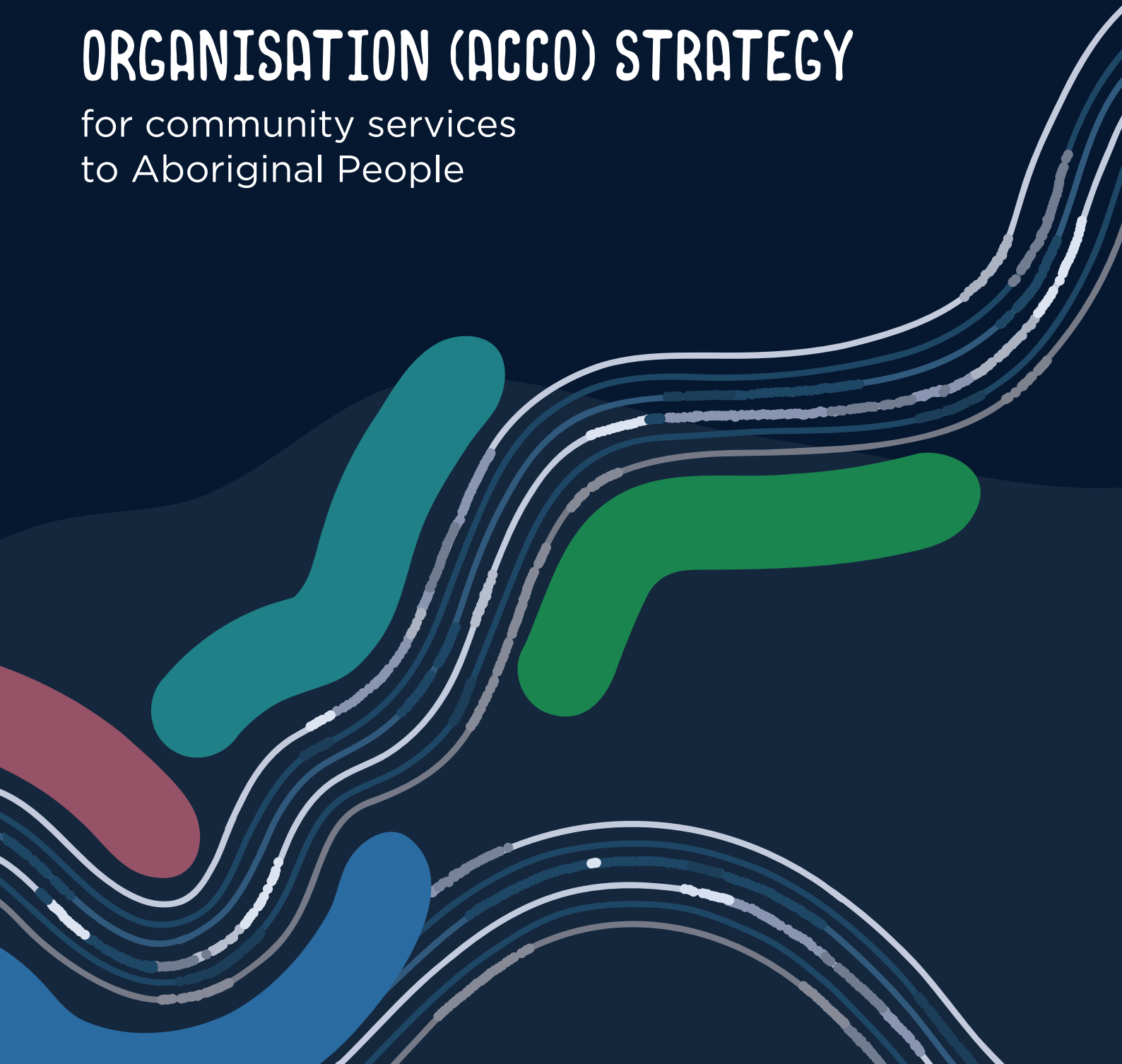




Whole-of-Government

ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED ORGANISATION (ACCO) STRATEGY

for community services
to Aboriginal People



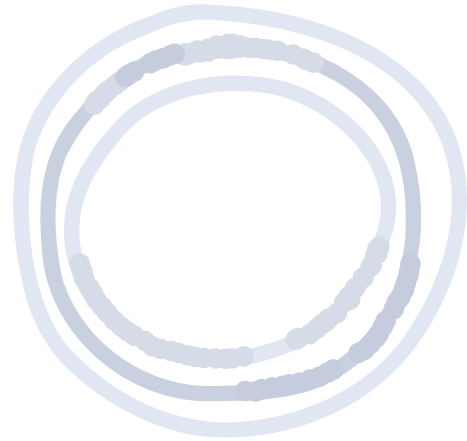
Acknowledgement of Country

The Government of Western Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians throughout Western Australia and their continuing connection to the land, waters and community. We pay our respects to all members of Western Australia's Aboriginal communities and their cultures; and to Elders both past and present.

A note about language

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

Together, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders make up the First Nations of Australia; however, Torres Strait Islander people in Western Australia have unique cultures, identities and histories, distinct from those of Aboriginal people. On average, Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders have different socioeconomic profiles and face different challenges, despite sharing a number of common experiences, including a history of racial discrimination. Some families have both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage, and this rich diversity is acknowledged and celebrated.



Trouble reading this document?

If you have trouble reading or understanding this document and want to access the information another way, please contact the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Aboriginal Engagement Directorate:
Phone: (08) 6552 5000
Email: AboriginalEngagement@dpc.wa.gov.au

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MINISTER'S FOREWORD

The WA Government is committed to improving outcomes for Aboriginal people in Western Australia by supporting Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to deliver culturally responsive and secure services to Aboriginal people.

I am pleased to share with you this whole-of-government Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Strategy which sets out how the WA Government can work with ACCOs to plan, design and deliver effective community services to Aboriginal people. It recognises the connection ACCOs have with their communities and their vital role in providing culturally responsive and secure services.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution and work of the WA Government's key partner in developing this Strategy, the Social Services Committee of the Aboriginal Health Council of WA, who have provided their valued input and expertise throughout the development of the ACCO Strategy.

This Strategy provides guidance on how the WA Government can progress key commitments of the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement). The Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy sets the overarching strategic direction of how the WA Government will direct its efforts towards a future in which **all Aboriginal people, families and communities are empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation.** The National Agreement, which was developed and is being implemented in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, sets out key priority reforms. These two overarching documents commit the WA Government to give Aboriginal people a greater role in making decisions that affect them and to increase the number of services being delivered to Aboriginal people by ACCOs.

The WA Government's ongoing efforts to deliver effective community services to all Western Australians is guided by the State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services (State Commissioning Strategy). Through the State Commissioning Strategy, the WA Government is committed to commissioning community services through a strategic, cohesive and system-wide approach. This ACCO Strategy complements the State Commissioning Strategy by providing further guidance on commissioning services for Aboriginal people. It is supported by a number of other commitments of the WA Government, including providing grants to support ACCOs to build capacity, and undertaking an Aboriginal Expenditure Review to identify opportunities to reprioritise funding to ACCOs.

I look forward to working with you to implement this ACCO Strategy and see the positive outcomes that result from it.

Hon Dr Tony Buti MLA

Minister for Education; Aboriginal Affairs;
Citizenship and Multicultural Interests



COUNCIL OF ABORIGINAL SERVICES WA FOREWORD

The Council of Aboriginal Services WA (CASWA) is an Aboriginal community-controlled statewide peak body established through an act of Aboriginal self-determination. CASWA exists to ensure Western Australian (WA) Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are united by a strong and collective voice and that they are supported to deliver place-based, community-led, culturally appropriate services to their communities.

CASWA joins the Aboriginal Health Council WA (AHCWA) as the only Aboriginal community-controlled peak bodies in WA, and members of the Coalition of Peaks. To establish CASWA, AHCWA auspiced a Social Services Committee (the committee) which brought together Aboriginal leaders from across the state with cultural knowledge and expertise in different sectors. The Committee through the voices of Aboriginal stakeholders, worked closely with the WA Government to develop the ACCO Strategy.

CASWA is pleased to introduce the whole-of-government ACCO Strategy - it marks a pivotal juncture in our ongoing efforts to elevate the ACCO sector, solidifying the sector's role in shaping the future of community services across our remarkable state.

The strategic significance of ACCOs, as enshrined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, resonates deeply within this ACCO Strategy. ACCOs are fortified by principles that radiate strength and self-determination. By design, they are conduits of community strength, directly connected to the fabric of the people they serve. Their governance, rooted in the knowledge and expertise of Aboriginal people and their communities, is the compass guiding their impactful journey.

This Strategy advances the principles of collaboration, partnership, and capability enhancement that lie at the core of ACCO operations. It's noteworthy that while the ACCO Strategy spotlights community services, ACCOs are dynamic entities with roles extending to land management, cultural heritage, native title, and remote community administration.

The ACCO Strategy acknowledges the wider tapestry of ACCO functions and the value of forging resilient relationships, fostering partnerships, and amplifying existing capacities.

The ACCO Strategy is underpinned by three objectives that highlight the path forward:

1. Greater Involvement of ACCOs in Planning and Designing Services:

A fundamental pillar of this Strategy, this objective emphasises the imperative of involving ACCOs in both mainstream and Aboriginal-specific services. This objective envisions a landscape where ACCOs participate actively in service planning and design, while ensuring the voices of Aboriginal service users and individuals with lived experiences remain pivotal.

2. Increased Service Delivery by ACCOs to Aboriginal People:

Aligned with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform Two, this objective sets a critical course toward elevating ACCOs as primary conduits of service delivery, envisioning a more equitable and inclusive service delivery landscape.

3. Building Strong and Sustainable ACCO Sectors:

At the heart of the ACCO Strategy lies the commitment to strengthen and sustain the ACCO sector, recognising that a thriving ACCO sector is the cornerstone on which the other objectives stand. As we embark on this transformative journey, we call upon every stakeholder to embrace the objectives of the Strategy, to champion ACCOs as catalysts for change, and to weave a future where empowerment is not just a notion, but a lived reality.

CASWA stands ready to advise and support the WA Government in its implementation of the WA ACCO Strategy. CASWA will advocate for and support the consistent implementation of the Strategy across government to ensure ACCOs across service sectors are recognised equally for their expertise and impact. In the delivery of this Strategy, we look forward to witnessing improved outcomes for our people and communities as a result of a stronger and more self-determining ACCO sector in WA.



BACKGROUND

The WA Government provides a diverse range of community services to support the wellbeing of all Western Australians. Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are critical to the delivery of community services, particularly to Aboriginal people across a wide range of sectors including, health, mental health, housing, family support, disability support, justice, youth engagement, education, training and child protection.

Through the [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) strategic element of 'Building Aboriginal Empowerment into how we work' and Priority Reform Two of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (National Agreement), the WA Government is committed to increasing the proportion of services being delivered to Aboriginal people by ACCOs, through sustained efforts in building strong ACCO sectors, and policies to support ACCOs as preferred providers of services to Aboriginal people.

Through the [State Commissioning Strategy for Community Services](#) (State Commissioning Strategy), launched in August 2022, the WA

Government is working to change the way it delivers community services. The intention is to drive a more holistic and sustainable community services system through a proactive and strategic approach to commissioning.

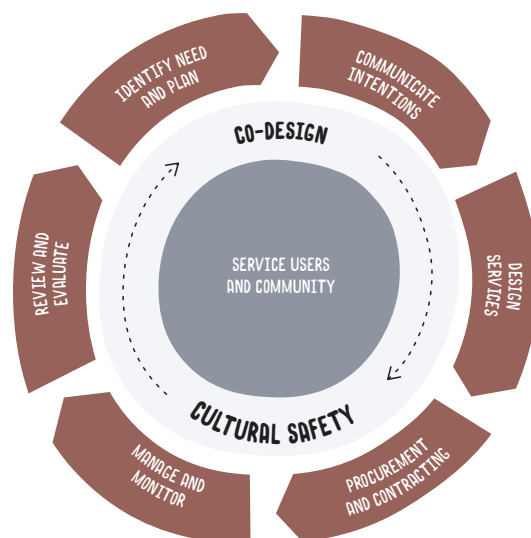
The community services system is currently not as effective as it could be in supporting outcomes for Aboriginal people, as detailed in the *Where are we now?* sections of the Strategy Overview on Page 10 - 11. This whole-of-government ACCO Strategy (ACCO Strategy) details how to shift the system to better support ACCOs and improve outcomes for Aboriginal people through commissioning community services.

WHAT IS COMMISSIONING?

Commissioning is a strategic approach to the delivery of community services that puts service users at the heart of the process. It looks beyond procurement of services and focuses on longer-term outcomes for individuals and the broader community. Commissioning is a cyclical process of planning, purchasing, managing, monitoring and evaluating services.

The State Commissioning Strategy provides more detail on commissioning, its phases and efforts to shift to a commissioning approach for community services.

This ACCO Strategy outlines how the WA Government will work with ACCOs throughout the commissioning cycle.



The approach is iterative, responsive and seeks to build the capacity of the providers

The process involves ongoing, genuine, respectful engagement

Service users and community needs are at the centre of commissioning

PURPOSE

The ACCO Strategy sets out the approach for WA Government agencies commissioning community services to fulfil the relevant commitments of the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and the National Agreement. It provides high-level strategic policy direction to guide and drive implementation across government to empower Aboriginal people and increase opportunities for ACCOs.

SCOPE

This Strategy focuses on the role of ACCOs in delivering community services.

Community services are services that provide support to sustain and nurture the functioning of individuals and groups, to address physical, social and economic disadvantage, maximise their potential, and to enhance community wellbeing.

ACCOs are defined in the National Agreement as organisations that strengthen and empower Aboriginal communities and people and are:

- 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; and
- d. governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.

The [Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy](#) (DCSP Policy) aligns to this definition. Guidance on identifying ACCOs that meet this definition can be found on WA.gov.au

There are many ACCOs in WA that perform key functions outside the community services context, including those working in land management, cultural heritage, native title and

remote community administration. While this Strategy is primarily relevant to community services, aspects of it remain relevant to these other ACCOs, particularly the importance of strengthening relationships, working in partnership and building on existing capability.

There are also many **Aboriginal organisations**¹ that do not necessarily meet the ACCO definition (for example, because they have a majority-Aboriginal board but not majority-Aboriginal membership), but nevertheless have an important role in delivering community services to Aboriginal people. This ACCO Strategy is also relevant to these organisations.

Some **registered Aboriginal businesses** are ACCOs while others (particularly those that operate on a for-profit basis) are not. For more about registered Aboriginal businesses, see p9 (Alignment to the Aboriginal Procurement Policy) and p21 (Prioritisation in Practice).

¹ Defined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap as an incorporated business, charity, not-for-profit organisation that has at least 51% Aboriginal ownership and/or directorship and is operated for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.

VISION

The ACCO Strategy’s vision is for Aboriginal people in Western Australia to be able to access place-based, Aboriginal community-led, culturally responsive and secure community services that are planned, designed and delivered by strong and sustainable ACCOs.

THE RATIONALE FOR BACKING ACCOS

ACCOs are critical to the delivery of community services to Aboriginal people. The benefits of ACCOs in planning, designing and delivering services are supported by academic research and lived experience. These benefits can be seen in:

- higher rates of service engagement (both initially and over extended periods); and
- better outcomes for Aboriginal service users.

ACCOs are uniquely positioned to deliver culturally responsive and secure services to Aboriginal people. This leads to better outcomes because:

1. ACCOs are accountable to the communities in which they work

ACCOs have formal and informal mechanisms that hold their directors and staff accountable to the communities in which they work. This gives ACCOs legitimacy in their communities and ensures their efforts are strongly aligned to the communities they work in.

2. Aboriginal people make the key decisions

ACCOs are governed by Aboriginal people, and this flows through to how the service model operates and how the individual users experience the service. It helps create services that are seen as trusted and legitimate by Aboriginal service users, which is particularly critical for services that rely on people actively engaging with them or services that support people to make personal or sensitive changes to their lives.

3. ACCOs are connected to their local communities

Through ACCOs’ presence in their local communities, Aboriginal people are more aware of ACCO services that are available, which supports higher rates of service engagement. It also gives ACCOs strong knowledge of the local needs and issues, the cultural context and community dynamics that are important for effective service design and delivery.

When ACCOs lead the planning, design and delivery of services on behalf of their communities, Aboriginal people are empowered as decision makers. As the National Agreement (clause 44) put it “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control is an act of self-determination”. This has positive impacts not just for the service users, but the community more broadly.

ACCOs also deliver important economic opportunities through the employment of local Aboriginal staff. See Page 9 for more on the relevance of these economic benefits to the ACCO Strategy.

While the Strategy recognises that ACCOs have unique strengths, all community service organisations should take steps to continuously improve their cultural responsiveness. This includes engaging Aboriginal people in service design, establishing relationships with local Elders and community leaders, and employing Aboriginal staff to manage and to deliver services. These changes are critical to providing the best services possible to Aboriginal people, but they are not a substitute for Aboriginal community control.

This Strategy also acknowledges that some Aboriginal people may prefer to use a different service provider, and it remains important that service users have a choice of service provider.

Sources: Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (2015), Australian Governments and Coalition of Peaks (2020), Panaretto et al (2014), Productivity Commission (2020), Ware (2013), WA Government (2021a).



OBJECTIVES

The ACCO Strategy has three objectives:

1. GREATER INVOLVEMENT OF ACCOS IN PLANNING AND DESIGNING SERVICES

This applies to both mainstream and Aboriginal-specific services, in line with the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy's strategic element of 'Building Aboriginal empowerment into how we work'. Greater involvement of ACCOs in service planning and design is not to the exclusion of Aboriginal service users and people with lived experience.

2. ACCOS DELIVERING MORE SERVICES TO ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

This reflects the National Agreement Priority Reform Two target to 'increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through ACCOs'.

3. STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE ACCO SECTORS

This reflects the commitments of the National Agreement to support strong and sustainable ACCO sectors, and is necessary to support the other objectives.

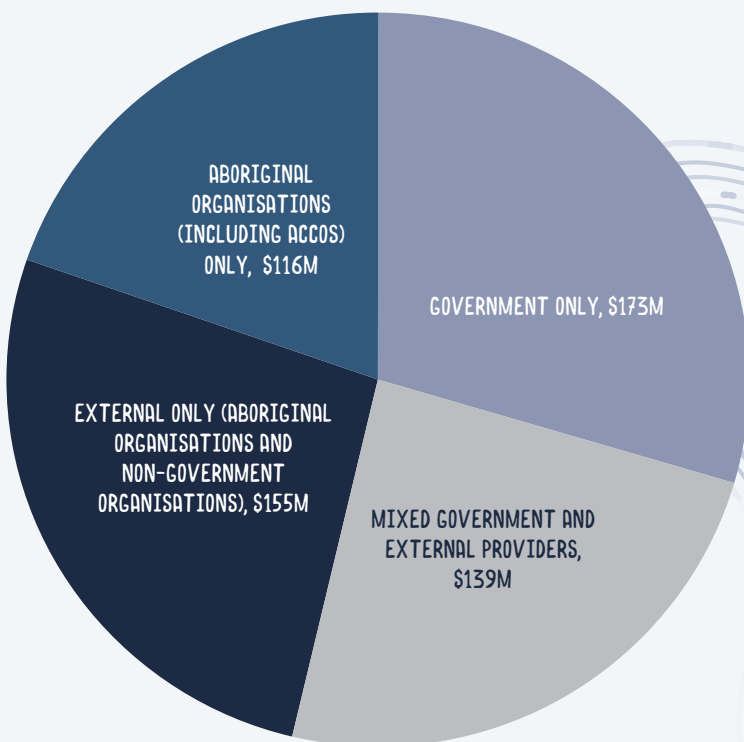
WHAT THE DATA TELLS US

As required by the National Agreement, the WA Government has undertaken an Aboriginal Expenditure Review (AER). The reviews aims to transparently identify current spending on Aboriginal programs and services, and identify opportunities to reprioritise ACCOs.

The 2022-23 AER, led by the Department of Treasury, shows that the WA Government spent \$583 million on Aboriginal-specific and Aboriginal-predominant programs over 2021-22.

The current AER data shows that while there is considerable investment in Aboriginal-specific programs, there is also a substantial way to go to achieve the vision of the ACCO Strategy.

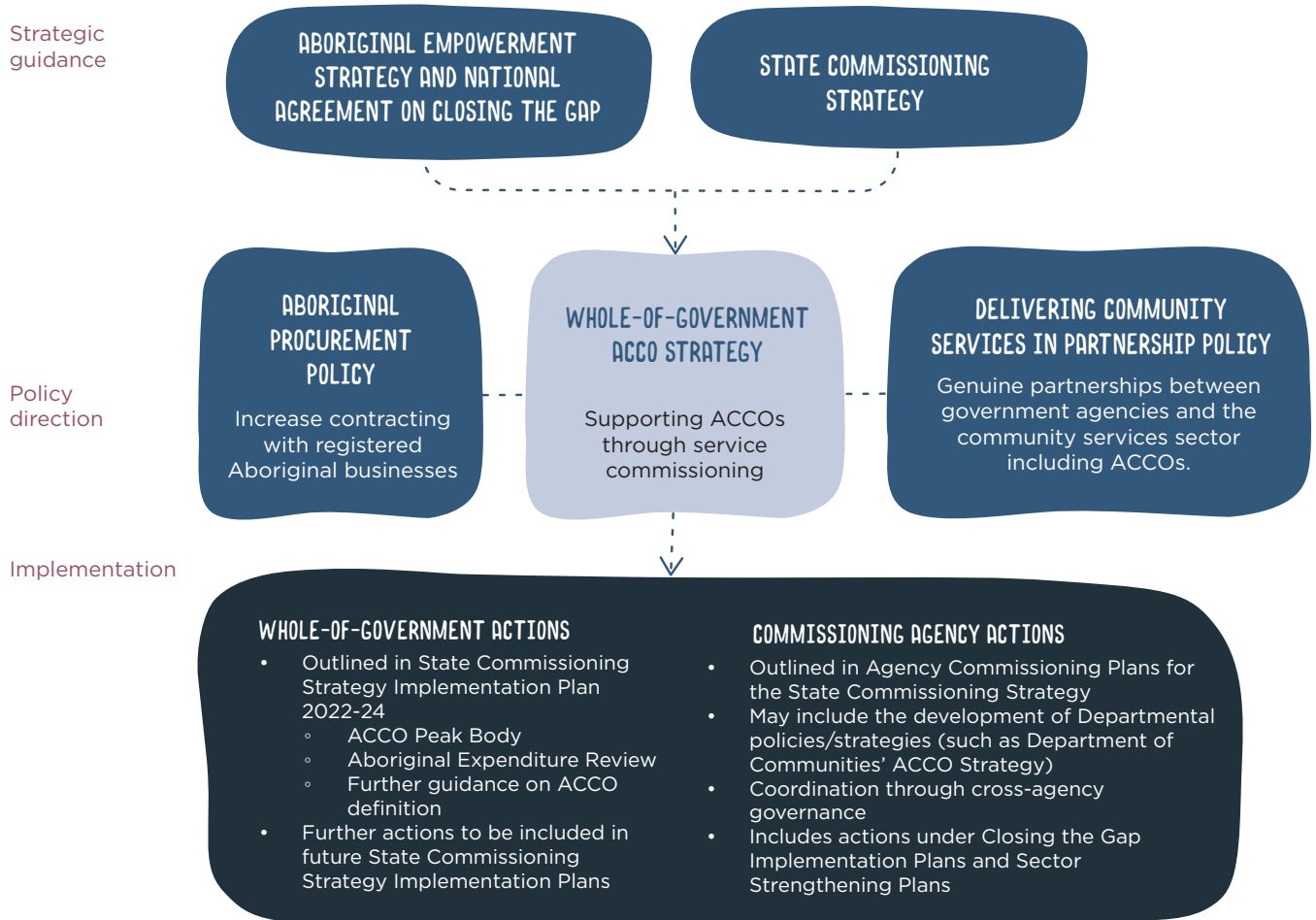
SPENDING ON ABORIGINAL-SPECIFIC AND ABORIGINAL-PREDOMINANT



-
- 2 The AER defines Aboriginal-specific and Aboriginal-predominant programs as direct spending on programs where a large proportion of service users are Aboriginal people.
 - 3 Some programs captured are delivered by multiple service provider types. Due to data limitations in the AER, the amount of funding provided to ACCOs for programs delivered under the 'External Only' and 'Mixed Government and External' could not be determined.
 - 4 As required by the National Agreement, the AER is focused on the amount of funding provided to Aboriginal organisations rather than explicitly focusing on ACCOs.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

The ACCO Strategy is a priority commitment of the [State Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan](#) and [WA's Closing the Gap Implementation Plan](#) and reflects the key strategic directions in the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy.



ALIGNMENT TO THE ABORIGINAL PROCUREMENT POLICY

The policy objectives of the Aboriginal Procurement Policy are focused on maximising employment for Aboriginal people and economic opportunities for Aboriginal businesses and organisations. While these objectives are also relevant, the ACCO Strategy's primary focus is on the effectiveness and uptake of services to Aboriginal people delivered by ACCOs.

Where an ACCO meets the definition of a registered Aboriginal business under the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, or the definition of an ACCO under the DSCP Policy, government agencies that contract the ACCO to deliver services will be able to count those contracts towards their agency contracting targets under the Aboriginal Procurement Policy. Note there are no numerical targets associated with the ACCO Strategy itself. Targets would not be appropriate due to the very diverse contexts of different service sectors, especially in terms of risk and sectoral maturity.

ACCO STRATEGY - OVERVIEW

The Strategy's objectives and vision are built on creating change in four focus areas that reflect the commissioning cycle. The focus areas have been identified based on the engagement with ACCOs, government agencies and Community Services Organisations (CSOs).

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND ACCO SECTOR THROUGHOUT THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE

Where are we now?

- Engagement between government agencies and ACCOs is uneven in quality.
- Government agencies' knowledge of ACCOs often sits within specific project teams rather than being embedded in their broader corporate knowledge.
- The ACCO sector's strength in a particular area is often seen as something that government agencies have no ability or responsibility to influence.
- ACCOs with the knowledge and competency to deliver services are not always well known or are not considered in commissioning.
- There is no standardised approach to sharing information on ACCOs across agencies.

Where do we want to be?

- **Know the ACCO sector:** Government agencies know their ACCO sector well in accordance with the agency's purpose and business.
- **Market stewardship:** Agencies understand and give effect to their systemic role in supporting and working with the ACCO sector relevant to their business. This role to be exercised in coordination with other agencies including Federal Government. Agency Commissioning Plans (ACPs) outline the proactive steps agencies will take to address market gaps in ACCO service delivery and provide ACCO sector supports.
- **Relationships:** Relationships between ACCOs and agencies are transparent, fair and open to support Aboriginal-led change.
- **Effective engagement:** Agencies collaborate when engaging with ACCOs, to ensure clear communication and minimise the burden on ACCOs.

2. SERVICE PLANNING AND DESIGN AT THE START OF THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE

Where are we now?

- Too often, service planning and design is done without sufficient or effective engagement with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities. This limits the potential for services to be culturally responsive and secure, to genuinely reflect community priorities and needs, and to assess their suitability in local contexts.
- For many services, uptake by Aboriginal people is lower than it could be, and/or the outcomes are less effective.
- ACCOs face difficulties meeting the resourcing burden involved in service design, which requires a significant investment of time in addition to the normal operations of the organisation.

Where do we want to be?

- **Partnership and engagement:** For services primarily delivered to Aboriginal people, ACCOs are partners (or, in appropriate cases, leaders) in the service planning and design from the inception. For mainstream services that are used by Aboriginal people, ACCOs are recognised as key stakeholders in planning, design and delivery.
- **ACCO-led proposals:** Where ACCOs develop their own service proposals, these are valued, and considered in service planning.
- **Resourcing:** ACPs reflect the resourcing implications for ACCOs (alongside other organisations) involved in service planning and design on an ongoing basis, and recognise the value of the expertise contributed by Elders and individuals with lived experience.

3. STRATEGIC PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING WITHIN THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE



Where are we now?

- Although government agencies are aware of the benefits of ACCO service provision, procurement strategies do not always create opportunities for ACCOs or recognise their unique value.
- ACCOs are not always made aware of upcoming tenders, and even when they are, tender processes can be so complex, or ACCOs so under-resourced, that it is difficult for them to respond.
- In situations where an ACCO is not able to deliver services independently, genuine partnerships, with plans to transition services, are not always prioritised.
- Where CSOs propose partnering with ACCOs in service tenders, agencies do not always take sufficient steps to ensure these partnerships are genuine and deliver the expected benefits.

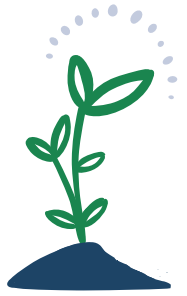
Where do we want to be?

- **Prioritisation:** ACCOs are prioritised as service providers to Aboriginal people, based on agencies' assessment of the relevant organisation's readiness to meet service delivery requirements. Restricted processes or direct approaches are used in procurement as appropriate to the particular case.
- **Maximising opportunities:** Procurement strategies consider how to maximise opportunities for ACCO involvement, including early engagement, contract unbundling (to reduce the geographic scope of a contract) or allocating a dedicated proportion of funding to ACCOs.
- **Partnerships:** Where partnerships between ACCOs and CSOs are identified as appropriate service delivery structures, commissioning agencies take steps to ensure these partnerships are genuine.
- **Transition:** Commissioning agencies work collaboratively with central agencies to plan for the transition of services to new ACCO providers in future commissioning processes, while managing risks and minimising disruptions to service delivery.

4. CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY - IN BOTH SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMISSIONING

Where are we now?

- The capability and capacity of ACCOs to deliver services, as well as participate in planning and design of services, varies significantly across sectors and across regions.
- The capability and capacity of government agencies to work in partnership with the ACCOs in their sector varies across and within agencies.
- "Market gaps" - places where there are no ACCOs currently ready to deliver a particular type of service - are not systematically identified and addressed by the responsible agencies.
- Capacity building supports are generally ad hoc and not necessarily linked to future service delivery opportunities.



Where do we want to be?

- **Government commissioning:** Government agencies have the capability and capacity to work with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities throughout the commissioning cycle.
- **ACCO sustainability:** In all parts of WA, and across the range of community services, there are strong ACCO sectors with the capability and capacity necessary to deliver services with sustainable funding models, consistent with the Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements in the National Agreement (clause 45).
- **Supporting ACCOs:** Government agencies identify gaps in ACCO service capacity in their ACPs. In coordination with other relevant agencies, agencies identify opportunities to support existing or new ACCOs to fill the service gaps.
- **Planning investment in capability:** Agencies consider ACCO capability-building needs when budgeting and planning for commissioning, and where appropriate, link investments in capability building to future service delivery opportunities. Agencies undertake early assessment of the readiness of an ACCO to meet service delivery requirements, including consideration of the need to support resourcing for early development and/or transitional arrangements.
- **Peak representation:** ACCOs have effective peak body representation, which plays a key role in policy development, advocacy to government, and sectoral development initiatives.

INTRODUCING THE NEW ACCO PEAK BODY: THE COUNCIL OF ABORIGINAL SERVICES WA

COUNCIL OF ABORIGINAL SERVICES WA

The newly established Council of Aboriginal Services WA (CASWA) will represent the interests of ACCOs from all social services sectors in WA.

CASWA will play a role in:

- Policy development and advice to government and other stakeholders, informed by sector consultation and research;
- Representing ACCOs to government and other mainstream stakeholders;
- Information dissemination; and
- Capacity-building and sector development.

HOW WAS CASWA DEVELOPED?

CASWA's development was led by a committee comprised of ACCO representatives from various sectors, independently auspiced by the Aboriginal Health Council of WA. ACCOs from across WA provided input into its constitution, which includes a requirement for CASWA's board to have representation from a broad range of sectors.

A CONDUIT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AND THE ACCO SECTOR

CASWA will provide an important link between the ACCO sector and government agencies, by facilitating partnerships, advising on engagement with ACCOs, and channeling expertise about, and from the sector.

ACCO CAPABILITY BUILDING

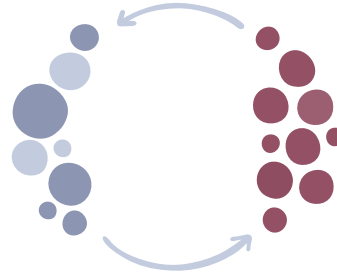
One of the key functions identified for CASWA is support ACCOs to enable them to exercise control over the delivery of Aboriginal services to Aboriginal people in WA. During its establishment phase, CASWA's initial focus will be on building trusting relationships with the ACCO sector and increasing its membership across WA. Following this, it will develop an approach for provision of capability building, corporate services and governance support to members.



GUIDANCE TO HELP DRIVE CHANGE ACROSS GOVERNMENT

This section provides guidance on how government agencies can drive change in each of the four focus areas, as part of the shift to commissioning services throughout the commissioning cycle.

1. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOVERNMENT AGENCY AND ACCO SECTOR THROUGHOUT THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE



KNOW THE ACCO SECTOR

Shifting to a service commissioning system that enables better services for Aboriginal people requires detailed knowledge of ACCOs as key partners. Government agencies should seek to understand:

- ACCOs currently active in the sector; and
- ACCOs with intentions to operate in the sector.

Government agencies should ensure they know about the ACCOs that are currently active in the sectors relevant to their portfolio, such as the regions and towns they are connected to. Government officers in Perth should draw on the knowledge and relationships of regional government networks, and other organisations (including ACCOs and peak bodies), networks throughout the commissioning cycle.

Government agencies should identify the ACCOs that they are working with in their ACPs to highlight opportunities to collaborate with other government agencies when engaging with ACCOs.

MARKET STEWARDSHIP

While there are many strong ACCOs operating throughout WA, there are also some gaps in the market where there are no existing ACCOs with the capability to deliver a given service.

Government agencies have a systemic role in addressing these gaps through “market stewardship”.

Market stewardship means taking a proactive approach to ensure that there are enough service providers with capability to deliver effective services to all users, wherever they live. Rather than simply purchasing services from the sector as it exists now, government agencies act as market stewards when they take active steps to support the strength of the sector.

In the context of this ACCO Strategy, market stewardship means government agencies working with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities to ensure there are ACCOs operating in each sector and each region who can support the planning, design and delivery of services to Aboriginal people. The cross-agency governance which has been established to support Closing the Gap provides mechanisms for agencies to work collaboratively to address market gaps that exist across multiple sectors. Sector Strengthening Plans (SSPs) developed under the National Agreement set out specific aspects of the market steward role in priority sectors.

Under the State Commissioning Strategy, government agencies are responsible for supporting a sustainable market of service providers for their sector. Further guidance on the market steward role is provided in Focus Area 1.




EFFECTIVE ENGAGEMENT

Driving change across agencies and enabling ACCOs to deliver services for Aboriginal people, depends on the following principles for effective engagement:

- Engagement is transparent and fair, meaning Government officers are clear about the scope of their own authorisation and the limits of what they can commit to.
- The learnings from engagement are recorded and shared.
- The cultural responsiveness of government officers, consistent with the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, is supported through training and development opportunities, including around unconscious bias and anti-racism.
- Engagement timelines and approaches are built to accommodate ACCO-led work.
- Depending on the context, engagement should include relationships at officer-level, not just with CEOs or directors.

Engagement and relationships are most effective when government takes time to understand ACCO and Aboriginal community perspectives, needs and aspirations. Simple practices to support engagement with ACCOs can include:

- engaging with ACCO peak bodies as conduits to engagement with ACCOs;
- prioritising trust as the foundation of a strong relationship, which can be supported by meeting in person;
- learning the local history of the community and their existing priorities and challenges;
- taking time to understand the local Aboriginal governance and authorisation structures;
- referring to previous engagement to build on existing knowledge; keeping accurate records of engagement including experiences and observations to inform future engagements;
- maintaining contact to develop and strengthen the relationship; and
- determining resources required for ongoing engagement, and considering the availability of key stakeholders.



‘ACCOs and Aboriginal people need to be leading the design and conduct of engagement, need to know the purpose of engagement, know what feedback is provided/can be provided, and understand how the feedback is influencing government decision-making.’

- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
Social Services Committee submission to the
ACCO Strategy Engagement Summary.

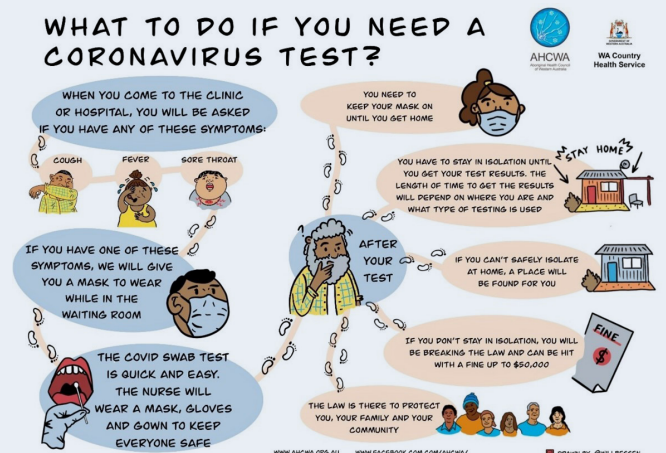
CASE STUDY:

PARTNERING WITH ACCOS TO RESPOND TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

To respond to the COVID-19 pandemic in Halls Creek, WA Country Health Service, (WACHS), Yura Yungi Aboriginal Medical Service, Halls Creek Shire and other government agencies met daily during the early weeks of the outbreak to ensure a joined up and coordinated response.

With some hospital staff getting COVID-19, ensuring the community had trust in the hospital as a safe place to visit was identified as critical to supporting people's health. This required providing culturally appropriate resources to those visiting the hospital to reduce fear and confusion about the new protocols introduced at the hospital.

To achieve this WA Health partnered with Yura Yungi and the Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA) to design a culturally appropriate hand-out titled 'What to do if you need a coronavirus test' specifically for Aboriginal community members coming to the hospital.



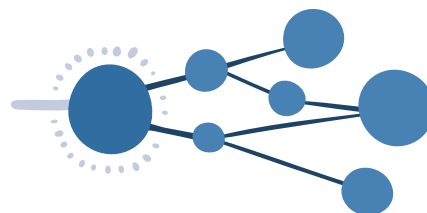
Artwork © Will Bessen

AHCWA had already developed some preliminary culturally appropriate posters and flyers and was able to adapt these for use in Halls Creek. The poster above was developed for Halls Creek Hospital by an AHCWA artist and rolled out across the Kimberley. AHCWA also added it to their web-based resources. WA Health continued to work closely with AHCWA on developing several culturally appropriate resources as the pandemic spread to other parts of the state. Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service produced videos and further promotional materials for circulation across media channels.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and WACHS collaborated continuously through the pandemic to achieve robust and responsive remote pandemic planning, urgent and ongoing public health response teams, extensive communication, and a joint response to vaccination across the state. These relationships helped keep remote and country communities safe through extremely challenging circumstances to deliver favourable outcomes for remote Aboriginal communities and patients.



2. SERVICE PLANNING AND DESIGN AT THE START OF THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE



PARTNERSHIP AND ENGAGEMENT

Up-front investment in service planning and design is critical to commissioning services that maximise outcomes for service users. A core principle of the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy is that decisions about Aboriginal people cannot be made without Aboriginal people.

For decisions with high potential impact on, or opportunity for, Aboriginal people, this means working in partnership with them. For other decisions, it means genuine engagement that is proportional to the potential impact or opportunity.

Planning and designing services in partnership with ACCOs and Aboriginal service users is essential for the development of **services of high impact or opportunity for Aboriginal people**. This includes services:

- that are identified as Aboriginal-specific;
- where there are high levels of overrepresentation of Aboriginal people, or the service is delivered to communities with a large Aboriginal population;
- where the participation of Aboriginal people is disproportionately low compared to the known level of need; or
- where the needs of Aboriginal service users vary in comparison to those of the broader population.⁵

Government agencies should work in partnership with ACCOs in accordance with the Strong Partnership Elements of the National Agreement (clause 32). The Strong Partnership Elements set out the requirements for partnerships with ACCOs, including representation, accountability, agreement and decision-making.

Before agencies commence any engagement with ACCOs, whether as part of a co-design process or formal partnership, a clear understanding of the financial and policy authorising environment is essential. Establishing the scope of authorisation will enable agencies to communicate with ACCOs early and explicitly about expectations and budget matters. This is necessary to avoid the risk of disappointment, frustration and delay.

It is critical that ACCOs have the necessary resources to engage in partnerships with government. This requires government agencies to make efforts to address the imbalance in power, including access to data and information that exists between government and ACCOs to help facilitate informed shared decision-making (see next page). Other unique considerations to support effective partnerships with ACCOs may include, providing information in Aboriginal languages, and flexibility in how feedback can be provided. Actions to address the resourcing gaps and requirements for work in partnership with ACCOs in service planning and design should be reflected in ACPs.

Partnership with ACCOs is appropriate in many, but not all, circumstances. For mainstream services, there will be other stakeholders who should also be involved in service planning and design. This can include CSOs and other priority groups, such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Because of the unique cultural context of Aboriginal communities and ongoing disadvantage across a range of social determinants, ACCOs must be recognised as key stakeholders for service planning and design for all types of services. Agencies should work with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities to determine the extent to which the service is important to Aboriginal people and the extent that ACCOs want to be involved in service planning and design. This will empower ACCOs to decide on the level of their involvement and how Aboriginal communities should be engaged. All engagement with ACCOs should be transparent, fair and open (see Focus Area 1).

⁵ Adapted from WACOSS and NFSWC (2019).

ACCO-LED SERVICE PROPOSALS

ACCOs often develop their own ideas for services because they are well-placed to recognise the unique priorities and dynamics in their communities. Service proposals designed by ACCOs are distinctly place-based and designed to meet the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal service users.

Where government agencies receive unsolicited ACCO-led service proposals, they should examine how the proposal complements existing services, matches service user needs and aspirations and delivers value for money, giving due consideration to the long-term outcomes that could be achieved by the proposal. Government agencies should keep their own records of decisions about unsolicited ACCO-led proposals so these can be considered as part of future service design processes.

RESOURCING TO SUPPORT ACCO PARTICIPATION

Several WA Government agencies have paid participation policies that prescribe how they remunerate external stakeholders' contributions to service planning and design. They set clear rules and establish transparency about payment. Paid participation policies are generally used to remunerate Elders or individuals with relevant lived experience for their time and expertise.

While time-limited and low-intensity engagement with government is part of the normal business of ACCOs and CSOs, the resourcing implications of in-depth engagement or long-term partnerships can be significant. Where engagement is ongoing and extends beyond the usual functions expected of the organisation, government agencies should ensure that ACCOs are adequately resourced to participate. Further detail on this is provided at clause 33 of the National Agreement.

Government agencies will need to consider resourcing implications of involving and partnering with ACCOs in service design on a case-by-case basis. Where the service will have a high impact or opportunity for Aboriginal people these resourcing implications may be greater and will need to be taken into account as part of the overall funding considerations for the commissioning process.

Using data to inform service planning and design

Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement calls for governments to support data- and evidence-based decision-making in service planning and design.

When working in partnership with ACCOs to plan and design services, agencies must take steps to share relevant data and address any barriers to this data sharing. Where data cannot be shared, agencies should provide transparent reasons why not.

Agencies should also:

- confirm that any findings drawn from large data sets are considered within an Aboriginal cultural context that is consistent with local community understandings;
- draw on evaluations and previous community engagements; and
- consider the data that will be necessary for evaluation, including how to empower ACCOs to lead data collection and management.

The service planning and design phase should also consider the data that will be necessary for evaluation, including how to empower ACCOs to lead data collection and management.

CASE STUDY:

CO-DESIGNING THE HEALTH NAVIGATORS PROGRAM

Carers and children in out-of-home care (OOHC) often find it challenging to navigate the health system to access the services they need. The Health Navigators Pilot Program (HNPP) provides a new model for all eligible children and young people in OOHC to navigate to the right service at the right time, including access to culturally safe and holistic services. The HNPP is being piloted in the South West and Mirrabooka regions, and partners with Aboriginal Medical Services to help children and young people access required health assessments and services.

To design the service, the Department of Health and Department of Communities facilitated a co-designed series of workshops across the South West and Mirrabooka regions with 143 key stakeholders to discover, develop, test and implement the pilot. Stakeholders included:

- ACCOs (particularly local Aboriginal Medical Services);
- carers;
- advocacy groups;
- non-government providers;
- other WA Government representatives; and
- those with lived experience.

Initial workshops were designed to identify the current state, key areas for improvement and what worked well within the existing landscape, to set the direction and principles for the HNPP. Follow-up workshops were held to test and confirm understanding of what was heard to ensure that the draft operational model aligned with community and stakeholder expectations. The co-designed engagement process was enabled by joint endorsement from the Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services and the Minister for Health and Mental Health.

Following the co-design process, the HNPP provided funding to the South West Aboriginal Medical Service, Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service, and the Noongar Family Safety & Wellbeing Council to:

- employ Aboriginal Health Navigator positions;
- increase existing service capacity to support Aboriginal children in OOHC through access to child health nurses and pediatricians;
- raise awareness of the existing capability and capacity across the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs); and
- enable self-determined growth for the ACCHOs, with government as an enabling partner.

The ACCHOs provide holistic and culturally appropriate health assessments and care through a diversity of skills and experience that benefit the health outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in OOHC. They are represented at each level of governance to ensure Aboriginal community advice is informing decision making.

Ongoing engagements about the HNPP are held through a strong governance structure, including advisory groups, and through the HNPP Evaluation. These mechanisms monitor how the pilot continues to test and respond to demand, within the scope of the HNPP. The Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia, with ACCHOs' direct involvement, are conducting an evaluation to review the efficacy and sustainability of the pilot.

CASE STUDY:

NORTH-WEST ABORIGINAL HOUSING FUND

The North-West Aboriginal Housing Fund (NWAHF) is a \$200 million initiative that aims to create pathways towards social and economic independence and wellbeing for Aboriginal people in the Pilbara and Kimberley.

The NWAHF invests in projects that empower Aboriginal people and communities by increasing opportunities for:

- suitable and stable housing options for Aboriginal people outside of the public housing system
- employment and training
- educational attainment
- economic development and capacity building for ACCOs and businesses.

NWAHF investments will create employment for approximately 335 Aboriginal people and support over 80 apprenticeships, in addition to providing culturally appropriate housing and support services.

As of September 2022, NWAHF has approved \$107 million to fund seven initiatives across the Pilbara and Kimberley to deliver homes available for purchase and employee housing for Aboriginal people. Of the \$107 million, \$74.1 million will be delivered through partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and the Department of Communities. Five of the seven initiatives will be designed, owned and delivered by Aboriginal organisations.

All investments are Aboriginal driven with co-design being a core principle of NWAHF. This can be demonstrated through partnerships with the following organisations:

- Binarri-Binyja Yarrawoo Aboriginal Corporation, which has resulted in the co-design of the East Kimberley Transitional Housing Program for Aboriginal people in Kununurra, Wyndham and Halls Creek.
- Nyamba Buru Yawuru, which has codesigned, led and delivered the 'Jalbi Jiya (Your Home)' five-year program in Broome.
- Yindjibarndi Capital and Yurra Pty Ltd, which has led the development of the Ganalili Accommodation and Training Facility, delivering Aboriginal apprentice and employee transitional accommodation on land owned by Yindjibarndi Capital in Roebourne.
- Robe River Kuruma Aboriginal Corporation, which has co-designed, led and delivered the Housing Pathways Support Program to provide culturally secure in-situ housing support over three years to enable Aboriginal people in the Pilbara to transition from social housing.
- Yura Yungi Medical Service (YYMS), which has co-designed, led and delivered the Yura Yungi Accommodation and Career Development Program to provide five new homes on land owned by YYMS in Halls Creek.

NWAHF contributes to strengthening and establishing formal partnerships and shared decision-making with Aboriginal people in the design and delivery of initiatives to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal people.

3. STRATEGIC PROCUREMENT AND CONTRACTING WITHIN THE COMMISSIONING CYCLE



ACHIEVING BETTER OUTCOMES WITH ACCOS

Government agencies commission services from external organisations as one way of achieving their portfolio responsibilities. In doing so, agencies are required to seek the best value for money outcome, considering both cost and relevant non-cost factors (Rule A1, WA Procurement Rules).

For the reasons outlined on page 6, ACCOs can deliver better outcomes for Aboriginal service users through greater service engagement and effectiveness. The unique strengths of ACCOs should therefore be harnessed where possible.

Under the Delivering Community Services in Partnership (DCSP) Policy, agencies must determine which procurement arrangements will best suit individual and community needs.

When procuring services under the DCSP Policy, agencies should prioritise ACCOs for:

- Aboriginal-specific services; and
- delivering a 'meaningful proportion'⁶ of services delivered by non-government organisations and intended for the broader population that are of high importance to Aboriginal people (based on the types of services in Focus area 2) – see below. This prioritisation operates in the context of agencies assessing the capability and capacity of potential service providers and determining how to ensure the particular service is delivered most effectively.

FLEXIBLE APPROACHES TO PROCUREMENT

The DCSP Policy provides for flexibility in the procurement of community services.

Ensuring ACCOs deliver a 'meaningful proportion' of services delivered by non-government organisations and intended for the broader population can be achieved by allocating a proportion of the total available

⁶ Clause 55b of the National Agreement requires this be done for new funding initiatives. It can also be considered when recommissioning services. The National Agreement suggests that the 'meaningful proportion' of funding considers the service demands of Aboriginal people and the number and capacity of ACCOs.

funding to be exclusively for ACCOs. This is likely to require unbundling larger contracts to instead provide for multiple service agreements with different ACCO and CSO providers.

Depending on the context, this may result in:

- some locations being serviced by an ACCO only (e.g. for mainstream services where Aboriginal people constitute a majority of service users); or
- a single location having both ACCO and CSO service providers, working in parallel and giving service users the choice of provider.

Where it has been identified that an ACCO or multiple ACCOs would be capable of delivering the service, either a competitive process restricted to ACCOs or direct approaches (negotiating with a one or more ACCOs, or seeking offers from more than one potential service provider that have been identified after extensive market testing) should be used depending on the nature of the market and whether a competitive approach is appropriate. The DCSP Policy includes a provision to allow government agencies to directly negotiate with ACCOs where the organisation meets the ACCO definition included in the Policy (aligned to the National Agreement) and direct negotiation has been identified as an appropriate approach.

For community services where it is not feasible or appropriate to use a restricted process or direct approach to prioritise ACCOs, it is critical for the competitive approaches to ensure that the service provider has the appropriate skills to deliver a service that is responsive to Aboriginal people's cultures, experiences and values and supports improved outcomes for them and their communities. To do this, the assessment process should consider:

- the service provider's ability to provide a culturally responsive service and their connection to the community where the service is being provided, including existing levels of trust and community support, and accountability to the community; or
- assessments that give extra weight to applications from ACCOs or Aboriginal organisations, or genuine partnerships with ACCOs as a proxy measure for the above.

Best practice procurement with ACCOs

Key considerations when undertaking procurement planning should include:

- early engagement with ACCOs to ensure they are aware, able and want to participate (following the engagement guidance in Focus Area 1);
- ensuring the scope of the contract allows for ACCOs to provide services to the communities they are connected to (drawing on the agency's knowledge of the ACCO sector to unbundle state wide or regional contracts); and
- ensuring smaller ACCOs, or ACCOs with limited resources to fully develop a compelling response to tenders, are not disadvantaged from responding.

Some ACCOs have emphasised that standard government procurement processes can be a barrier to participating in procurement. Some do not have the dedicated resources to respond to complex or burdensome processes and others have limited administrative support to respond to even simple procurement processes.

To enable ACCOs to develop a compelling response to tenders, there is emerging practice within the WA Government to reduce the burden on ACCOs in some procurement processes through inclusive engagement. These novel approaches include:

- meeting on Country to speak with ACCOs about service proposals;
- dedicating resources to working with ACCOs throughout the process to develop a strong proposal, including small grants to ACCOs to help them respond to tenders; and
- offering targeted training about procurement processes.

These approaches may not be appropriate in all cases, but where they are, they can enable ACCOs to respond while ensuring government probity obligations are still met.

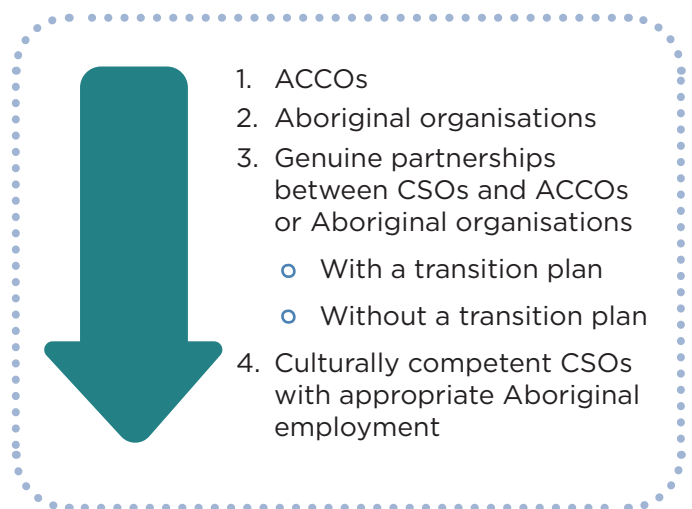
Similar concepts can also be applied to contract management to minimise the reporting and administrative burden on ACCOs, such as allowing ACCOs to use existing documents or other evidence to meet their contract management and reporting requirements.

PRIORITISATION IN PRACTICE

In some cases, agencies will identify a service where ACCOs should be prioritised as the service provider, but assess that there is no existing ACCO — or consortium of ACCOs — with capacity to deliver the particular service. In these cases, the procurement approach should instead prioritise Aboriginal organisations,⁷ or partnerships between CSOs and ACCOs or Aboriginal organisations as the preferred provider to deliver the service (figure below). This general approach should be applied flexibly, drawing on the agency's knowledge of the ACCO sector and, where possible, local community knowledge to identify the most appropriate service provider.

Where a procurement process identifies market gaps in ACCO service delivery, agencies should record this identified market gap in their ACP and consider what is required to address the market gap in the long term (see Focus Area 4).

Figure: Preferred order of prioritisation⁸



⁷ Aboriginal organisations are defined in the National Agreement as an organisation with at least 51% Aboriginal ownership and/or directorship and is operated for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.

⁸ Adapted from WACOSS and NFSWC (2019).

CASE STUDY:

HOUSING FIRST HOMELESSNESS INITIATIVE

The Strategy *All Paths Lead to Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030* seeks to introduce a Housing First approach to homelessness that prioritises connecting individuals to permanent housing, with flexible and tailored supports to follow. This is seen as a key foundation of the system change needed to end chronic homelessness.

Since the launch of the All Paths Lead to Home Strategy, the Department of Communities (Communities) has made significant progress in implementing a Housing First approach through the Housing First Homelessness Initiative. The Housing First Homelessness Initiative provides support to individuals and families who are rough sleeping in the Perth metropolitan area (including Rockingham/Mandurah), Bunbury and Geraldton. This funding covers support and case management, co-ordination accommodation and evaluation.

Housing First Support Services comprises multi-disciplinary teams delivering assertive outreach, case management partnership and collaboration. Housing First Support Services work alongside accommodation providers and housing organisations to secure suitable accommodation and put in place appropriate wrap-around supports to help people maintain accommodation.

As of 30 September 2022, 159 people were being case managed through the Housing First Support Services, 69 people had been placed in long-term housing and 43 people were supported in crisis or transitional accommodation.

To strengthen culturally appropriate responses, Noongar Mia Mia and Wungening Aboriginal Corporation have been engaged to deliver the Aboriginal Housing First Support Services. The service, Moorditj Mia 'Strong Home', designed by Noongar Mia Mia, provides culturally appropriate accommodation, employment, health, mental health, financial and social supports across the Perth metro area. Noongar Mia Mia has developed a unique framework to strengthen a culturally informed Housing First approach. The Noongar Cultural Framework and Noongar Housing First Principles create a solid foundation promoting culturally safe environments and housing and support services for Noongar people experiencing homelessness, their families, and communities.

There are six principles:

1. Noongar people and their families have a right to a home with cultural connections to boodjar, moort and kaartdijin.
2. Support is flexible, culturally appropriate and is available whenever needed.
3. Choice and self-determination with no cultural compromise.
4. Culturally appropriate active engagement through kwop daa.
5. Support focuses on strengthening wirrin.
6. Social, cultural and community inclusion.

CASE STUDY:

DRAWING ON LOCAL EXPERTISE FOR THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONNECTORS PROGRAM

The Aboriginal Community Connectors Program (the Connectors Program) aims to improve the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal people and communities, specifically by supporting at-risk Aboriginal children and young people, and vulnerable Aboriginal people experiencing alcohol and other drug dependency, homelessness, family and domestic violence, and/or lateral violence.

The Connectors Program plays a critical front-line role in ensuring that some of the most vulnerable Aboriginal people in the State can access crisis support (i.e. mediation, referrals to police and health services, provision of safe transport), and be connected to culturally responsive and secure services. The Connectors Program supports local Aboriginal community activities and events and fills a critical gap in accessible and affordable transport in many regional locations.

The Department of Communities engages local ACCOs as service providers to deliver the program in thirteen locations across Western Australia which includes services in:

- Kimberley (Broome, Derby, Halls Creek, Kununurra & Wyndham)
- Pilbara (Hedland & Roebourne)
- Midwest-Gascoyne (Geraldton/Mullewa, Carnarvon & Meekatharra)
- Goldfields (Kalgoorlie)
- Metropolitan Perth.

The ACCO service providers employ approximately 120 Aboriginal people to deliver immediate street level assistance which provides cost savings to government by reducing the impost on policing due to anti-social behaviours, health services and the justice system.

PARTNERSHIPS BETWEEN ACCOS AND CSOS

Partnerships between ACCOs and CSOs — or other consortium and joint venture approaches involving ACCOs — have an important role in the achievement of the Strategy's objectives. Service delivery partnerships should create mutual benefits for all parties, and deliver outcomes for Aboriginal people. In some cases it may be appropriate for government agencies to broker partnerships to support the commissioning process.

Where a partnership between an ACCO and CSO is prioritised in a procurement process, government agencies should take steps to ensure the partnership is genuine. The foundations of genuine partnerships are respect, trust and accountability. A genuine partnership between an ACCO and CSO may be demonstrated by one or more of the following elements:

- agreed partnership values and/or principles;
- all parties receive an agreed amount of funding for their participation in the partnership, reflective of their roles and responsibilities;
- a formal agreement between the parties about how decisions are made;
- the ACCO or Aboriginal organisation has the lead role in service delivery; and
- the agreement between the organisations recognises the power imbalances that may exist between organisations of different sizes.

The commissioning agency should also seek to ensure the partnership remains genuine for the duration of the contract; contract management plans should reflect the partnership arrangement to ensure ongoing monitoring. This is necessary to ensure that the value of the ACCO's contribution is retained throughout the contract term.

TRANSITION TO ACCO SERVICE DELIVERY

Partnerships between ACCOs and CSOs can include a plan to transition additional or all responsibility for service delivery to the ACCO over time. This approach is most appropriate in circumstances where the ACCO is not ready at the start of the contract period to deliver the service as the sole provider, and it is identified that ACCO delivery is the preferred long-term approach. Transitions should be considered and decided on a case-by-case basis and not be forced on any service agreement.

Transition to ACCO delivery may not be appropriate in all circumstances, particularly where transition will limit the choice of service users. Where decisions are made not to transition services for predominantly Aboriginal service users, the rationale for doing so should be understood by all parties.

Where a partnership between an ACCO and CSO includes an agreement to transition more or all responsibility to the ACCO, a transition plan must be agreed to by all parties, including the commissioning agency, and led by the ACCO. Fundamentally, a transition plan should ensure continuity of the service for users and manage other risks, while setting out a pathway for the ACCO to take on additional responsibilities.

There will be instances where additional funding may be needed to support transition. These instances should be reflected in ACPs and be considered for each service on a case-by-case basis.



CASE STUDY:

AN ACCO-LED CONSORTIUM APPROACH FOR DELIVERING PRISONER REINTEGRATION SERVICES

ReSet is a consortium led by Wungening Aboriginal Corporation with the support of three partners. ReSet provides support to men and women while in metropolitan prisons and after leaving prison, so that they can have a new beginning that is meaningful and breaks the cycle of offending. The other partners of the consortia are Centrecare, Waalitj (formerly known as Wirrpanda Foundation) and St Bartholemew's House.

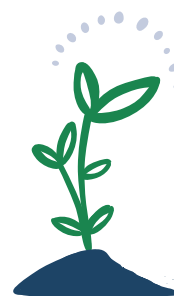
The consortia was developed to meet the metropolitan reintegration needs of the Department of Justice as requested in the tender *Adult Justice Services Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs DCS063-2016*. There was a strong emphasis on ACCO service delivery, given the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the justice system. The services requested included:

- Pre-release skills including but not limited to relationships (including parenting), employment, health and life skills
- Post-release linkages to and referrals to relevant education, employment, training, other community based activities, programs or other services
- Building cultural support frameworks to pre-release programs and services including mentoring schemes
- Post-release linkages and referrals to relevant family and parenting services
- Transitional and sustainable housing services including linkages and referrals to relevant accommodation services, temporary transitional accommodation options, pre-release tenancy skills and post-release tenancy support
- Post-release transport strategy to support successful return to communities around the state.

No individual entity would have the capacity to deliver the diversity of services requested by the Department of Justice. Through a process that allowed time and opportunities for the consortium to develop, including two dedicated Aboriginal entity workshops, the consortium has been able to deliver the full range of services requested including, Family Support Centres at Bandyup, Casuarina, Hakea and Wooroloo prisons.



4. CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY - IN BOTH SERVICE DELIVERY AND COMMISSIONING



BUILDING CAPACITY WITHIN GOVERNMENT

Commissioning is a holistic, system-wide approach that goes beyond the purchasing of services. The WA Government is committed to building the capacity and capability in all agencies to shift to a commissioning approach to community services. The Department of Finance is leading the provision of commissioning education and training resources for government agencies, including the development of a commissioning capability self-assessment guide and online commissioning tools.

The shift to a commissioning approach is complemented by commitments in the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and the National Agreement to transforming government organisations to eliminate racism, embed culture at the heart and work in partnership with Aboriginal people. These commitments are also critical to working effectively with Aboriginal people and ACCOs to support this Strategy's objectives.

MARKET STEWARDSHIP TO SUPPORT SUSTAINABLE ACCO SECTORS

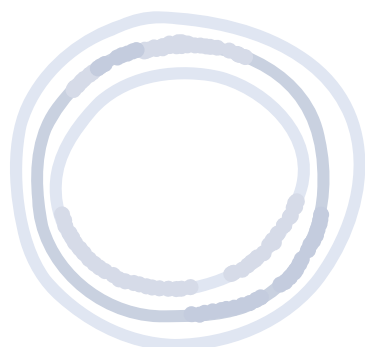
As outlined in Focus area 1, commissioning requires government to play the system-level role of the market steward to ensure there are ACCOs operating in all parts of WA who can support service planning, design and delivery. More specifically, WA Government agencies (in the sector they commission services) ensure that:

- ACCOs operate with sector supports consistent with the Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements (see clause 45 of the National Agreement);
- efforts are taken, where appropriate, to address market gaps where there is no ACCO with the existing capability to deliver a service; and
- the sustainability of individual ACCOs is one of the factors to be considered, in the context of the broader sector.

While each government agency should take a lead role to ensure they have a strong ACCO sector to work with, sectors cannot be considered in isolation. Collaboration between government agencies, facilitated through cross-agency governance for Closing the Gap and drawing on the data collected by the AER, will be important. This will ensure each government agency's market stewardship efforts are coordinated and consistent with community aspirations. This includes a coordinated approach to agencies' negotiations with the Australian Government about its potential role in supporting the relevant ACCO sector.

ACCO sector supports

The National Agreement commits the WA Government to building strong ACCO sectors that meet the Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements (clause 45), recognising that ACCOs, like other CSOs, need strong sector supports to meet their potential and be sustainable over the long term.



The Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements include:

1. sustained capacity building and investment in ACCOs to address issues through clearly defined standards or requirements, such as an agreed model of care;
2. a dedicated and identified Aboriginal workforce;
3. representation by a peak body that has a majority Aboriginal board, strong governance, policy development and influencing capacity; and
4. dedicated, reliable and consistent funding models.

For the four national priority sectors of health, housing, disability, and early childhood care and development, Sector Strengthening Plans (SSPs) have been developed to provide further guidance about actions required to achieve the Strong Community-Controlled Sector Elements. The WA government agencies responsible for these sectors will continue to be guided by the SSPs. Any future SSPs will carry the same implementation responsibilities.

Addressing gaps in ACCO sector capability and capacity

A market gap exists if there is a gap between service delivery requirements and what the existing ACCOs in the relevant location are currently able to provide. Commissioning agencies must determine the most appropriate way to respond in the short- and long-term to identified market gaps.

Short term options in the procurement phase include:

- selecting organisations further down the order of prioritisation set out on p21 of this Strategy; or
- investing in a particular ACCO’s capacity and capability, where the agency determines that this is appropriate in light of value-for-money and risk management considerations.

Agencies should consider the potential need for such investment before commissioning commences, noting this may include set up costs associated with the ACCO expanding into new service types, and other measures to ensure the ACCO will be ‘service delivery ready’ when the contract commences.

Further guidance on these matters will be developed to support implementation of the ACCO Strategy. Once CASWA is operational, it will play a role in supporting ACCOs to understand these issues.

Options to fill market gaps in the long-term should be explored with local communities, existing

ACCOs and relevant peak bodies and could include:

- working with an existing ACCO, that is known to the community, to expand their services; or
- playing a facilitating role to support the community to establish a new ACCO to deliver the service.

ACCO sustainability

The importance of a sustainable system is a key theme in the State Commissioning Strategy. Compared to many of the CSOs that operate in multiple regions and sectors to provide services to the broader population, ACCOs are often smaller due to their community-based governance structure and focus on providing services to their communities. ACCOs often provide a range of service types that do not fit neatly into a single government portfolio. This different profile means that many smaller ACCOs often rely on a smaller number of contracts or short-term grant funding, making sustainability a critical issue. Where ACCOs rely on multiple grants simultaneously, there can be a significant administrative burden on smaller ACCOs. Government agencies should apply the proportionality principle to grants, whereby they strike a balance between the complexity, risks and outcomes of the grant to minimise the administrative burden on ACCOs.

In the longer term, funding ACCOs through long term contracts can provide greater stability and allow ACCOs to make the necessary investments in workforce and infrastructure to deliver effective services.

Through the State Commissioning Strategy, the WA Government has committed to further exploring how to make community services funding more sustainable (Priority 4 in the State Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan 2022-2024). This is particularly critical for smaller organisations that are more likely to have thin margins and limited financial reserves.⁹

As market stewards for their respective sectors, government agencies have a role in supporting the third objective of this Strategy, that each sector has strong and sustainable ACCOs. Consistent with the State Commissioning Strategy and the DCSP Policy, this includes ensuring ACCOs’ contracts and service agreements reflect the full cost of service delivery, including administrative costs, other overheads and the resources to engage in necessary service planning and design.

9 Social Ventures Australia and Centre for Social Impact (2022)

IMPLEMENTING CHANGE ACROSS GOVERNMENT

While delivering on the objectives of this Strategy is an iterative process, most of the guidance is not new and work to support the objectives has been in progress for some time.

Some actions to support implementation of this Strategy are already underway as part of implementing the State Commissioning Strategy (see Priority Two of the [State Commissioning Strategy Implementation Plan](#)).

Agency-level actions for each focus area of this Strategy will be incorporated into Agency Commissioning Plans (ACPs), required under the State Commissioning Strategy. ACPs will be published biennially by commissioning agencies and will outline their upcoming commissioning activities, with a focus on expiring contracts and act as a key tool to communicate with ACCOs about upcoming commissioning work.

Published ACPs will provide an understanding of the key actions being undertaken by WA Government agencies to implement this Strategy. The WA Government's Annual Report on Closing the Gap and the annual Aboriginal Expenditure Review (AER) will highlight progress in implementing this Strategy.

Agency-level actions will also be guided by national Sector Strengthening Plans that have been developed under the National Agreement for the four national priority sectors of health, housing, disability and early childhood care and development.

The governance to support the implementation of this Strategy will be through the specific Commissioning and Closing the Gap cross-agency governance committees established to provide strategic direction on the implementation of the State Commissioning Strategy and the National Agreement. These cross-agency governance committees play an important role in driving change and ensuring a consistent approach across government. Place-based coordination between agencies (including through District Leadership Groups) is also critical to ensure local knowledge and relationships utilised throughout the commissioning cycle.

Monitoring progress against the objectives

The AER provides valuable data on current WA Government funding to Aboriginal organisations including ACCOs. The AER, which will be repeated annually, will support efforts to identify opportunities to reprioritise funding to ACCOs and provide an annual data snapshot on the progress made on Objective 2: ACCOs delivering more services to Aboriginal people. Disaggregation of data on ACCOs will be strengthened in future AER data collections.

Data development work is being undertaken as part of the implementation of the National Agreement to provide for ways to measure progress against Objective 1: Greater Involvement of ACCOs in planning and designing services, and Objective 3: Strong and sustainable ACCO sectors.

STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT IN DEVELOPING THIS STRATEGY

Engagement with ACCOs, CSOs and across the WA Government to support the development of this ACCO Strategy has occurred over multiple years and in a range of ways, including:

- the ACCO Strategy workshop held in July 2022;
- submissions provided in response to the November 2022 ACCO Strategy Engagement Summary;
- written submissions and engagement at regional forums from 2019-2021 to support the development of the Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy and the National Agreement;
- engagement with the WA Government's Supporting Communities Forum;
- submissions and engagements as part of the development of the State Commissioning Strategy; and
- the development of the Department of Communities' ACCO Strategy.

The Social Services Committee (SSC) — a multi-sectoral committee auspiced by AHCWA — has provided guidance throughout the development of this ACCO Strategy. The SSC was established to support the establishment of the Council of Aboriginal Services WA (CASWA) — WA's ACCO Peak Body — and guided by extensive regional engagement with ACCOs. The SSC's guidance to the Department on this Strategy has been critical in shaping its content and development. The voices of ACCOs have also been heard and are reflected in this Strategy.

APPENDIX:

ACRONYMS, KEY TERMS AND REFERENCES

Acronyms:

ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACP	Agency Commissioning Plan
AER	Aboriginal Expenditure Review
AHCWA	Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia
CASWA	Council of Aboriginal Services WA
CSO	Community Services Organisation
DCSP Policy	Delivering Community Services in Partnership Policy
SSC	Social Services Committee of AHCWA
SSP	Sector Strengthening Plan

Key terms:

Aboriginal organisation	Defined in the National Agreement as an incorporated business, charity, not-for-profit organisation that has at least 51% Aboriginal ownership and/or directorship and is operated for the benefit of Aboriginal communities.
Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO)	Defined in the National Agreement as an organisation that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and 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.
Commissioning	Commissioning is a cyclical process of planning, purchasing, managing, monitoring and evaluating services. The aim of this process is to determine the services the community needs, whether there is a role for government in providing these services, and then designing the best approach to service delivery.
Community services	Services that provide support to sustain and nurture the functioning of individuals and groups, to address physical, social and economic disadvantage, maximise their potential, and to enhance community well-being.
Registered Aboriginal business	A business listed in an accepted directory of registered Aboriginal Businesses, as identified in the Aboriginal Procurement Policy Agency Practice Guide . Directories include the Aboriginal Business Directory of Western Australia and Supply Nation's Indigenous Business Direct.
Market stewardship	A proactive approach to ensure that there are enough service providers with capability to deliver effective services to all users, wherever they live.

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