




Government of Western Australia
Department of Communities

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy 2022 to 2032

Empowering Aboriginal children, families and communities
to choose their own futures from secure and sustained
foundations provided by ACCOs.



Communities would like to acknowledge Artist Nate Stuart for designing the artwork for the Strategy, which represents landscape features from all regions of Western Australia.

Words from the Artist:



This design is inspired by the diverse landscapes and regions of Western Australia.

Reflecting this array of diversity are the First Nations people, who have learned to live in, respect and adapt to the land for thousands of years.

My focus for this design is to highlight the true benefits of what equal collaboration can achieve.

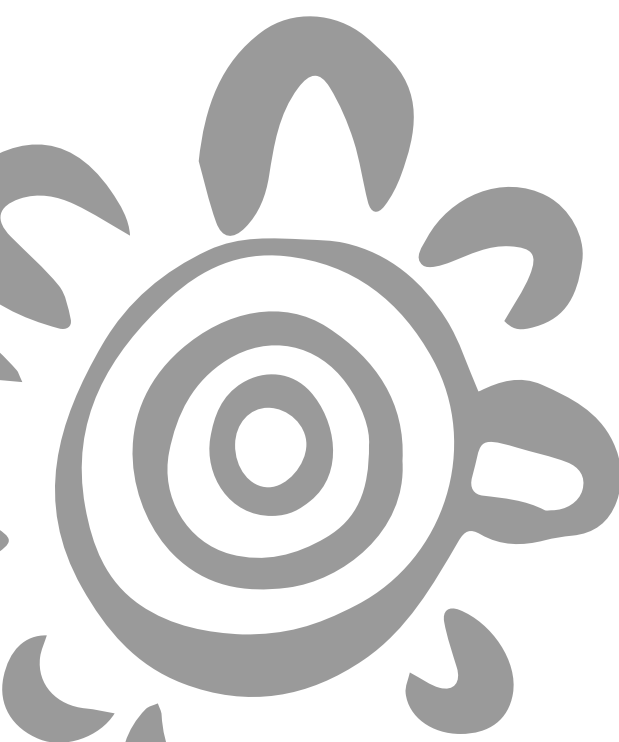
Representing all regions in Western Australia, Aboriginal people and Communities coming together to resolve challenges through culturally appropriate strategies, to meet the needs and improve outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and communities.



Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Australian Government proudly acknowledges the Traditional Owners and recognises their continuing connection to their lands, families, and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and to Elders past and present.

The first step in living alongside and working with the Aboriginal community is built upon establishing respectful relationships. Crucial to these respectful relationships is acknowledging the history of Aboriginal people and recognising the importance of connection to family, culture and Country.





Definitions

Aboriginal

In this document, the term 'Aboriginal' is used in preference to 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' people, in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of Western Australia.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation

Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap¹ defines an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation as an organisation that is:

- a. "incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit
- b. controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- c. connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services
- d. governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body."

Aboriginal Business

In line with the Department of Finance² definition, Department of Communities defines Aboriginal Business as:

- "Aboriginal Businesses (including subcontractors, subconsultants and suppliers) registered on the Aboriginal Business Directory WA or Supply Nation and may be:
- a sole trader where the person is Aboriginal
- a partnership or firm where at least 50% of the partners are Aboriginal
- a corporation where Aboriginal persons own at least 50% of the legal entity."

Corporation

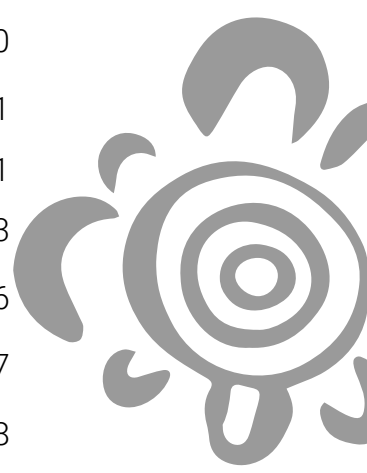
The *Corporations Act 2001*³ defines a corporation as:

- a. "a company; and
- b. any body corporate (whether incorporated in this jurisdiction or elsewhere); and
- c. an unincorporated body that under the law of its place of origin, may sue or be sued, or may hold property in the name of its secretary or of an office holder of the body duly appointed for that purpose."



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Message from the Director General

The Department of Communities (Communities) is committed to reform across the agency, particularly in the way that it commissions and delivers services to Aboriginal children, families, and communities. We know that when Aboriginal people provide place based, locally led and culturally safe services to Aboriginal people, the outcomes are far better.



Communities recognises the importance of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and their pivotal role in delivering culturally secure services to Aboriginal people. The ACCO Strategy 2022–2032 (Strategy) will lay the foundation for enduring reform to ensure Aboriginal people are at the core of our business.

The Strategy illustrates a commitment by Communities to partner with and support ACCOs through providing opportunities for ACCOs to design and deliver services to Aboriginal people. The Strategy is a fluid approach to the overarching work that we do and allows for change and adaptation to ensure it remains relevant to the needs of Aboriginal people.

The Strategy aligns with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) and the Western Australian Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy 2021–2029 demonstrating the long-term commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal people.

I thank the ACCO Project Working Group, which has shown great commitment and has been instrumental in the development of this Strategy. Members of the ACCO Project Working Group have provided their insights, and shared their passion and knowledge, and their voices are reflected throughout this document.

Through this Strategy, Communities is committing to working with and supporting Western Australian ACCOs to achieve self-determination for the safety and wellbeing of all Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

Mike Rowe

Director General
Department of Communities



Introduction

Communities Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy 2022–2032 responds to the need to improve the way that Communities procures and delivers services to Aboriginal children, families, and communities, while supporting the empowerment of ACCOs through creating opportunities to deliver place based culturally appropriate services across Western Australia.

Aboriginal people across Western Australia have repeatedly told the government that to truly change outcomes, Aboriginal communities must lead through a process of self-determination. Self-determination that is achieved through community-based and family-led solutions, has been proven to produce effective and sustainable outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. For this to be achieved, reform of the current systems must occur. Current policies and processes that prescribe how Communities partners with Aboriginal people need to be reviewed and changed to ensure that Aboriginal people are given the right to self-determine and that this is sustained into the future.

Communities provides services to the most vulnerable Western Australians and Aboriginal clients are disproportionately over-represented. The Communities portfolio commissions various organisations to deliver services to clients, with a large amount of funding distributed to non-government and non-Aboriginal organisations. While there are many exceptional services already in place, these services are not always best placed to serve or meet the cultural needs specific to Aboriginal people.



Building Strong Partnerships

In a demonstration of collaboration and partnership between Communities and the Aboriginal community, the Strategy was developed by a Project Working Group through a series of workshops using the principles of co-design. Working Group membership included senior leaders from across Communities and representatives from eleven ACCOs from regions across Western Australia, whose core business is providing community services to Aboriginal people.

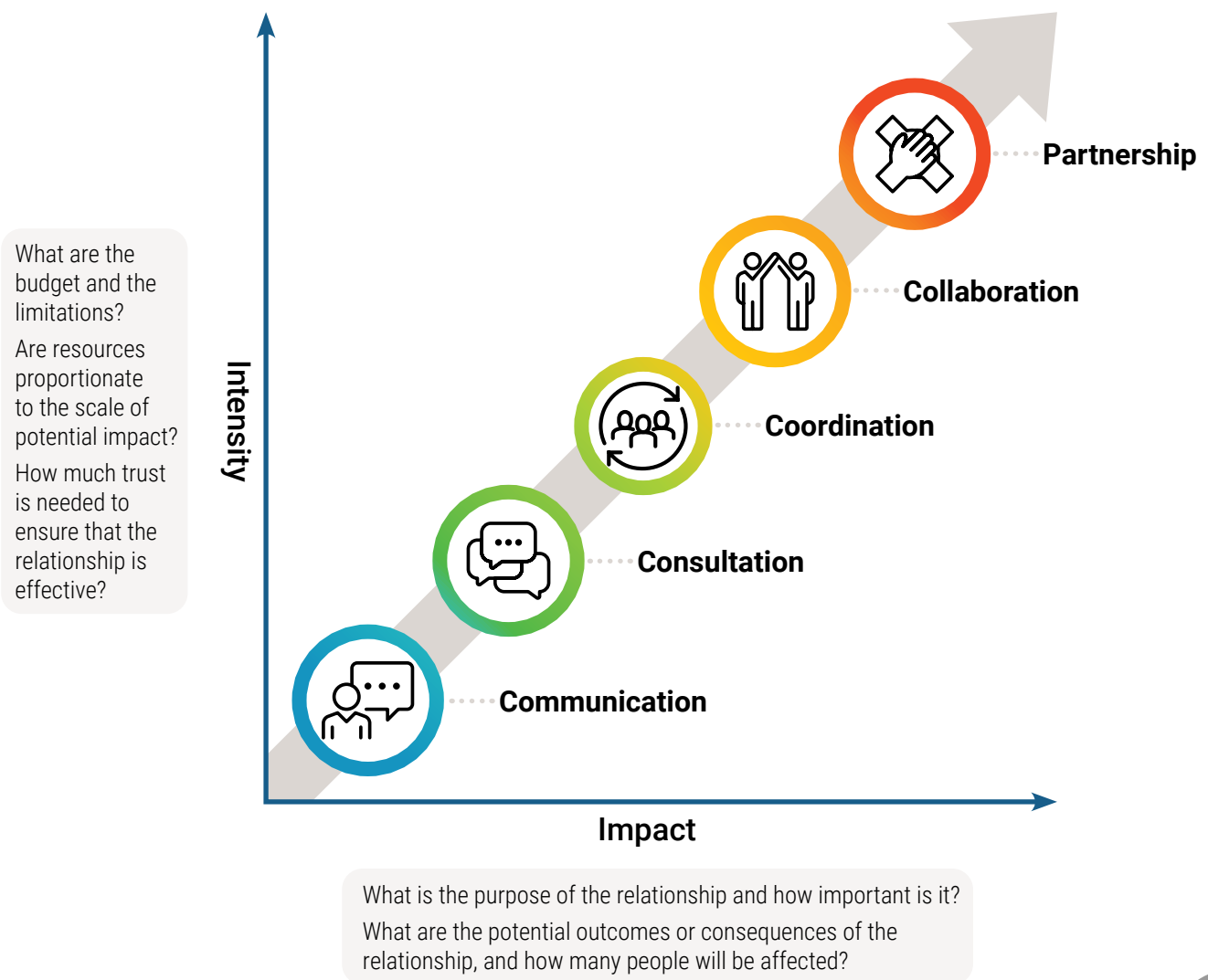
Moving forward, Communities will partner with and support ACCOs to develop high quality services run by Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal children, families, and communities. Through collaboration, the Strategy will drive the way that Communities and Aboriginal people work together to ensure a collective approach to improve service delivery. Communities' approach will support ACCOs to build a self-sustained sector that lasts for generations to come.

The Strategy will encompass several key elements that underpin strong partnerships, as identified in Communities Partnership Framework. These principles include:

- Communication
- Consultation
- Coordination
- Collaboration
- Partnership



Figure 1: Communities Partnership Framework⁴





To ensure successful partnerships with ACCOs are achieved, the Strategy acknowledges the following principles to support effective formal partnerships and reflect genuine ways of working:

- Respect
- Shared responsibility
- Shared accountability
- Shared decision making
- Transparency
- Commitment
- Integrity

Guided by the National Agreement⁵, the Strategy recognises that for strong partnerships to be accountable and representative of Aboriginal people, formal agreements are established. These formal agreements contain elements that:

- i. “defines who the parties are, what their roles are, what the purpose and objectives of the partnership are, what is in scope of shared decision-making, and what are the reporting arrangements, timeframes, and monitoring, review and dispute mechanisms
- ii. are structured in a way that allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to agree on the agenda for the discussions that lead to any decisions
- iii. are made public and easily accessible
- iv. is protected in state, territory, and national legislation where appropriate.”

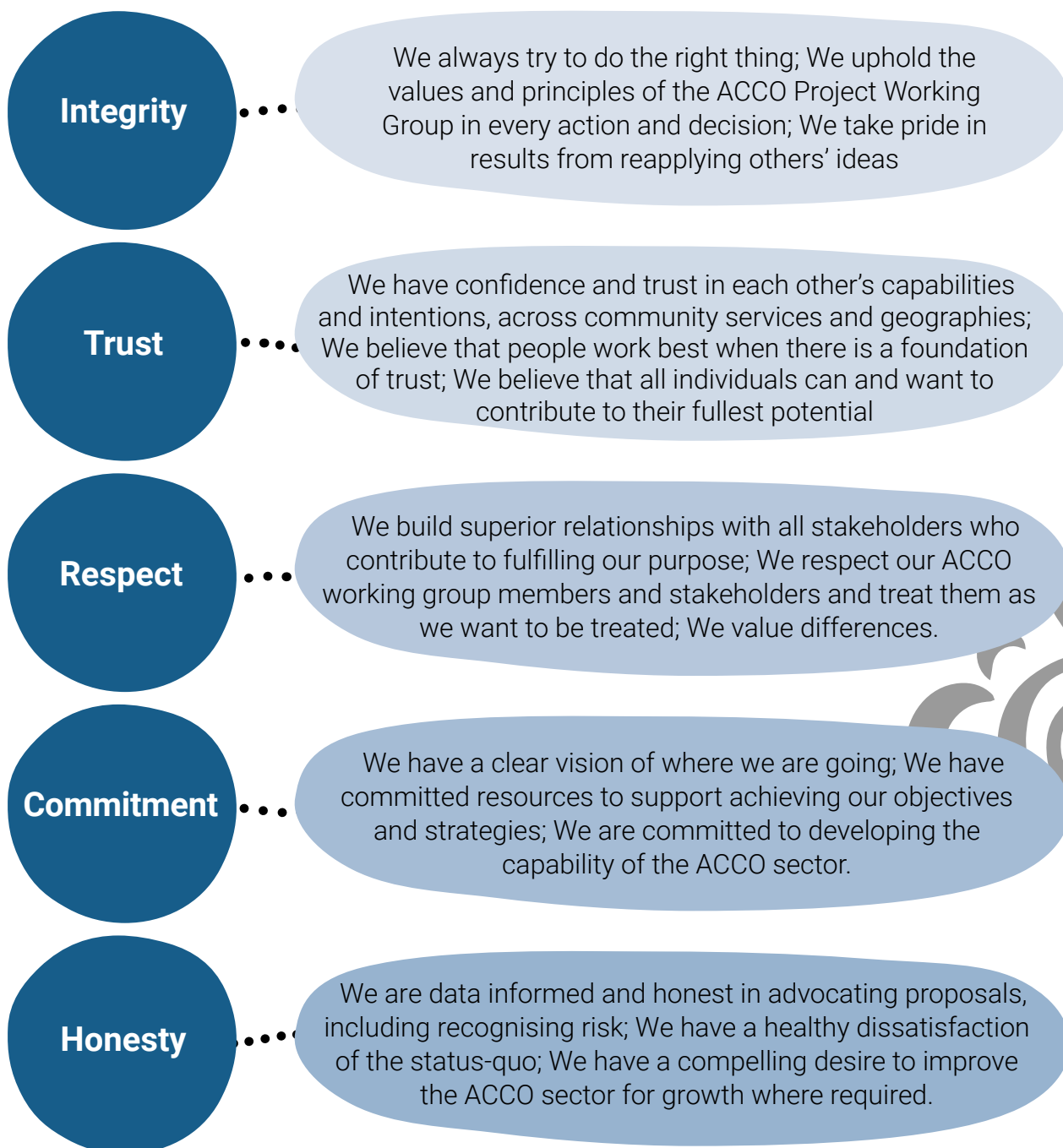
There is a great opportunity for major change to take place and ensure services for Aboriginal people are delivered by Aboriginal organisations. Communities will engage with Aboriginal people to be involved in designing and improving the systems and initiatives that impact Aboriginal people. Working in partnership and funding ACCOs is key to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people and will support ACCOs to achieve self-determination and create safe and healthy families and communities.



Communities Collective Values

Communities iCREATE values of Integrity, Courage, Respect, Empathy, Accountability, Trust and Empowerment are at the centre of everything we do. These values complement the shared values developed by the Project Working Group and are embedded throughout the Strategy.

Figure 2: ACCO Strategy Project Working Group Values



Strategic Alignment Overview

In changing the way that Communities commissions services to Aboriginal people, it is critical that the Strategy is in alignment with other key government policy and initiatives. A collaborative approach at a government level will ensure that all parties work together to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities in Western Australia.

Figure 3: ACCO Strategy Framework





Communities Strategic Direction

Purpose: Collaborating to create pathways that enable individual, family, and community wellbeing.

iCreate Values: Integrity, Courage, Respect, Empathy, Accountability, Trust, Empowerment.

Key Stakeholders

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations
Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
Communities Aboriginal Strategic Advisory Group
Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council
Western Australian Council of Social Services
Department of Premier and Cabinet
Department of Finance

Strategy Objectives

- Culturally informed decision-making by Communities
- that maximises ACCO involvement in delivering services to Aboriginal children, families and communities.
- Communities governance structures and systems are improved to achieve economic and socio-economic opportunities for ACCOs.
- Communities service delivery models are co-designed in partnership with ACCOs to provide locally informed, place-based and culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children, families and communities.
- Communities will procure ACCOs to deliver frontline services to Aboriginal children, families and communities.

National Strategic Alignment

National Agreement on Closing the Gap July 2020
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Procurement Strategy 2021–23
Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031
Indigenous Advancement Strategy
Indigenous Procurement Policy

State Strategic Alignment

Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy – Western Australia 2021–2029
Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan – Western Australia
Aboriginal Procurement Policy

Communities Strategic Alignment

All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030
Department of Communities Strategic Plan 2019–2023
Building a Better Future: Out-of-Home Care Reform Program: Roadmap 2019–2023
Path to Safety: Western Australia's strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030
Resilient Families, Strong Communities: A roadmap for regional and remote Aboriginal communities
Ageing with Choice: Future directions for seniors housing 2019–2024
A Western Australia for Everyone: State Disability Strategy 2020–2030
WA Carers Strategy
WA Housing Strategy 2020–2030



The Aboriginal Procurement Policy

The Western Australian State Governments Aboriginal Procurement Policy⁶ aims to maximise opportunities for Aboriginal businesses on State Government projects. The policy sets targets for the number of government contracts awarded to registered Aboriginal businesses and seeks to develop entrepreneurship and business opportunities for the Aboriginal community.

Both the Aboriginal Procurement Policy and the Strategy seek to increase economic development opportunities in the Aboriginal community through targeting Aboriginal employment and organisational engagement across current and future procurement of Works, Goods and Services and Community Services. With respect to the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, the 2019–2020 Performance Report states:

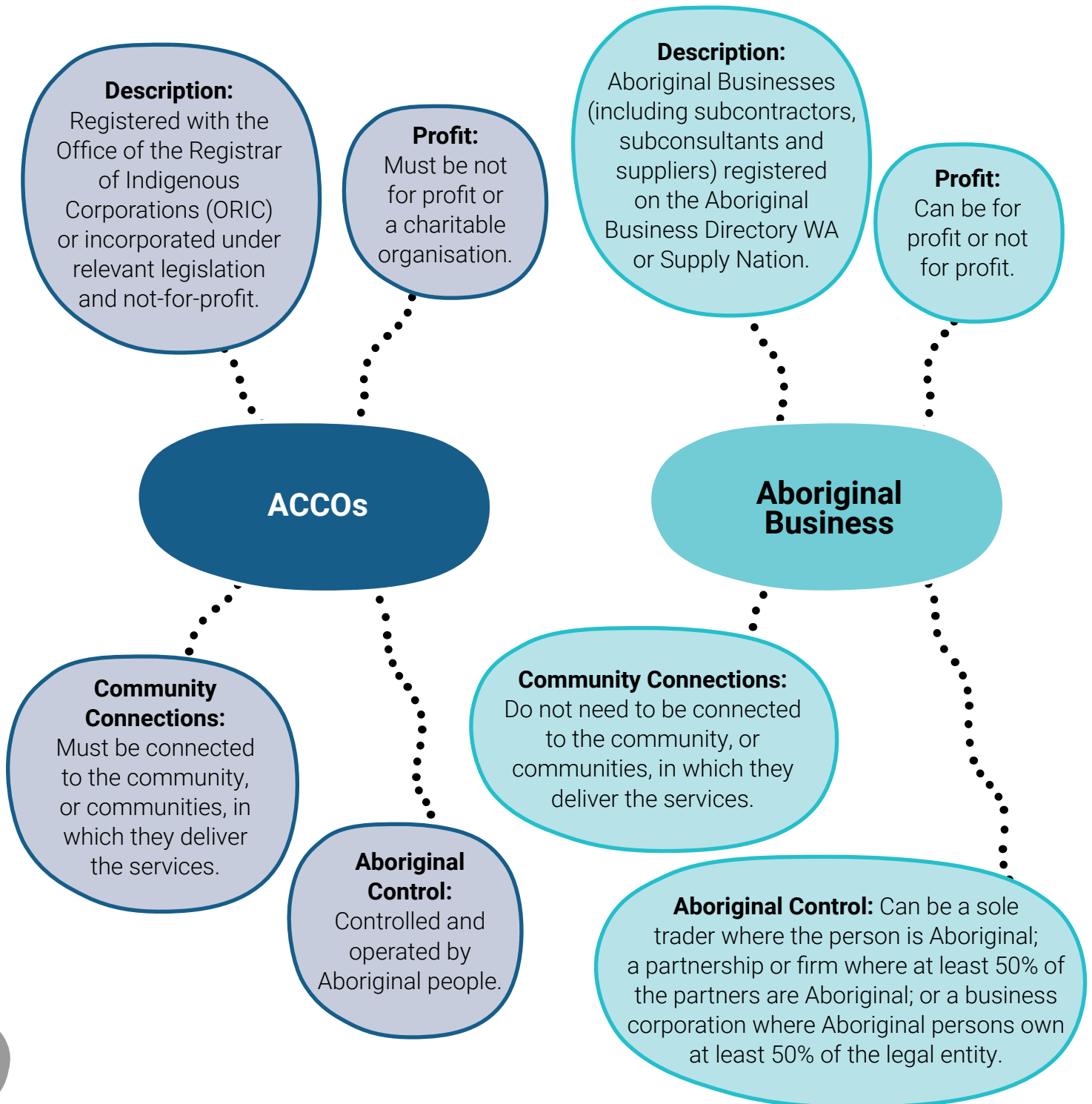
“Communities continued to demonstrate strong Aboriginal business and not-for-profit contracting outcomes due to its buying portfolio of goods, services, community services and works requirements...”⁷

Communities will continue to work towards meeting the targets identified in the Aboriginal Procurement Policy and support Aboriginal businesses. Separately from this work, under the Strategy, Communities will focus on committing to increased opportunity for ACCOs to deliver services to Aboriginal children, families, and communities. The Strategy has a different focus to the Aboriginal Procurement Policy which relates to Aboriginal Business (as defined in that Policy).





Figure 4: Governance and Operations Comparison ACCO⁸ and Aboriginal Business⁹





The National Agreement on Closing the Gap¹⁰

The Strategy will align directly to a number of Priority Reforms and Socio-Economic targets identified within the National Agreement and will assist Communities in meeting its commitment as a signatory to the National Agreement.

Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement focuses on the commitment to building formal Aboriginal community-controlled sector to deliver services to support Closing the Gap. Communities acknowledges that ACCO delivered services are better for Aboriginal people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal people, and are often preferred over mainstream services.

Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement highlights the need for:

- Sustained capacity building and investment in ACCOs;
- A dedicated and identified Aboriginal workforce;
- ACCOs that deliver common services will be supported by a Peak Body, and governed by a majority Aboriginal Board; and
- ACCOs have a dedicated, reliable, and consistent funding model, designed to suit the types of services required by communities.

The National Agreement also identifies the development of Sector Strengthening Plans which detail the joint national strengthening effort every three years and will identify actions against the strong sector elements within the National Agreement. Acknowledging that the initial Sector Strengthening Plans will focus on Early Childhood Care and Development, Housing, Disability and Health, with Communities leading all but Health. The Strategy will identify, support, and develop opportunities for ACCOs to provide services to Aboriginal people across these areas, as well as all other areas within Communities' remit.





The **National Agreement** has been created to act as an enabler for Aboriginal people and governments to work together to achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians by overcoming the inequality experienced by Aboriginal people. It enables self-determination for Aboriginal people and communities through a strong Aboriginal community-controlled approach.

Under the National Agreement, the **Western Australian Government** has agreed to:

- Commit to building a strong ACCO sector in line with the strong sector elements;
- Include information in agencies annual reports on the actions taken to strengthen the ACCO sector; and
- Implement measures to increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The Western Australian Government

The Department of Communities ACCO Strategy

Communities' ACCO Strategy aligns with:

- Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement, "Building the Community Controlled sector", acknowledging that ACCOs usually achieve better results, employ a majority Aboriginal workforce and are the preferred providers by Aboriginal people over mainstream services;
- Outcome 8 – "Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal people and their communities", and
- Levers the procurement opportunities afforded to government to implement prioritisation policies for ACCOs through clause 55. "Government Parties agree to implement measures to increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations..."

The Strategy at a Glance

Vision

Aboriginal children, families and communities are empowered to choose their own futures from secure and sustained foundations provided by ACCOs.

Purpose

The Strategy provides a framework for how Communities will work together with and support Western Australian ACCOs to achieve self determination to create safe and healthy families and communities.

Pillars

Cultural Safety and Governance

That all services for Aboriginal children, families and communities are grounded in Aboriginal knowledge and culture.

Partnerships

Building genuine partnerships and engagement with ACCOs to deliver strong accountability and culturally responsive ways of working.

Economic Opportunities

ACCOs are given economic and socio-economic opportunities to deliver services to their community.

Objectives

The Strategy aims to realise the following strategic objectives:



Culturally informed decision-making by Communities that maximises ACCO involvement in delivering services to Aboriginal children, families and communities.




Communities' governance structures and systems are improved to achieve economic and socio-economic opportunities for ACCOs.



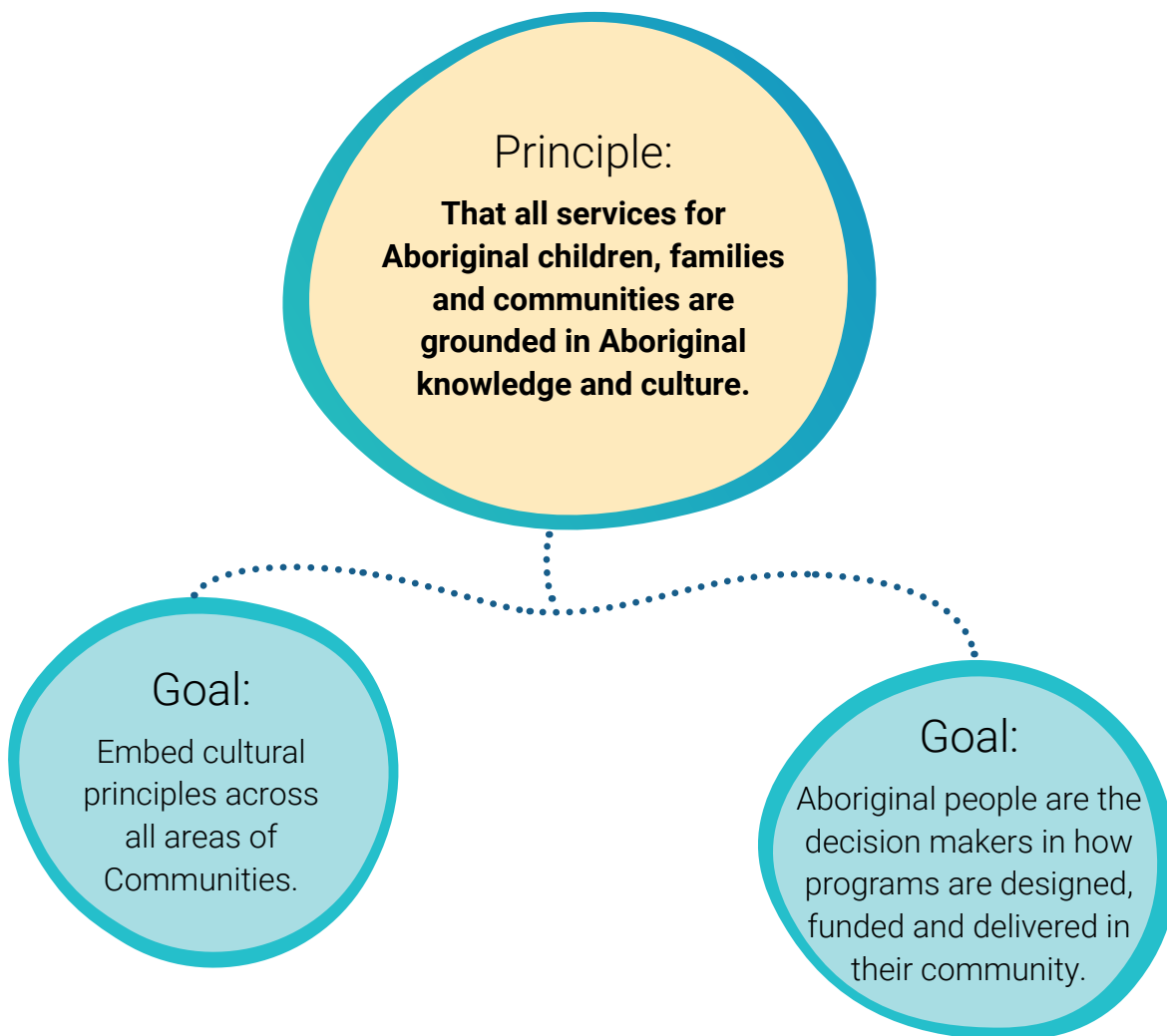
Communities' service delivery models are co-designed in partnership with ACCOs to provide locally informed, place-based and culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal children, families and communities.



Communities will procure ACCOs to deliver frontline services to Aboriginal children, families and communities.



Cultural Safety and Governance



Guided by Aboriginal knowledge and culture, the Strategy will challenge the way Communities procures services to be delivered to Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

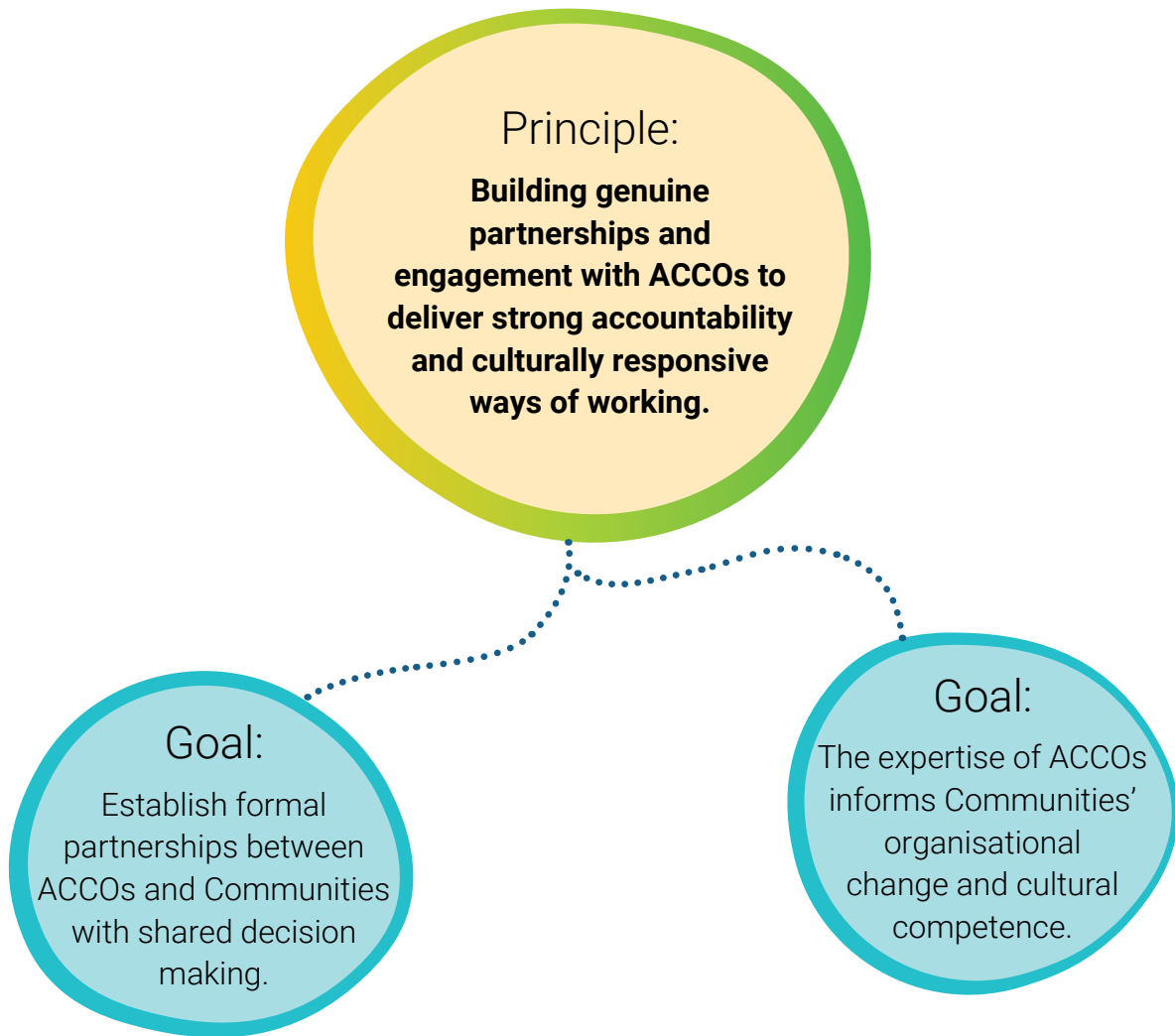
Where services are delivered to Aboriginal people, solutions will be locally informed, place-based, and culturally appropriate. Self-determination will drive service design, implementation and delivery and ensure governance is strong, and services are designed and delivered in a culturally safe way.

Communities is committed to improving cultural capability across the department through the development of an Aboriginal Cultural Framework.

The Framework will focus on building and maintaining Communities' cultural capability to ensure the delivery of culturally safe and responsive services to Aboriginal people in WA.



Partnerships



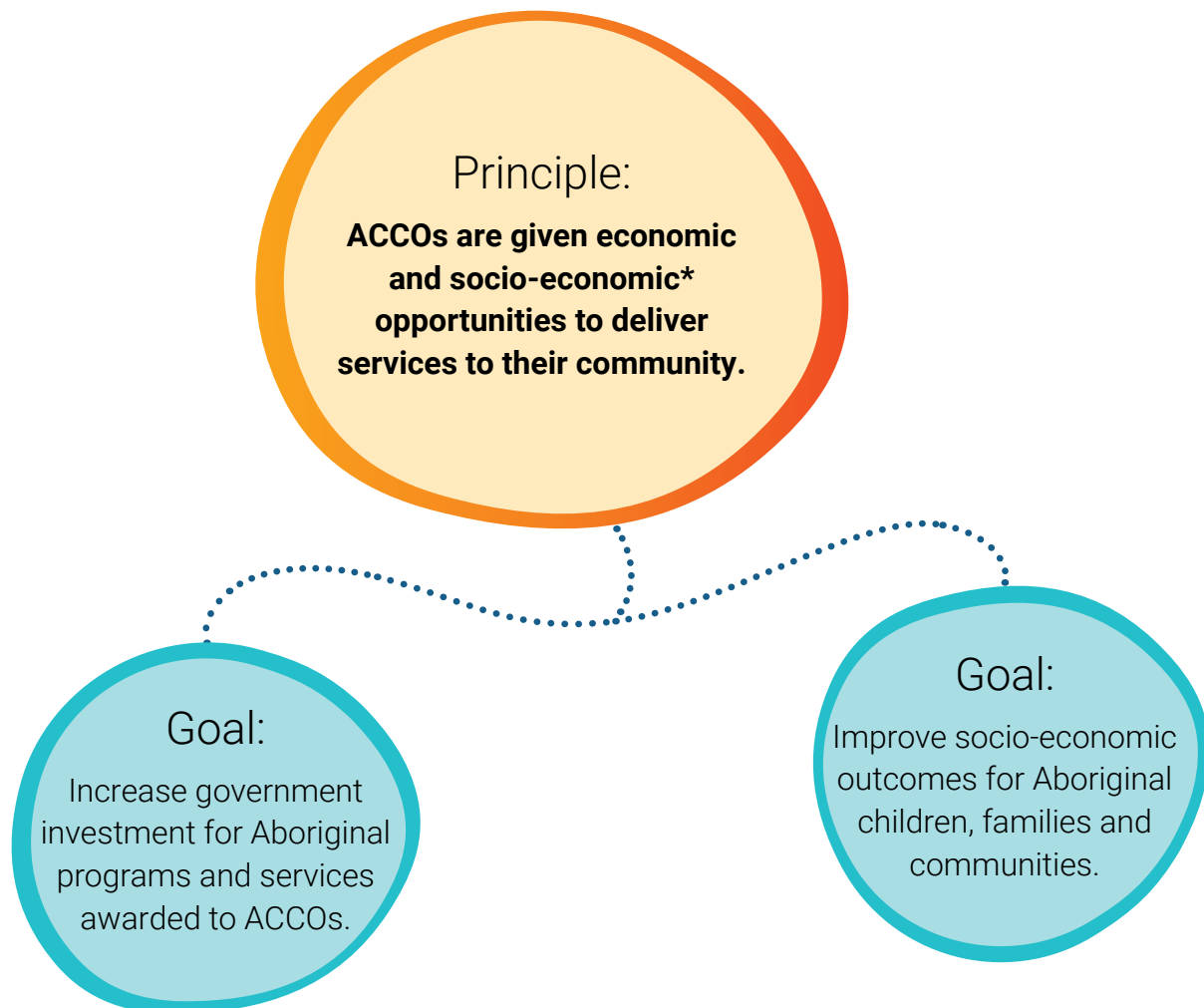
Communities will consider the cultural authority that exists within Aboriginal communities to ensure that our engagement is culturally safe.

Communities will work with ACCOs to support the establishment of a Peak Body for Western Australian community service ACCOs. The Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia is currently funded by the WA Government to lead this project and Communities will continue to work collaboratively to support the establishment of an ACCO Peak Body for WA.

Communities will continue to develop our employees to be culturally informed and responsive to deliver services to Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

Communities will commit to sharing responsibility, and engaging with integrity by being accountable to ourselves, our workplace and, most of all, our communities.

Economic Opportunities



Communities will support ACCOs to build further expertise, intelligence, and data sovereignty in collecting, using, and interpreting data.

Communities commits to building opportunities for ACCOs to complete the tender processes required for new contracts within the community services sector. This will enable an increase in the proportion and value of contracts, service agreements and grants awarded to ACCOs. Communities development of an ACCO Commissioning Framework will support and guide the transition of mainstream service contracts and programs servicing Aboriginal people to ACCOs.

Communities commits to incremental change, through continuous improvement, shared understanding of current capabilities, and the strengths and opportunities of Communities and the ACCO sector.

* The term socio-economic refers to the advantage and disadvantage of Aboriginal people (including ACCOs) in accessing material and social resources, and their ability to participate in their community.



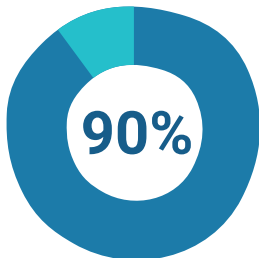
Why Change is Essential

Child Safety and Family Wellbeing

Communities acknowledges the impact of intergenerational trauma and in alignment with the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations¹¹, the Strategy recognises that ACCOs are in the best position to provide culturally appropriate services that support Aboriginal children and families to thrive. Across the spectrum of child protection and family support, the understanding of the significance of cultural safety for Aboriginal children and families involved in the child protection space sits at the forefront and, the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families remains a priority for Communities.

Early Intervention

Early intervention is critical in diverting children from entering Out of Home Care (OOHC) and without early and targeted support, vulnerable children and families are at increased risk of statutory intervention. The Aboriginal In-Home Support Service (AISS)¹² is an intensive in-home intervention that aims to keep Aboriginal children and young people safely at home or returned home with family and connected to country, culture, and community.



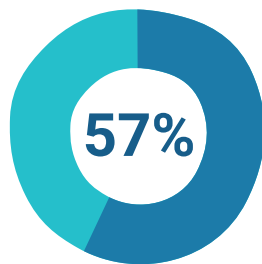
Percentage of children referred to the Aboriginal In-Home Support Service (AISS) keeping children safe at home stream remained at home with their parents after 12 months.¹³

The evidence shows the positive impacts the AISS has with Aboriginal families and keeping Aboriginal children at home with their families. As at the end of the 2020/2021 financial year, AISS is only offered in the Perth metropolitan area. By empowering ACCOs through increasing opportunity, services such as AISS, can be delivered across all Western Australian Aboriginal communities by a strong ACCO sector.

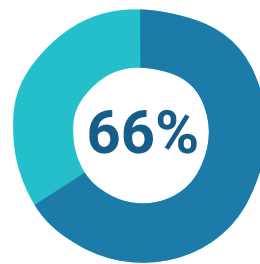
Out of Home Care

Communities is committed to reducing the number of Aboriginal children in OOHC and understands that a new approach to delivering services for Aboriginal families in Western Australia is the key to achieving this outcome and in meeting Target 12 of the National Agreement.¹⁴

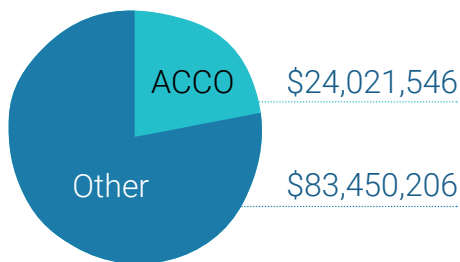
Increasing the number of ACCOs providing OOHC services is a prime example of where a shift in delivery of services for Aboriginal people is needed to ensure culturally appropriate services are available to Aboriginal children in OOHC. When Aboriginal children are placed in care arrangements with family, kinship carers or through an ACCO service provider, each can remain connected to their families, culture, and local community.



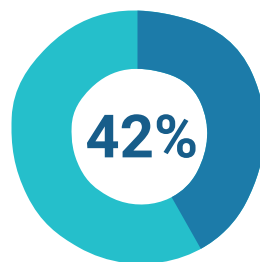
The percentage of children in care in Western Australia that are Aboriginal.¹⁵



The percentage of Aboriginal children in Western Australia placed in compliance with the CCSA (2004) section 12 (2).¹⁶



The approximate value of OOHC placement services contracts is \$107.5 million.



Percentage of children in care referred to the AISS Reunification stream, remained reunified with their parents after 12 months.¹⁷



The number of ACCOs that have a current OOHC contract to provide placement services. That is 1 out of 9 organisations.

Data as at 2020/2021 financial year, with future procurement planned for 2022.





Reunification programs delivered by ACCOs, such as the AISS Reunification program, demonstrate significant achievements in supporting children and enables families to successfully reunify.

Communities commitment to strengthening the ACCO sector, through the Strategy, will support self-determination and capability building. The Strategy will develop opportunities for ACCOs to be the lead agencies that provide services to Aboriginal people. Communities acknowledges that to improve outcomes, there is a need to partner with and build the capacity of ACCOs so that Aboriginal services can serve the unique needs of Aboriginal families alongside Communities.

Housing

Communities recognises that when people are unable to access a safe, stable and sustainable home, the ability to keep a family safe, sustain a job or maintain independence becomes much more difficult.¹⁸ Communities has a significant role in enabling purposeful partnerships being built on the strengths of the housing sector, that will provide the foundation for innovative collaboration with ACCOs to improve service delivery and supply.

There are many factors which impact on how Aboriginal people access housing and housing support services and central to this is the acknowledgement that cultural responsibilities and obligations may impact Aboriginal people and their families. Communities acknowledges that ACCOs are often best placed and the preferred provider of such services to Aboriginal people.

Public housing stock shortages and increasing homelessness figures are a significant issue in Western Australia with the problem only being escalated by the additional impact of COVID-19. More needs to be done to strengthen and empower ACCOs in the Housing sector, inclusive of Maintenance and Asset Management, to ensure that culturally appropriate housing and support services are available.

The need to build on the ACCO Housing sector has been amplified by Housing being one of the four original priority areas listed in the National Agreement.





Homelessness

In Western Australia over 30% of people counted as homeless identify as Aboriginal. The rate of homelessness among Aboriginal people is far higher than for non-Aboriginal people across the state. Aboriginal homelessness is particularly high in regions such as the Kimberley, metropolitan Perth and in regional and remote areas.¹⁹

In direct alignment with All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020–2030, Communities acknowledges the absolute need to improve Aboriginal wellbeing and that ACCOs are best placed to provide local, culturally safe services to Aboriginal people experiencing homelessness. The Strategy seeks to strengthen the role that ACCOs have in designing and delivering culturally appropriate responses for Aboriginal people and to ensure that the ACCO sector is equipped to do so.²⁰

“Strategies to end homelessness in the Aboriginal population must be culturally informed and culturally led, building on the place-based knowledge and strengths of Aboriginal people and communities. This includes the provision of housing supply and services managed by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations.²¹

“Aboriginal community housing organisations are critical in preventing homelessness within the Aboriginal community. There is a need to build the capacity and capability of this sector to deliver housing solutions across the housing continuum.²²



Community Housing Organisations

The notion of 'home' is so much more to many Aboriginal people than just shelter. To Aboriginal people, 'home' also extends to family, kinship systems and country. Communities recognises that government practices impacting housing and homelessness must reflect an understanding of Aboriginal culture and values and that Aboriginal Community Housing providers have the cultural knowledge to provide culturally safe property management and tenancy support Aboriginal people to ensure supported and sustained tenancies.

At the time of publishing this document, in Western Australia there are no Aboriginal Community Housing Organisations registered through the National Regulatory System for Community Housing, however, there are multiple ACCOs operating in this sector. While there is no obligation for a housing provider to be registered under the national system, being registered provides national recognition of high standards of governance and management. Limited funding and investment opportunities exist for those unregistered ACCOs.

It is essential that support is provided to ACCOs wanting to provide housing and tenancy support, to strengthen their organisational position, and to guarantee a collective approach to improved service delivery across the housing sector through the alignment with Aboriginal housing providers nationally.

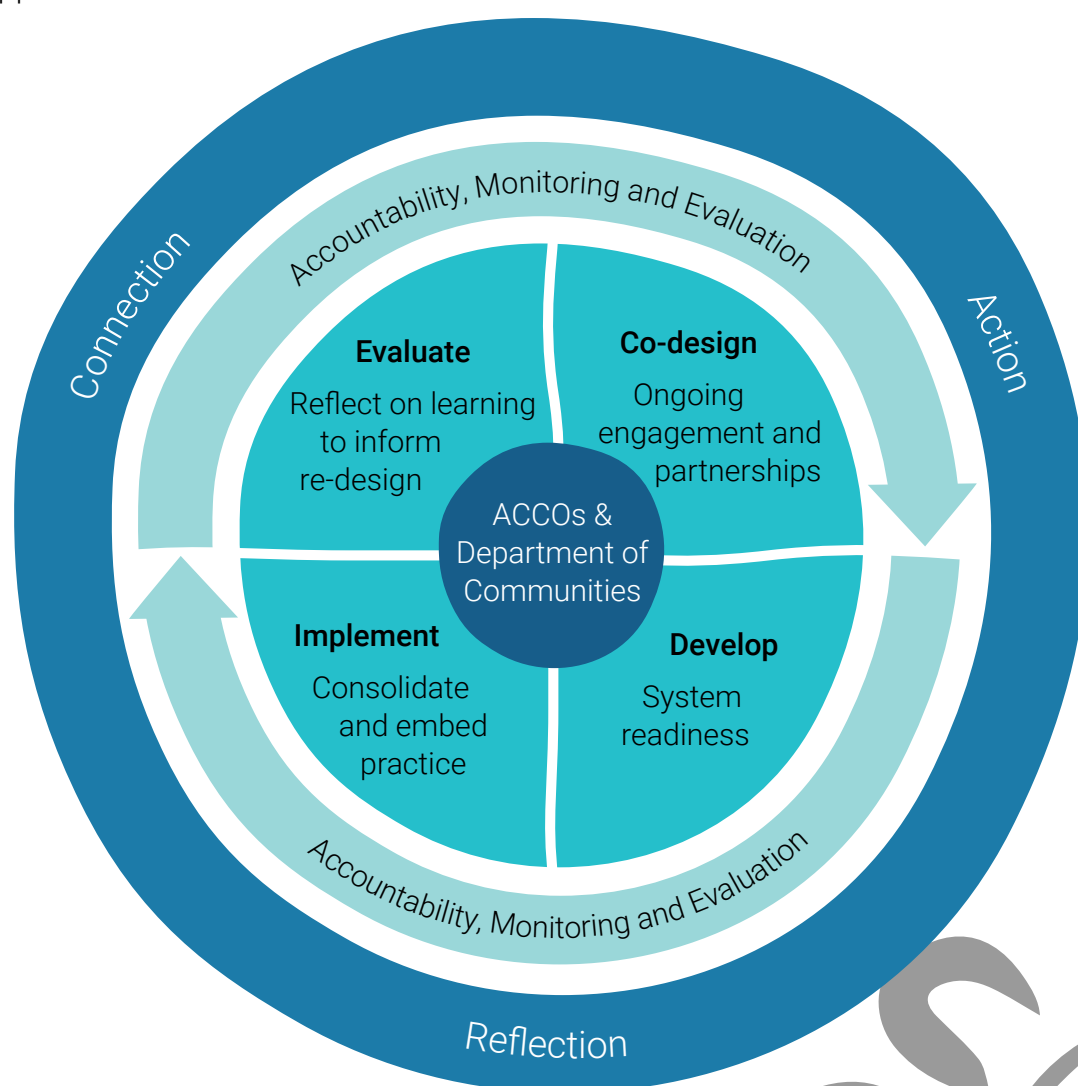
“Indigenous people report experiences of vulnerability, humiliation and shame in dealings with public housing around issues such as rent arrears, and previous debts and difficulties in managing their housing.”²³

Implementation of the Strategy

A flexible and phased approach to future action plans will ensure that the Strategy remains responsive to new priorities and challenges faced as the ACCO sector is strengthened.

Working in a continuous cycle of co-design, development, implementation and ongoing monitoring and evaluation will move Communities towards achieving the strong and driven ACCO sector needed to deliver culturally secure outcomes for Aboriginal children, families, and communities.

As the Strategy will regularly be reviewed and is responsive to the needs of ACCOs in the strengthening of the sector, initial targets have not been identified. This omission is to allow the first phase of the Strategy implementation to determine a baseline of the ACCO sector requirements that will inform development target areas and the types of supports needed.





A Call to Action – Implementation Plan One

The Strategy's Implementation Plan One: A Call-to-Action 2022 to 2024, sets the tone for the reform required to achieve the vision of Communities and the Project Working Group.



Complete a Strengths and Opportunities Analysis of the Western Australian ACCO Sector



Co-design and implement an ACCO Strategy Accountability, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework



Establish an Aboriginal shared decision-making body in Communities to oversee the implementation of the Strategy



Co-design and implement an Aboriginal Engagement Framework



Co-design and implement an ACCO Commissioning Framework



Co-design Implementation Plan Two





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