and engagement of Kimberley children, young people and their families, • Supporting the early learning and development of Kimberley children. 	<p>“We want for our children the same opportunities and choices other Australians expect for their children.</p> <p>We want them to succeed in mainstream Australia, achieving educational success, prospering in the economy and living long, safe and healthy lives.</p> <p>We want them to retain their distinct cultures, languages and identities as peoples and to be recognised as Indigenous Australians.”</p>
<p>Aboriginal Youth Well-being Forum (East Kimberley)</p>	<p>Aboriginal Youth Well-being Forum (West Kimberley)</p>	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Community Strength: Invest in local community level capabilities to build skills, knowledge and support for Aboriginal people, including those that provide frontline services. 2. Cultural Safety: Build a culturally safe service system including investing in non-Aboriginal workers cultural competency to enhance the effectiveness of services and community safety. 3. Pooled funding and location based procurement: Service commissioners should align state and Commonwealth investment and implement a location based co-design approach to the procurement of services. 4. Self-determination: Aboriginal people need to be joint decision-makers in issues that affect them. 5. Choice and control: Aboriginal people need access to a range of services that allow them to make choices regarding who, where and how they receive support. 6. System Integration: Local, regional, state and national agencies need to work better together, to develop integrated systems that can respond to community priorities. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Youth led: Young people’s voices and decision-making should be at the centre of government and community responses. The government must enable this through governance structures, investing in pathways and capability-building for young people, and resourcing for their sustained involvement. 2. Aboriginal led: developing solutions guided by Aboriginal communities, leaders, youth and organisations. Policy and service delivery should be anchored in Aboriginal culture and implemented in partnership. 3. Partnership: The principle should be equality of voices at all tables. 4. Whole-of-system: The coordination of multiple systems and stakeholders is required to achieve sustainable outcomes. 5. Action: The government must move from dialogue to action to achieve tangible outcomes, investing in Aboriginal organisations and existing services that already work. 6. Measuring outcomes: A robust and culturally informed framework for measuring outcomes, with shared accountability for outcomes and help prioritise funding and activity. 	

Statement of support for Principles and Strategic elements:

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups support the Principles and Strategic elements outlined in the Discussion Paper, noting commonalities between regional priorities and the **Empowerment elements**, such as focussing on:

School and early learning	Health	Early childhood development	Services and infrastructure
Financial and food security	Home and housing	Culture	Family and safety

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups have made a similar commitment to the **Strategic elements**, with a lens of **building** and increasing **cultural understanding and respect** in the region, particularly:

Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement-making.	Enabling Aboriginal-led solutions through better service commissioning.	Boosting economic opportunities across all areas of Government activity.	Investing more in preventative initiatives.
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Strategic element: **2. Bringing decisions closer to communities through empowered engagement and agreement-making** is supported by the Kimberley region as an essential element in driving culturally responsive, place-based solutions.

The key messages from the Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing community consultation session held in the East Kimberley, related to Strategic element 2, noting that **Self-determination** and **Choice and control** were going to be fundamental to shift the impact in the region. The Forum also identified that **Cultural wellbeing** was crucial to impacting change. The vision for this may include cultural healing, cultural education and the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools, promoting wider appreciation of Aboriginal culture, and services that promote connections to Country.

Additionally, the Kimberley District Leadership Groups have a shared commitment to commissioning services, coordinating service delivery and ensuring data is available at the relevant (local) scale. The operating environment of the Groups, enable Government, service providers and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to equally voice challenges and solutions to achieve this priority.

Supported Position: Creating a regional decision-making structure, to provide decision-makers who live in the region, greater accountability for the outcomes and solutions needed to impact change. State, Commonwealth and local governments, along with community service and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations are actively engaged and at the table to work through challenges in the Kimberley.

A supported, accountable and transparent governance structure, providing the region with the **authorising environment** to lead change would enable this Strategic element to become a reality.

Strategic elements: **3. Enabling Aboriginal-led solutions through improved service commissioning and grant-making** and **4. Investing more in preventative and early intervention initiatives** are also supported by the Kimberley region, to respond to challenges identified by the Kimberley District Leadership Groups.

The Groups identified to work collaboratively to deliver responsive, effective and integrated human services, to improve the wellbeing of Kimberley children, families and communities. This is being addressed through Priority Working Groups that have a specific focus on:

- Addressing family violence in the Kimberley,
- Support and engagement of Kimberley children, young people and their families, and
- Supporting the early learning and development of Kimberley children.

These Priority Working Groups have identified opportunities to change service responses and investment to support earlier intervention supports, such as:

Mental health counselling for children and young people affected by substance abuse and family violence	Education for young parents, especially young women prior to pregnancy with messaging about FASD	Targeting school attendance, challenging current practices and making the issue a whole-of-community response to getting and keeping children in school.
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The inclusion of Aboriginal organisations and community leaders in the Kimberley District Leadership Groups and related Priority Working Groups is aiding in driving the change towards Aboriginal-led solutions and commissioning of local, culturally appropriate services.

Supported Position: Building the capacity of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, will create a more culturally responsive service sector and contribute to communities' broader experience of empowerment and self-determination – **Choice and Control**. In a region as geographically diverse as the Kimberley, it would be important to support partnership or consortium approaches to commissioning services, to ensure that ACCOs have sufficient capacity, opportunity and reach. This would create an environment empowerment and self-determination.

Creating a shift in the services and programs delivered in the Kimberley, as an element of increasing self-determination and empowerment, to focus on **early intervention** and support. Providing space for Aboriginal organisations and government to develop place-based solutions to proactively build up resilience, capability, healing, and independence. With programs focused on strengthening cultural identity, healing and empowerment, youth engagement, preventative health measures, early childhood development, and safe and stable housing.

This could be achieved by negotiating new State and Commonwealth funding opportunities, implementing accountable and transparent evaluation measure to ensure effectiveness of investments and responsiveness of community to service providers.

Key recommendations:

In summary the Goal, Priorities and Strategic elements outlined in the Discussion Paper: a Path Forward, are supported as they align with the priorities and vision identified for the Kimberley region.

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups recommend the resulting Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy has a strong focus on creating:

- a real opportunity for **Choice and Control** for Aboriginal community controlled organisations, communities and their members.

A theme consistently gathered during consultation processes in the region, is about local choice, control and Aboriginal people being responsible for making decisions for Aboriginal people.

This was one of the strongest messages from the Aboriginal Youth Well-being Forums conducted following the Coroner's Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region; and

- an **authorising environment** that provides local and regional decision making for place-based solutions.

The Kimberley District Leadership Groups have developed a collective leadership framework leveraging communal strengths, commitment, and actions to be held accountable as a group to realising the agreed priorities.

The groups have identified that striking the right balance of authority in regional decision-making frameworks will be key to support Aboriginal led and placed based approaches, while managing complex conflicts of interest of Government's and the community sector.

There is a need for pooled and location based funding strategies across the broader human services system, to promote collaboration, integration and funding sustainability of programs and services delivered regional. There is also a need for regional flexible funding options, to respond to shifting agendas or in times of community wide-crisis.

To achieve full implementation of Aboriginal led decision making, there needs to be a clear (legislative) policy statement about regionalism, incorporating data collection and investment mapping.

Regional leadership across Government and organisations need to move towards a regional partnership and decision-making platform, supported by the necessary policy reforms to maximise opportunities for change and strengthening the alignment between regional leadership and the "Perth" authorising environment.