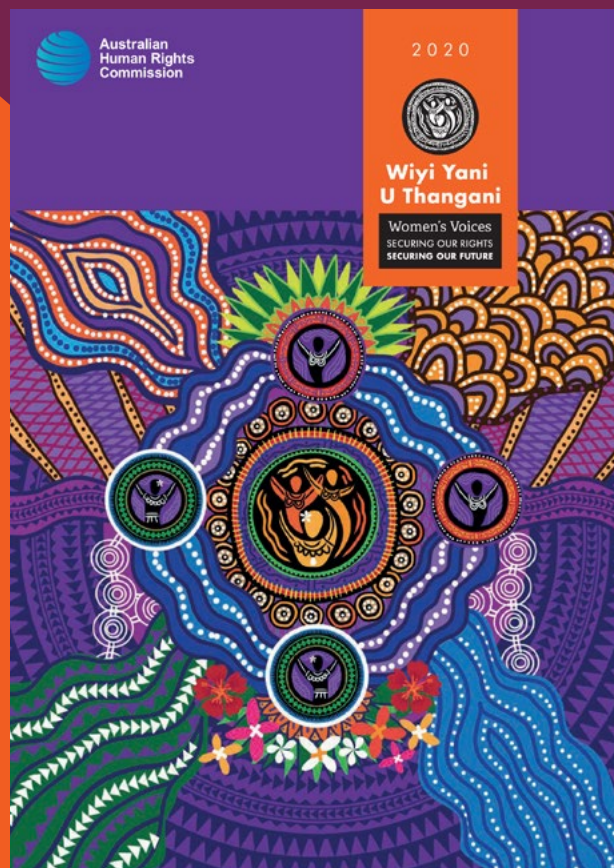




Australian Government

# Australian Government response to the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices):

Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report



## **Australian Government Response to the Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Report (online)**

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# Contents

Australian Government Response .....	4
At a glance .....	7
Overarching Recommendation 1.....	10
Overarching Recommendation 2.....	12
Overarching Recommendation 3.....	14
Overarching Recommendation 4.....	17
Overarching Recommendation 5.....	21
Overarching Recommendation 6.....	25
Overarching Recommendation 7.....	27

# Australian Government Response

The Australian Government welcomes the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices): Securing Our Rights, Securing Our Future Report (2020)* (*Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Report*) and its recommendations to embed the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls and their communities in government processes, programs and policy frameworks at all levels. The report reflects the extensive truth-telling process by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls that underpinned the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* engagements. The Australian Government acknowledges the importance of truth-telling and healing as integral to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Australian Government recognises the critical elevation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' voices to the national level through the calls for action, pathways forward, and overarching recommendations of the report. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are essential to the strength, protection and revitalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and cultures. The Australian Government acknowledges the intersectional challenges and compounding disadvantage faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and recognises that their roles in families and communities are central to the development, growth and diversity of Australian society.

This is why the Australian Government supported the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Ms June Oscar AO, to deliver Stages One and Two of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* Project. Funded under the Fourth Action Plan of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, Stage Two included widespread dissemination, accessibility and improved understanding of the findings contained within the landmark *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Report*. The Australian Government will support the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to deliver Stage Three of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* Project. This will include the delivery of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Leadership Summit and a research project to identify effective strengths based programs and approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

The Australian Government is committed to improving its understanding of *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices) Report's* guiding principles of truth-telling, equity in leadership, accountability and transparency to empower women, and in turn entire communities, to achieve the targets and outcomes in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (the National Agreement). All levels of government are party to the National Agreement.

The Australian Government, through the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), is already using the report and its findings to inform whole-of-government policy frameworks and future national strategies to address drivers of social and economic security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In particular, the guiding principles of a place-based approach, understanding intersectional discrimination, and embedding culture and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identities that underpin the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report continue to be implemented across the Australian Government, as demonstrated in the Commonwealth's *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*. These connections are represented in the graphic on page 6.

The findings of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report, including the calls for action and overarching recommendations, are complex. Achieving the transformative change the Report sets out will require ongoing consultation across the Australian Government and with states and territories, Indigenous communities, organisations and representative bodies in addition to the private sector, as well as consideration of the transformative change agenda outlined in the National Agreement. The Australian Government response to the Report sets out current activities, the Australian Government's position on each overarching recommendation, and future actions.

All Australian governments, the private sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, have a role to play in reforming the structural inequalities identified throughout the Report, to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities are empowered to actively engage with all levels of decision making, meet their aspirations and thrive into the future.

The Australian Government notes the overarching report recommendations, the pathways forward and calls to actions throughout. These elements elevate the strengths, challenges, opportunities and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls in urban, regional and remote areas. The Australian Government welcomes Stage Three of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Project and will continue to ensure that the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report's findings are utilised to inform and guide the development of policy and program initiatives that directly impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

## OVERARCHING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls
2. Conduct a National Summit and establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body
3. Empowering women's leadership on the ground
4. Protecting, supporting, and reviving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems
5. An urgent focus on healing from intergenerational trauma
6. National action to eradicate racism
7. Local and regional focused engagement



### EXISTING MECHANISMS

*(plus relevant programs as listed in the Australian Government Response)*



- National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and its Implementation Plan
- Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022
- Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023, and its successor
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence
- National Women's Alliances, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance
- National Roadmap for Indigenous Skills, Jobs and Wealth Creation
- Justice Policy Partnership
- Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023
- Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2016–2026
- National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy
- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031
- NDIS Workforce Capability Framework



### MECHANISMS IN DEVELOPMENT

- Indigenous Voice
- The next National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children, which will include a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan
- Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan (2022–2027)
- Early Stage Social Enterprise Foundation
- Indigenous Rangers Sector Strategy
- Implementation plan for the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- National Anti-Racism Framework

# Australian Government response: At a glance

All Australian Government departments will ensure that the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report's findings are used to inform policy development and programs that directly impact the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.



No.	Overarching Recommendations	Response	Actions	Alignment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap	Relevant Commonwealth Agencies
1	A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls	Support in principle	The Australian Government supports a focus on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls including through existing government frameworks and strategies relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, women's safety, women's economic security, women's health, disability and other relevant topics to include meaningful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific actions and considerations.	This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, by making sure that policies, programs and service delivery are tailored to respond to the distinct experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Department of Social Services</li> <li>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</li> </ul>
2	Conduct a National Summit and establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body	Support in part	<p>The Australian Government supports a National Summit with its focus on leadership and shared decision-making.</p> <p>The Australian Government notes the recommendation to establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body, to be considered as part of a range of current and future mechanisms, including Closing the Gap partnerships arrangement.</p>	This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making and Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, by making sure that government is appropriately engaging with and listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. The Justice Policy Partnership established under Priority Reform One, aligns with Outcome 10 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system; and Outcome 11 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Department of Social Services</li> <li>Attorney-General's Department (through the Australian Human Rights Commission)</li> <li>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</li> </ul>
3	Empowering women's leadership on the ground	Support	The Australian Government will establish a partnership with jurisdictions and the Coalition of Peaks to implement supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' leadership through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap gender and sexuality, and disability cross-cutting outcome areas.	<p>This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making and Priority Reform Two: Building the Community Controlled Sector, by building the capacity of the community-controlled sector to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.</p> <p>This recommendation aligns with Outcome 8 – Strong Economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities – by supporting the strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporation</li> <li>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</li> </ul>
4	Protecting, supporting, and reviving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems	Support	The Australian Government, as part of a range of current and future mechanisms, including through the Commonwealth <i>Closing the Gap Implementation Plan</i> is taking action to protect, support and revive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems.	This recommendation aligns to Outcome 15 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters; and Outcome 16 – Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Office for the Arts</li> </ul>



No.	Overarching Recommendations	Response	Actions	Alignment to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap	Relevant Commonwealth Agencies
5	An urgent focus on healing from intergenerational trauma	Support in part	The Australian Government, through its Commonwealth <i>Closing the Gap Implementation Plan</i> , will implement actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led healing. This includes specific actions under the health and wellbeing and safety outcome areas and under Priority Reform Three and the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme.	<p>This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, by requiring mainstream organisations to improve their cultural safety and responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.</p> <p>This recommendation aligns with Outcome 13 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe; and Outcome 14 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Department of Social Services</li> <li>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</li> </ul>
6	National action to eradicate racism	Support	The Australian Government, through its Commonwealth <i>Closing the Gap Implementation Plan</i> , is taking actions to address Priority Reform Three which includes a specific target to decrease the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who have experiences of racism. A National Anti-Racism Framework is being developed by the Race Discrimination Commissioner in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission.	This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, by supporting activities that identify and eliminate racism across government and mainstream institutions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> <li>Attorney-General's Department (through the Australian Human Rights Commission)</li> </ul>
7	Local and regional focused engagement	Support	The Australian Government, as part of a range of current and future mechanisms, including through the Commonwealth <i>Closing the Gap Implementation Plan</i> is taking action to support local and regional engagement through partnership actions on the Priority Reforms.	<p>This recommendation aligns to Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making, Priority Reform Two: Building the Community Controlled Sector, Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, and Priority Reform Four: Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level. This is through sharing decision-making at a local and regional level, building community capacity to drive its priorities, improving mainstream service responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, and strengthening community involvement in data and evaluation.</p> <p>The recommendation aligns with Outcome 8 – Strong Economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities and Outcome 17 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>National Indigenous Australians Agency</li> </ul>

# Overarching Recommendation 1

A National Action Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

All Australian governments commit to the introduction of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Action Plan to address the challenges, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls as raised throughout this report.

This National Plan should:

- be co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls
- ensure that policies, programs and service delivery are tailored to meet the distinct experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, through both mainstream and Indigenous specific programs
- foster an enabling environment so women and girls have the opportunity to thrive, in which the voices of women and girls are respected, that grows and strengthens women and girls as leaders, protects and strengthens culture, and supports women and girls to heal from trauma
- be ambitious and set out benchmarks and targets for achieving equal enjoyment of human rights by Aboriginal and Torres Strait women and girls
- set out a data collection and measurements framework (including resourcing systems reform to ensure adequate disaggregation and nationally consistent data) and monitoring and evaluation processes needed to track progress and ensure accountability
- complement, as well as contribute to, the refinement of existing national frameworks (such as on child protection, family violence, Closing the Gap) to ensure holistic support is provided
- build on the recommendations of previous reports when developing the national framework
- be reported on annually
- be funded to the level required to achieve its purpose

## **The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle.**

Prioritising the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls is essential to ensuring improved outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The Commonwealth *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan* recognises the importance of developing responses to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly in the areas of safety and justice, health and wellbeing, education, economic security, land, housing, employment, training and business. It notes that when intersectional considerations are meaningfully incorporated into policy and program design, this ensures the diverse experiences and identities of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are included, supported

and empowered. The National Agreement requires disaggregated data, where possible, across the Closing the Gap targets framework to ensure outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who may experience greater levels of disadvantage, can be monitored and actions can be tailored to suit individual needs.

The Australian Government is also exploring options for the development of a mandatory Australian Public Service-wide culturally sensitive gender training to inform decision-makers, policy, program and frontline officers, and to improve the quality of services designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, especially women.

Advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls will also be supported through existing Australian Government-led strategies and plans including the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010–2022*, *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*, the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy*, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy*, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* and its successor; the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015*, the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* and *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*; and future frameworks including the next *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032*, which will include a dedicated *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan*, and the first five-year action plan, including an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific action plan for *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*. These existing and future plans, frameworks and strategies work together with the National Agreement to address the challenges, priorities and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Implementation of this recommendation relates to National Agreement Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations, by ensuring that policies, programs and service delivery are tailored to respond to the distinct experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All levels of government are party to the National Agreement and are considering how mainstream organisations can better tailor their services and programs to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as how they can share resources and knowledge to build the capacity of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to drive community-led initiatives.

# Overarching Recommendation 2

## Conduct a National Summit and establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body

The Australian Government fund a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Summit, to be chaired by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, with the Minister for Women and Minister for Indigenous Australians. The Summit would design the key elements of the National Plan on advancing the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

The Australian Government similarly fund and support the establishment of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body to engage with government about the implementation of the recommendations of this report, with a particular responsibility to lead the development of the National Summit and assist in the formulation of the National Action Plan.

The Advisory Body would include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls drawn from across urban, regional and remote areas of Australia, reflecting the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and in roles from across community organisations, peak bodies and representative bodies, non-government organisations and governments.

The Advisory Body would operate independently of government, with appropriate secretariat support to conduct its business.

The Advisory Body would retain a monitoring function to hold all governments to account in implementing the National Action Plan. Its composition might be superseded or augmented by a National Representative Voice once it is operational.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation in part.**

The Australian Government supports the recommendation to conduct a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Summit with a focus on leadership and shared decision-making.

The Australian Government has committed \$2.8 million over 2021–22 to 2023–24 to support the delivery of Stage Three of the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Project. This includes the delivery of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Leadership Summit and a research project, in consultation with relevant Australian Government agencies including the NIAA. The research project will identify effective strengths-based programs and approaches for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and be used as an evidence base to help guide discussions at the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Leadership Summit.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls play pivotal leadership roles in their families, communities and wider Australian society. The *Wiyi Yani U Thangani* (Women's Voices) Report amplifies the stories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to the national stage, empowering voices that need to be heard by all governments.

Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' strength, resilience, passion and commitment to ensuring a better future for all is necessary to ensure a significant and sustained shift in the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It will also enable increased access to decision making roles, paving the way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to not only actively engage with, but also determine their futures.

The Australian Government notes the recommendation to establish a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women and Girls Advisory Body.

The Australian Government acknowledges and supports the need to engage and work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through a range of existing and proposed mechanisms. This includes through funding the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance under the Women's Leadership and Development Program to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices are heard in the policy making process.

Another initiative that centres the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples in the development and implementation of family violence policy is the establishment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence (Advisory Council). The Advisory Council, established in mid-2021, includes recognised and respected leaders and elders with knowledge and experience in family violence (including supporting people with disability and LGBTIQ+), as well as the issues that intersect with violence. The Advisory Council will lead the development and guide the implementation of the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the *National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032*, and membership will reflect a diversity of voices in regards to gender, community and geography, and a variety of academic and professional backgrounds.

The voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are strongly represented through the membership of the Justice Policy Partnership established under Priority Reform One. The Justice Policy Partnership aims to reduce the disproportionate rate of incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and youth (National Agreement, Outcomes 10 and 11).

The recommendation will also contribute to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream organisations to improve accountability and responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls (National Agreement, Priority Reform Three), by making sure that government is actively engaging with and listening to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

The Australian Government notes the recommendation includes the potential for the Advisory Body to be superseded or augmented by an Indigenous Voice. A co-design process to develop the detail of an Indigenous Voice recently concluded. In December 2021 the Australian Government released the Indigenous Voice Co-design Final Report and announced its support for the establishment of the Local & Regional Voices as the next step, in line with the process set out in the Report.

These actions will contribute to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to inform decision-making by governments, which will accelerate policy and place-based progress against targets in the National Agreement (National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reform One).

# Overarching Recommendation 3

## Empowering women's leadership on the ground

That all governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, as well as business, non-government organisations (NGO) and education sectors to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' leadership.

This includes by:

- setting targets for the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in advisory and decision-making roles in government, business and mainstream organisations (especially those that provide services to Indigenous communities). For example, the Indigenous Business Sector Strategy identifies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as a priority cohort, central to the development, growth and diversity of the Indigenous business sector
- embedding gender equality as a key principle across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations
- empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women through strategic investment in leadership and governance support, including through partnerships with key organisations such as the Australian Indigenous Governance Institute, the Australian Institute of Company Directors, The Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), Indigenous Business Australia's (IBA) The Strong Women, Strong Business initiative and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet's (PM&C) Board Candidate Register
- providing government support for broad-based and community-led capacity building programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls' leadership.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation.**

Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' access to leadership roles and opportunities to represent, advocate, and make decisions that rightfully recognise and prioritise the needs of their communities is important for all government and sectors across Australia.

The Australian Government recognises this and is already investing in pathways to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls leadership, including investing in projects under the Women's Leadership and Development Program (WLDP), managed by the Office for Women in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Under the WLDP \$9.3 million over 2020–21 to 2023–24 is invested towards programs targeted to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. This includes over \$770,000 towards the Australian Institute of Company Directors Board Diversity Scholarships 2021–2024 project, a scholarships program aimed at improving rural and regional women's representation on boards. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance is also funded \$820,000 under WLDP from 2021–22 to 2023–2024, to ensure the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls are heard in the policy making process.

The Australian Government is seeking to further strengthen the economic participation and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including women and girls, through the *National Roadmap for Indigenous Skills, Jobs and Wealth Creation*. The National Roadmap will complement and help realise the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and identify actions to get more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people job-ready, increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participation in the workforce and provide more business and leadership opportunities to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to achieve their economic aspirations.

The Australian Government has committed \$13.9 million over four years from 2021–22 to establish an Early Stage Social Enterprise Foundation (the Foundation). The Foundation will be focused on providing capacity-building and financial support for early stage social enterprises that improve the economic security of Indigenous women, particularly those who are experiencing or have experienced domestic violence.

Additionally, the Australian Government, through the *Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan* will support ORIC to explore options to improve gender representation on the boards of Indigenous corporations registered under the *Corporations (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (CATSI Act).

This includes supporting registered organisations to understand how to embed gender representation in their corporate governance arrangements if culturally appropriate and desired. For example, providing gender-sensitive information to interested CATSI Act organisations, and collecting gender disaggregated data about CATSI Act organisations' board composition, where possible. These actions will contribute to Priority Reform Two: Building the Community Controlled Sector of the National Agreement, by building the capacity and capability of the community-controlled sector to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

Through the 2021–22 Budget, the Australian Government committed an additional \$63.5 million over four years from 2020–21 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and young women through girls' academies. This funding will support 2,700 additional girls' academies places and maintain support for existing places, to reach 12,600 places by December 2023. Academies provide culturally appropriate support to girls and young women to assist them to complete their education and make successful post-school transitions. Girls' academies participants have access to a range of activities and supports that strengthen their leadership skills and prepare them for life after school.

The Australian Government is also investing in a generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) professionals and leaders through the \$25 million, ten-year, national Indigenous Girls' STEM Academy. The Academy operates until 2028, supporting high-achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls who aspire to pursue education and careers in STEM professions. Up to 1,000 women and girls will receive pastoral and academic support from Year 8, through their senior secondary schooling and into university to access STEM graduate careers. A further 100 women will be supported to attain STEM teaching qualifications, increasing the number of STEM-qualified female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in schools.



Implementation of this recommendation will contribute to Outcome 8 of the National Agreement, by supporting the strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. It will also support Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making of the National Agreement, by building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to inform decision-making by governments, which will accelerate policy and place-based progress against targets in the National Agreement.

# Overarching Recommendation 4

## Protecting, supporting, and reviving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and knowledge systems

Australian governments should urgently invest in measures to protect, strengthen, and revive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and women's cultural practices and knowledge systems.

This includes through supporting Indigenous community-led initiatives that:

- enable women and girls to exercise their cultural rights to practice and transmit traditional knowledge, ensuring the expression and continuation of our Law, language, knowledge and cultural practices
- build resilience and cultural security among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- enable women and girls to protect country through Indigenous cultural management, for the ongoing practice and use of Indigenous knowledge and languages such as the ranger programs across the country and through partnerships with National Parks Associations and their education programs
- enable the conduct of women's ceremonial and cultural gatherings to ensure the ongoing practice and transference of knowledge
- record and archive women's knowledge, including songs and language to be accessible to current and future generations.

This support should be provided in urban locations, as well as regional and remote localities.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation.**

Connection to Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls is integral to protecting the succession of cultural knowledge, systems of lore and the strength of kinship networks. It is essential there is investment in women accessing and working on Country to ensure sacred women's sites, lore, knowledge, cultural skills and songs are maintained and protected. Promoting and facilitating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls' rights to manage Country and exercise their cultural practices will contribute to social, cultural, environmental and economic outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and their communities.

In particular, implementation of this recommendation will contribute to Outcomes 15 and 16 of the National Agreement, by supporting measures to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls can maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, and physical relationship with their land and waters and their cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing.

Through the National Agreement, the Australian Government is working with the National Native

Title Council (NNTC) and native title corporations (Prescribed Body Corporate (PBCs)) to consider options to improve PBC capacity and support native title holders to better manage their lands and waters, and enjoy their native title rights and interests. This may include consideration of the roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women on PBC Boards and how their voices can be amplified so that the specific interests and needs of women and girls are taken into account in the management of land and waters.

The Australian Government recognises the success of the Indigenous Rangers and Indigenous Protected Areas Programs in supporting ongoing connection to and opportunities to care for Country. It has recently invested in expanding the area of sea in Indigenous Protected Areas to strengthen the conservation and protection of the marine environment, while creating employment and economic opportunities for Indigenous Australians. It has also invested in additional ranger initiatives including to extend the Indigenous Rangers Program to 2028 and fund new ranger groups through the new Murray-Darling Basin Indigenous River Rangers Program. The Government has further committed to develop an Indigenous Rangers Sector Strategy with ranger organisations to expand on the environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits where ranger projects are in place. It will support the needs and aspirations of Indigenous ranger groups and actions that promote Strong Country, Strong Culture, including culturally appropriate knowledge protection and inter-generational knowledge transfer. It will also promote a Strong Economy, including opportunities to increase employment for women in the ranger workforce. Together, these actions will contribute to strengthening communities.

The Australian Government's commitment of over \$746 million to extend the Indigenous Rangers Program will provide long-term economic and employment security for ranger groups and support the continued use of women's cultural practices and knowledge systems. Women are an important part of the Indigenous Rangers Program, representing around 30 per cent of the Indigenous ranger workforce. The program currently funds three dedicated women's ranger groups. The Australian Government recognises the important role women play in caring for Country and providing role models for younger generations.

The Australian Government's vision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages is supported through the Indigenous Languages and Arts (ILA) program. Through the ILA program, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are supported to practice and transmit cultural knowledge, to develop creative livelihoods, and to record and archive women's knowledge (including languages) for current and future generations. The ILA program is an ongoing program and invests over \$20 million per annum to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to express, preserve and maintain their cultures through languages and arts activities around Australia. The ILA program includes annual operational funding support for a network of 20 Indigenous language centres around the country working on capturing, revitalising and maintaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women account for nearly 90 per cent of the Indigenous languages sector workforce. The ILA program also supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop, produce, present, exhibit or perform Indigenous arts projects that showcase Australia's traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultural and artistic expressions. In 2020–21, the program supported the cultural education and learning of

young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in language, arts, culture and bush tucker; supported the transmission of traditional weaving skills; and reinvigorated specific arts and cultural practices to support women's cultural and linguistic heritage.

In addition, the Australian Government supports language preservation and revitalisation through the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Dictionaries Project. The Australian Government has committed \$2.9 million to the Project from 2018–19 to 2022–23, to support the publication of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language dictionaries.

The Australian Government also funds the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation (ALNF) to record languages in a number of locations across the Northern Territory, South Australia, Queensland, and in the Torres Strait to a digital platform, to assist literacy, school outcomes and employment outcomes. As part of the project, the ALNF uses the interactive platform to provide translations between English and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages; engages with the community to collect language assets; and trains and assists community members and related stakeholders to use, develop, maintain, revitalise and share local languages. The Australian Government has invested \$1.32 million in the project between 2019–20 and 2021–2022.

The Australian Government's Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support (IVAIS) program provides approximately \$27 million per annum to support the operations of around 90 organisations, including around 80 Indigenous-owned art centres, as well as a number of art fairs, regional hubs and industry service organisations that are at the heart of Australia's world-renowned Indigenous visual art movement. Together these organisations provide opportunities for more than 8,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists and more than 500 Indigenous arts workers, the majority in remote communities. In 2019–20, 71 per cent of artists and 61 per cent of arts workers supported by the IVAIS program were women.

The IVAIS program is designed to support activities that enrich the social, cultural and economic life of Indigenous communities and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to generate income, gain employment, develop professional skills and participate in the nation's economy, while maintaining a continued connection to country and culture. Many art centres evolved out of women's centres and are often at the heart of community life, providing safe places for women to create art, share stories in language, maintain and revive cultural practices such as weaving, work on country and facilitate intergenerational exchange.

In 2019–20 and 2020–21, an additional \$12 million was provided through the Relief and Recovery Fund to the IVAIS program to support IVAIS-funded Indigenous art centres and art fairs during and emerging from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. This funding assisted art centres and art fairs to remain sustainable for the benefit of Indigenous artists and their communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of protecting and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to maintain, safeguard and develop their Indigenous Knowledge, including Traditional Cultural Expressions (TCEs). Australia currently provides for some protection of Indigenous cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and TCEs to the extent available under existing laws such as intellectual property, consumer protection and heritage legislation. The Australian

Government has committed to investigate ways to bolster the existing mechanisms to protect Indigenous Knowledge, including that of women and children. This includes exploring models of possible stand-alone legislation and the consideration of labelling schemes to identify authentic Indigenous made or designed products.

The Australian Government funds Return of Cultural Heritage Initiative, which fosters relationships with overseas collecting institutions to facilitate and secure the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material to Australia. The return of cultural heritage material to Australia contributes to the preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and provides all Australians with the opportunity to learn and understand more of Aboriginal cultures and about the significance of these objects, contributing to reconciliation.

# Overarching Recommendation 5

## An urgent focus on healing from intergenerational trauma

The Australian Government recognise the importance of understanding and addressing intergenerational trauma if substantial progress is to be made in closing the gap across all socioeconomic and cultural indicators of wellbeing.

Accordingly, substantial investments be made in community-led healing initiatives to address trauma.

This includes by:

- adequately funding community-based healing initiatives through the National Healing Foundation
- supporting the development of national healing and trauma-informed accredited training and qualifications, with a workforce development strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women
- all Australian governments to commit to mandatory healing and trauma-informed training for the entire human service sector, both government and organisations that are funded to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families. This should be implemented through a national framework developed in co-design with the National Healing Foundation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and other relevant stakeholders.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation.**

The Australian Government, through the Commonwealth *Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*, will implement actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led healing. It is important that all policy and program initiatives that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are culturally sensitive, community-led, culturally inclusive (for example people with a disability), trauma-aware and healing-informed. As we begin to improve our knowledge of trauma and move towards approaches that favour truth-telling and reconciliation, it is important that we move towards trauma-aware and healing-informed approaches where possible. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on healing are culturally-based and focus on addressing the relationship “between the spiritual, emotional and physical in a holistic manner”<sup>1</sup>. The Healing Foundation<sup>2</sup> asserts that healing includes recognition of the connections between, and impact of, social and economic disadvantage, racism and dispossession and violence, and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Culture is essential to healing and, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, strengthening cultural connections and resilience requires ongoing and concerted attention<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> *Healing in Practice*, SNAICC, 2012

<sup>2</sup> *Healing Centres*, The Healing Foundation, 2012

<sup>3</sup> *Healing in Practice*, SNAICC, 2012

We are seeing a gradual shift in policy and programs to focus on healing-informed approaches to support individuals, families and communities that address intergenerational trauma. This shift has occurred, for instance, in the justice system, where restorative justice programs have been implemented. Tailored and targeted measures continue to be required to enable healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. Such measures need to be holistic (supporting the individual within their family and community), culturally inclusive, trauma-aware, community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, and culturally-based to build resilience and enable healing. The Australian Government recognises that knowledge of trauma and healing is varied and in order to implement healing-informed initiatives in an effective and meaningful way, the ability of both government and non-government organisations to implement these changes needs to be explored.

Supporting the healing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls and communities requires systemic and structural transformation of mainstream organisations to improve responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (National Agreement, Priority Reform Three). Such transformation includes improvements in cultural safety and increased knowledge of trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There is a need for governments and services to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to exercise their autonomy to collectively heal from trauma, by resourcing and supporting community-led responses that strengthen cultural processes and provide cultural healing<sup>4</sup>.

The *Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme* has been established by the Australian Government to help the Stolen Generations to heal the trauma from being forcibly removed from their family. The Redress Scheme will recognise the harm and ongoing trauma of forced removal from family for Stolen Generations survivors who were forcibly removed in the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory prior to their respective self-government, and in the Jervis Bay Territory.

The Australian Government has funded the co-design of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, place-based, trauma-informed healing approaches for victims and survivors of child sexual abuse and their families, through the Supporting Healing for Families project under the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030*. This will deliver a trauma-aware, healing-informed and culturally appropriate resource to improve early disclosure experiences of, and access to specialist support services for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims and survivors. The Australian Government is also developing the cultural competency and trauma responsiveness of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous child and family sector organisations and workforce engaged through the Department of Social Services (DSS) grant funding.

Additionally, the Australian Government developed the *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031*, which includes a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as a priority group. Through the *Fourth Action Plan of the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and Children 2010–2022*, the Australian Government is

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<sup>4</sup> *Looking Where the Light Is*, The Healing Foundation, 2016



supporting Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) to deliver research projects with Indigenous communities, including a project exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing programs that respond to domestic and family violence and sexual assault. ANROWS is also conducting relevant research jointly funded by all Australian governments, including a project on service system responses and culturally designed practice frameworks to address the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children exposed to domestic and family violence.

The Australian Government, through the NIAA, provides funding to Thirili Ltd to provide suicide postvention services nationally. Thirili's model of care is based on identifying the strengths in families and communities while supporting them through the different phases of grief, loss and trauma. The delivery model incorporates the five guiding principles of trauma informed care - safety, choice, collaboration, trustworthiness and empowerment.

The Australian Government also funds Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) and Alcohol and other Drug (AOD) workforces, including counsellors, caseworkers, support workers and AOD workers and Link Up staff, to have access to culturally responsive accredited and non-accredited training and professional development opportunities, and upskilling across a range of topical issues including trauma-informed care practices and healing methods, through Workforce Development and Support Units (WDSUs). The WDSUs also provide opportunities for the SEWB and AOD workforces to come together to learn and share across these important issues through regular networking. The WDSUs are located in:

- Sydney, New South Wales [Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW](#)
- Adelaide, South Australia [Nunakuwarrin Yunti of SA Inc.](#)
- Melbourne, Victoria [Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)
- Brisbane, Queensland [Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council](#)
- Darwin, Northern Territory [Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance, Northern Territory](#)
- Broome, Western Australia [Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services](#)
- Perth, Western Australia [Yorgum Healing Services](#)

The Australian Government is also supporting the refresh and development of an implementation plan for the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing*. This work is being led by Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention leadership body, through funding from the Department of Health.

Understanding the unique and at times complex trauma girls and women with disability experience at an individual and structural level is currently being investigated as part of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect, and Exploitation of People with Disability, with the final report due September 2023. The Australian Government provides Indigenous counselling and advocacy supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are engaging with

the Royal Commission. The First Peoples Disability Network is funded to deliver culturally inclusive capacity building supports to non-Indigenous disability support services. Additionally, there have been investments made to increase trauma-informed capacity of disability support services including training and the development of a handbook for disability support workers. The Healing Foundation has been involved in contributing to the design of these resources.

The Australian Government, through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Commission, launched voluntary resources for the disability sector in the form of an NDIS Workforce Capability Framework which includes capabilities for workers to support people with experiences of trauma and respond appropriately to people's sense of safety. It also includes capabilities aimed at ensuring workers are responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, by understanding and responding to people's desired connection to culture, country and community. In addition the Framework recognises the need for workers to support people in challenging or changing social circumstances and to understand the impact of multiple complexities and potential barriers to supports.

Implementation of this recommendation will contribute to Outcome 13 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe, Outcome 14 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing and Priority Reform Three of the National Agreement, by requiring mainstream organisations to improve their cultural safety and responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

# Overarching Recommendation 6

## National action to eradicate racism

The Australian Government commit to action to address racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including women and girls.

This includes by:

- developing a national framework on antiracism, including measurable targets and accountability measures
- conducting public awareness activities denouncing racism, as experienced by women and girls, and providing tools for community members to take bystander action when they witness racism
- ensuring adequate data collection across all governments to measure experiences of racism
- supporting independent research and analysis through engagement with organisations such as Australia's National Research Organisation on Women's Safety (ANROWS) and Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), to identify systemic or institutional racism (and other forms of discrimination that intersect with racism) and bias among key agents in the community, including police, prisons, courts, hospitals, universities, schools, government agencies and nongovernment organisations.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and their cultures have prevailed and endured despite the ongoing effects of institutionalised and systemic racism.

Addressing and eliminating racism is a primary enabler to achieve the outcomes in the National Agreement. The Australian Government recognises that eliminating racism requires a whole-of-government and multi-jurisdictional approach. It needs to focus on the impact of prejudicial attitudes within organisational cultures and practices, privilege the experiences, cultures, and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and dismantle the mutually-reinforcing structures of racial discrimination that exist in our society. By supporting activities that identify and eliminate racism across government and mainstream institutions, implementation of this recommendation contributes to addressing Priority Reform Three: Transforming Government Organisations of the National Agreement.

There are many ways in which the Australian Government is addressing racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including women and girls. As identified in the *Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan*, the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031* (Health Plan) has been refreshed and includes a focus on cultural safety that aligns with the human rights-based approach of the *Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2016–2026*. The Health Plan has a strong focus on the impact of racism and discrimination on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and

wellbeing outcomes. It includes a long-term vision to eliminate racism, with immediate actions to identify and address racism in all health care settings. The Health Plan focuses on the accountability of the mainstream to provide culturally safe and responsive health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Race Discrimination Commissioner (the Commissioner) of the Australian Human Rights Commission is developing a new National Anti-Racism Framework. The national framework will provide both a national focus for tackling racism and a coordinated approach from government, the private sector and advocacy groups. The Commissioner is working closely with the Commonwealth and other relevant agencies and stakeholders on the development of the framework.

The Australian Government is also committed to supporting the cultural capability of teachers, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can reach their full potential through culturally responsive learning environments. The Government has invested \$1.6 million over three years to commission the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) to identify and develop resources that will support educators' ongoing cultural capability development.

In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls and women with disability experience intersectional discrimination, based on their disability and Indigeneity, contributing to trauma, isolation and exclusion. While there is high inclusion in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community life and cultural practice for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with diverse capabilities, on every other socioeconomic indicator Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with a disability experience acute social, wellbeing and health inequalities. The experiences of disability amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is complex and intersects with social and structural determinants of health and wellbeing, including education, justice, housing, employment, access to appropriate infrastructure. Addressing intersectional discrimination is a consideration of *Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031*. In addition, the *Disability Sector Strengthening Plan* under Closing the Gap will also include specific actions to address intersectional discrimination.

The NIAA is also developing a framework for engagement to set a baseline expectation of how to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the design and delivery of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific and mainstream policies and programs. This framework will provide guidance and support for agencies across the Commonwealth on when and how to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in a culturally safe way that will be built on trauma aware and healing-informed principles. This will include enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to organise and represent themselves, share data and information to support effective engagement, and build transparency into engagement approaches.

# Overarching Recommendation 7

## Local and regional focused engagement

The Australian Government focus its engagement and service delivery practices with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls and their communities at the local and regional levels.

This requires:

- better mapping of need at the local level, to ensure evidence-based approaches
- priority setting to be determined with the full involvement of freely chosen representatives at the community level
- ensuring that funding is directed to addressing the root causes of disadvantage and inequality at the community level rather than simply responding to this inequality, and that mechanisms be developed to monitor and evaluate the impact of funding decisions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls and their communities
- capacity-building needs are identified to strengthen Indigenous communities, including supporting communities to identify and engage in public, private and philanthropic partnerships to resource community initiatives. Ensuring that culturally safe and tailored engagement processes exist with local communities and at the regional level to improve relationships and partnerships with public, private and philanthropic bodies
- full community involvement in research, monitoring and evaluation practices to identify and learn from best practice approaches.

### **The Australian Government supports this recommendation.**

The NIAA prioritises working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, industries, business and service providers. The Indigenous Advancement Strategy, administered by the NIAA, allows for joint development of solutions at the regional and local level, with funded providers being expected to work closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the design and delivery of projects, to develop and implement local solutions to improve outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Australian Government recognises the crucial role of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCOS) in delivering culturally safe, effective services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls. Continuing support for ACCOs is pivotal in addressing the causes of disadvantage and inequality and investing in community-led, culturally-based solutions. By building ACCO and community capacity to empower women and girls, drive their own priorities, and exercise autonomy to collectively heal from trauma and disadvantage, this recommendation relates to Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement. This complements the Australian Government commitment of \$46.5 million over four years, with state and territory governments also committing \$30.7 million from state and territory governments, to build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors through the Closing the Gap Partnership actions in the National Agreement.

The Australian Government is also investing \$38.6 million over three years to establish an Outcomes and Evidence Fund to support innovative proposals initiated by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that address the out-of-home care and family violence targets in the National Agreement. In addition, the Australian Government has committed \$3.2 million over two years to assess the needs and increase the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations in the child and family sector.

The undertaking of regional roundtables, including the *Regional Action Plans* that stemmed from the regional roundtables, will continue to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to communicate the needs, strengths and opportunities of their local communities. The suite of tools produced by the Australian Human Rights Commission will increase accessibility by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls to the *Wiyi Yani U Thangani (Women's Voices)* Report findings and build their capacity to utilise the report as a tool in their own communities, as well as in future engagements with government. This suite of tools will also include guidance for relevant institutions and organisations at all levels to empower agents of change to drive the direction of policy and program development across all portfolios in order to meet the needs, aspirations and challenges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, girls and their communities into the future. The regional roundtables and *Regional Action Plans* further support this recommendation and Outcome 8 of the National Agreement, by supporting the strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls.

A co-design process to develop the detail of an Indigenous Voice recently concluded. In December 2021 the Australian Government released the Indigenous Voice Co-design Final Report and announced its support for the establishment of the Local & Regional Voices as the next step, in line with the process set out in the Report. Local & Regional Voices will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in every community to have a greater say in public policy, programs and service delivery affecting their lives through providing advice to, and working in partnership with, all levels of governments.

The focus on supporting the community controlled sector to increase capacity and capabilities to be more culturally inclusive of girls and women with disability is a priority in the *Disability Sector Strengthening Plan*, currently being developed.

Implementation of this recommendation will also contribute to Outcome 17, Priority Reform One, Priority Reform Three and Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement, by placing accountability and responsibility on mainstream organisations to improve their service, safety and responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and girls, and by strengthening community access to the right data and evaluation so they are able to effectively participate in shared decision-making on the areas that effect their lives.





