

Submission to the 2026 Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men visible in shared decision-making, community control, evidence and system reform

Central proposition: Closing the Gap cannot be achieved while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys are highly visible in crisis statistics but insufficiently visible as rights-holders, cultural leaders, partners, service designers and evaluators.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Aboriginal Males Healing Centre acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across Australia and pays respect to Elders past and present. We recognise the continuing authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the diversity of Nations and communities, and the right of each community to determine its own priorities, cultural governance and pathways to wellbeing. We honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, men, families and communities who continue to carry the work of safety, healing, culture and self-determination.

About this submission

This submission responds to the Productivity Commission's September 2026 call for submissions to the second review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It focuses on implementation since 2020, the four Priority Reforms, the 17 socio-economic outcomes, Indigenous-led evaluation, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, genuine shared decision-making, systemic reform and community-led approaches designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.

AMHC does not claim to speak for every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander man, Nation or community. It speaks from an Aboriginal male-led, community-grounded perspective and asks the Commission to examine a persistent structural blind spot: policies frequently describe men through risk, offending, illness, unemployment and service failure, but less often recognise men as cultural authorities, fathers, carers, mentors, community builders, knowledge holders, partners in family safety and architects of reform.

Contents

- Executive summary
- Recommendations
- 1. Purpose, approach and overarching assessment
- 2. Representation, evidence and knowledge sharing
- 3. Assessment of the four Priority Reforms
- 4. Indigenous-led evaluation and Indigenous Data Sovereignty
- 5. Progress against the 17 socio-economic outcomes
- 6. Community-led approaches designed and delivered by men
- 7. A practical implementation and accountability framework
- 8. Direct responses to the Commission's guiding questions
- Conclusion
- Appendix A - 17-outcome gender-responsive assessment
- References

Executive summary

The National Agreement marked an important change in national policy. It recognised that better outcomes require governments to share power, strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, transform their own systems and share data. Six years later, however, the promise of structural reform remains substantially unrealised. The 2024 Productivity Commission review and the 2025 independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review reached closely aligned conclusions: power is not consistently shared, accountability is weak, systemic transformation is limited, funding arrangements remain a barrier, and Indigenous Data Sovereignty has not yet been embedded across the data lifecycle (PC 2024; Productivity Commission 2026a).

The July 2026 national data reinforce the urgency. Of the 19 targets supporting the 17 socio-economic outcomes, one has been met, three further targets are on track, five are improving but not on track, two show no change, four are worsening and four cannot be assessed, including one with no available data. At the same time, the parties still have no agreed way to measure progress on the four Priority Reforms. This means Australia is measuring many consequences of system failure without a settled national measure of whether governments are changing the systems that produce those consequences (Productivity Commission 2026b).

AMHC's assessment: There has been policy development, new partnerships and pockets of good practice, but implementation is not yet sufficiently transferred, measurable, enforceable, locally accountable or gender-responsive to constitute reform at the scale promised in 2020.

The male-specific evidence is especially stark. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male life expectancy was 71.9 years in 2020-22, 8.8 years below non-Indigenous males. At 30 June 2025, the age-standardised imprisonment rate was 4,496.9 per 100,000 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males, compared with 520.4 for females. In 2024-25, the youth detention rate was 44.3 per 10,000 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boys, compared with 6.1 for girls. In 2023, the age-standardised suicide rate for First Nations males was 48.5 per 100,000 - 3.5 times the female rate and 2.9 times the non-Indigenous male rate (ABS 2023; Productivity Commission 2026c, 2026d; AIHW 2026a).

Male indicator	Latest rate/value	Comparison	Period
Life expectancy	71.9 years	8.8 years below non-Indigenous males	2020-22
Adult imprisonment	4,496.9 per 100,000	8.6 times the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female rate	30 June 2025
Youth detention	44.3 per 10,000	7.3 times the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female rate	2024-25
Suicide	48.5 per 100,000	3.5 times the First Nations female rate; 2.9 times the non-Indigenous male rate	2023

Sources: ABS (2023); Productivity Commission (2026c, 2026d); AIHW (2026a). Rates use different populations, units and reference periods and should not be directly compared with each other.

These outcomes are interconnected. Poor health, trauma, racism, housing insecurity, exclusion from education and work, justice contact and family violence can reinforce one another. A fragmented service response treats the presenting crisis but leaves the underlying pathway intact. AMHC therefore calls for a gender-responsive, whole-of-family and whole-of-system approach. It must protect the distinct rights, voices and safety of women and children while making men visible, accountable and supported to change. Investment in men must be additional and complementary; it must never displace women-led services, victim-survivor supports or child safety protections.

The review should recommend a formal national mechanism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's participation; multi-year transfer of authority and resources to community-controlled organisations; enforceable government transformation duties; community-governed data agreements; independent, Indigenous-led evaluation; and integrated place-based pathways connecting culture, health, family safety, housing, justice, education, training, employment and aftercare. Progress should be judged not by the number of consultations, plans or pilots, but by demonstrable transfers of decision rights, budgets, data control and service authority, together with measurable improvements in people's lives.

Recommendations

1. **Create a formal First Nations Men's Closing the Gap Partnership.** Establish a properly resourced national mechanism under Priority Reform One through which community-authorized Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's representatives and specialist men's organisations share decisions on policies, investments, targets and evaluation affecting men and boys. It should link to, not duplicate or weaken, the Coalition of Peaks and existing policy partnerships.
2. **Adopt a gender-responsive implementation duty across all 17 outcomes.** Require implementation plans, funding decisions and annual reports to explain effects on women and girls, men and boys, families, gender-diverse people and intersecting cohorts. Where a disparity is concentrated among males, require a specific action, budget, accountable owner and trajectory.
3. **Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Action Plan.** Co-design a cross-portfolio plan with community-controlled men's organisations and local cultural authorities. It should cover health, social and emotional wellbeing, suicide prevention, family safety and accountability, housing, education, employment, justice, culture, digital inclusion and fatherhood, with safeguards for women and children built into design and governance.
4. **Make shared decision-making verifiable.** Adopt a national shared-decision standard that records decision scope, delegated authority, community mandates, resourcing, independent advice, consensus and dispute processes, final decisions, reasons, budget effects and how feedback was returned to communities.
5. **Accelerate transfer to community control.** Publish time-bound service and funding transition plans; provide multi-year, flexible and indexed funding; fund governance, infrastructure, workforce, evaluation and data capability as core costs; and report expenditure reaching community-controlled organisations, including specialist men's organisations.
6. **Make government transformation enforceable.** Embed the Agreement in Cabinet, budget, procurement, grants, commissioning, regulatory impact, executive performance and annual reporting processes. Establish independent oversight with community legitimacy, public findings, corrective-action powers and consequences for persistent non-compliance.

7. **Fund integrated, place-based male healing and accountability pathways.** Support locally governed models that connect outreach, culturally safe clinical care, cultural healing, risk assessment, family safety coordination, residential or safe accommodation where required, justice diversion and throughcare, education, training, employment and long-term follow-up.
8. **Keep men who use violence in view and accountable.** Within Outcome 13 and related national plans, establish sustained, culturally governed intervention pathways for men who use violence. Family and child safety must govern design; information sharing, evidence-informed risk practice and statutory safeguards must be maintained; and investment must not be taken from victim-survivor services.
9. **Mandate Indigenous-led evaluation from policy inception.** Require Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance over evaluation priorities, questions, methods, interpretation and dissemination. Fund qualitative and quantitative methods, including culturally valid measures, and require findings to be returned to participating communities in useful forms.
10. **Give practical effect to Indigenous Data Sovereignty.** Amend and implement the Agreement as agreed, progress an independent national Indigenous data institution, and require project-level data governance agreements covering ownership, control, access, possession, consent, storage, linkage, interpretation, publication, reuse, withdrawal and benefit.
11. **Measure the Priority Reforms without further delay.** Agree and report national and jurisdictional measures of power-sharing, transfer of service delivery and funding, institutional transformation, data access and Indigenous Data Governance. Measures must include community experience and not rely only on government self-report.
12. **Adopt a public 12-, 24- and 36-month implementation schedule.** Assign responsible parties, budgets, milestones and independent verification to each accepted recommendation. Require public explanation and a recovery plan whenever a milestone is missed.

1. Purpose, approach and overarching assessment

1.1 Purpose and scope

The Commission has been asked to analyse progress against the four Priority Reforms and 17 socio-economic outcomes, examine contributing factors including funding, identify successful approaches and recommend how implementation can be improved, hastened and strengthened. This submission addresses those tasks through the specific lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys, while maintaining a whole-of-family, rights-based and safety-centred perspective.

AMHC supports the Agreement's objective and its emphasis on structural reform. The Agreement should not be reduced to a target dashboard. Outcomes matter, but the Priority Reforms describe how governments must change their relationships, institutions, investment and control of information. If those reforms remain unmeasured or optional, socio-economic targets will continue to record downstream harm without changing upstream power.

1.2 What has changed since 2020

AMHC recognises several important developments since 2020:

- the continuation of a formal national partnership between governments and the Coalition of Peaks;

- the establishment or development of policy and place-based partnerships, sector strengthening plans and community data projects;
- the 2024 Productivity Commission review and the first independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led review, which provided unusually consistent diagnoses of power, accountability and implementation failures;
- Joint Council agreement to most actions arising from the 2024 review and further Partnership Actions responding to the Indigenous-led review;
- the Data Policy Partnership, consideration of a Bureau of Indigenous Data and agreement to recognise Indigenous Data Sovereignty more explicitly; and
- the Commonwealth Priority Reforms Roadmap and the 2026 First Nations family, domestic and sexual violence plan, both of which reinforce Indigenous leadership, systems reform, evidence and data governance.

These are necessary foundations. They are not yet proof that decision-making power, resources, data control or service authority have shifted at scale. The 2026 Annual Data Compilation Report states that there is still no agreed way to assess progress on the Priority Reforms; phase two of the measurement process remains in progress, while later phases - developing data, collecting data and building time series - have not commenced. This is a serious accountability gap six years into a ten-year agreement (Productivity Commission 2026b).

1.3 AMHC's overall finding

Finding: The Agreement's architecture is broadly sound, but implementation remains process-heavy and power-light. The next phase must convert principles into enforceable decision rights, transferred resources, community-controlled delivery, Indigenous-governed evidence and consequences for inaction.

A genuine reform test asks: Who decides? Who holds the budget? Who owns and interprets the data? Who delivers the service? Who can require correction? Who reports back to community? If the answer remains predominantly government, the activity may be consultation or co-design, but it is not yet shared decision-making or self-determination.

2. Representation, evidence and knowledge sharing

2.1 The visibility paradox

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are highly visible in administrative systems when they are imprisoned, hospitalised, unemployed, homeless, in crisis or recorded as respondents to violence. They are much less visible in the formal architecture that decides policy priorities, allocates investment, defines success and interprets evidence. This is not merely a representation problem. It affects what governments see, which interventions they fund, when they intervene and which forms of knowledge are treated as authoritative.

The national framework contains some sex-disaggregated data, including for life expectancy, imprisonment, youth detention and suicide. Yet sex and gender are not consistently built into the headline targets, implementation plans, funding reports, governance arrangements or evaluation questions. Outcome 13 rightly centres the safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children. However, the target's measurement architecture largely records victimisation and identifies long-term pathways for perpetrators as a data-development matter. Without explicit investment in culturally governed work with men who use violence, the system risks measuring harm after it occurs while underbuilding the pathways needed to prevent recurrence.

Non-negotiable principle: Making men visible must strengthen - never dilute - the voices, safety and resources of women and children. Effective men's work is accountable to family and child safety, maintains statutory protections and complements women-led and victim-survivor services.

2.2 Representation must carry authority

Representation is not achieved by inviting one man to a meeting or adding a men's engagement session after priorities have been set. Community-authorised representatives require a clear mandate, time to consult, access to independent advice, culturally safe participation, remuneration and an equal ability to influence decisions and budgets. Relevant governance bodies should publish a representation statement describing how they include women, men, young people, Elders, remote and regional communities, people with disability, Stolen Generations survivors and LGBTQIA+SB people, without imposing a single national formula on diverse communities.

Where outcomes disproportionately affect men and boys - including adult imprisonment, youth detention, male suicide and male life expectancy - the governance response should include community-authorised male leadership and specialist men's organisations. This should occur alongside, and in accountable relationship with, women's leadership, child-safety expertise and other affected groups.

2.3 Evidence must include community knowledge

Administrative datasets are essential but incomplete. They are strongest at counting episodes of service contact and statutory intervention. They often do not capture cultural identity, trust, belonging, restored family responsibility, changes in violent behaviour, community legitimacy, continuity of care, the cultural safety of an interaction or why a person disengaged. They may also fragment one person's story across health, justice, housing and family-safety systems.

A fit-for-purpose evidence system should combine:

- nationally comparable quantitative indicators, routinely disaggregated by sex/gender, age, disability, geography, remoteness and other relevant factors;
- local administrative data linked only under lawful, ethical and community-governed arrangements;
- community-defined cultural, relational and wellbeing measures;
- lived-experience evidence gathered through culturally safe yarning, oral history, story and other methods chosen by community;
- independent family-safety feedback where programs work with men who use violence; and
- longitudinal follow-up that examines sustained change rather than program attendance alone.

2.4 Knowledge sharing must be reciprocal

Communities are repeatedly asked to provide stories, advice and data but do not always receive timely information about decisions, reasons, expenditure or results. Knowledge sharing must be two-way. Before engagement, agencies should explain what is open for decision and what is not. After engagement, they should return a plain-language and locally appropriate account of what was heard, what changed, what did not change and why. Communities should receive their data and evaluation findings in usable forms, with resources to interpret and apply them.

3. Assessment of the four Priority Reforms

3.1 Priority Reform One - formal partnerships and shared decision-making

The creation of formal partnership structures is a material improvement on unilateral policy-making. However, the existence of a partnership does not establish shared power. The 2024 and 2025 reviews found that power was not consistently shared and that many relationships did not yet operate as genuine partnerships. AMHC's concern is that national and jurisdictional arrangements can remain distant from local male voices and from small or emerging community-controlled organisations that do not have the resources to participate continuously.

A partnership should be assessed against seven practical tests:

Test	Evidence of genuine shared decision-making
Authority	The matters open for shared decision, delegated powers and limits are written and agreed before engagement.
Mandate	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives are selected through legitimate community-controlled processes and can renew or test their mandate.
Resources	Participation, community engagement, independent advice, travel, cultural governance and administration are fully funded.
Decision rules	Consensus, quorum, conflicts, escalation and independent dispute-resolution processes prevent unilateral override.
Budget power	Partners influence allocation, commissioning and reprioritisation, not only program design.
Transparency	Decisions, reasons, dissent, funding effects and implementation status are reported publicly, subject to cultural and privacy protections.
Community return	Information is returned in accessible forms and communities can question, correct and influence the next decision.

AMHC recommends a First Nations Men's Closing the Gap Partnership with links into health, justice, housing, disability, early childhood, family safety and data structures. It should not become another advisory body. Its terms must confer joint agenda setting, budget influence, access to evidence, the capacity to commission independent advice and a formal route to Joint Council.

3.2 Priority Reform Two - building the community-controlled sector

Community control is not satisfied when an Aboriginal organisation is used mainly as a referral source, cultural adviser or subcontractor while a mainstream provider controls the contract, model, data and evaluation. Nor is sector strengthening achieved through short grants that fund program activity but exclude governance, property, information systems, workforce development, clinical supervision, insurance, evaluation and leadership succession.

Funding arrangements should:

- default to multi-year, flexible and indexed agreements where performance is satisfactory;
- fund the full cost of delivery, including governance, cultural authority, infrastructure, workforce, data and evaluation;
- provide proportionate reporting and a single agreed outcomes framework across contributing agencies;
- allow community-controlled organisations to retain and reinvest efficiency gains;
- publish service-transition plans with assets, workforce, data, intellectual property, timelines and risk controls;
- measure the proportion and value of funding controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, not merely flowing through them; and
- support specialist organisations led by men where the evidence and community mandate demonstrate a need, without reducing funding to women's and children's services.

A meaningful transition must be co-designed and staged. Community-controlled organisations should not be set up to fail by receiving responsibility without the capital, workforce, data access or transition support previously available to mainstream providers.

3.3 Priority Reform Three - transforming government organisations

The Commonwealth Priority Reforms Roadmap correctly identifies institutional barriers, deficit framing, exclusionary cultures and fragmented decision-making. The remaining challenge is to make transformation part of core government business rather than a specialist Indigenous affairs function. Every portfolio influences Closing the Gap, including Treasury, central agencies, health, justice, education, housing, employment, infrastructure, digital policy, procurement and regulators (Commonwealth of Australia 2026).

Transformation should be evidenced by changes to:

- Cabinet and budget templates, requiring a Closing the Gap and shared-decision impact statement;
- procurement and commissioning rules, including ACCO preference and transfer pathways;
- senior executive performance agreements and agency risk frameworks;
- workforce recruitment, retention, cultural safety and consequences for racism;
- program timeframes so relationship building, cultural governance and ethical approval are funded rather than compressed;
- complaints, review and procedural fairness mechanisms; and
- annual reporting that discloses decisions, expenditure, outcomes, missed commitments and corrective action.

Cultural awareness training alone is not transformation. The test is whether institutional power, incentives, processes and behaviour change. Independent mechanisms must have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legitimacy, structural independence, access to information, authority to publish findings and a pathway to require corrective action.

3.4 Priority Reform Four - shared access to data and information

Data access is necessary but is not the same as Indigenous Data Sovereignty. Providing a dashboard after government has determined what to collect, how to classify people, how to interpret results and who may reuse the information leaves underlying power unchanged. The 2026 Annual Data Compilation Report itself shows both progress and limitation: data are available for 18 of 19 targets, yet four cannot be assessed; only 60 of 146 supporting indicators are reported; only one supporting indicator uses community-sourced data and one uses community-governed data (Productivity Commission 2026b).

AMHC supports the Data Policy Partnership's work, the agreement to strengthen recognition of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, the APS Framework for the Governance of Indigenous Data and consideration of a Bureau of Indigenous Data. Implementation should now be tested at the level of actual programs and communities. Each relevant initiative should have a negotiated Indigenous Data Governance Agreement, community data capability funding and a mechanism for community-authorised interpretation before publication.

4. Indigenous-led evaluation and Indigenous Data Sovereignty

4.1 Evaluation is part of self-determination

The Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, priorities and knowledges at the centre and recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had limited input into evaluation planning, conduct and reporting. Those principles should be mandatory, adequately funded and independently monitored across Closing the Gap implementation, including mainstream programs with significant effects on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Productivity Commission 2020).

Indigenous-led evaluation does not mean lowering methodological standards or excluding quantitative analysis. It means that cultural and technical rigour operate together and that the people whose lives are affected share authority over what success means, which questions are asked, how evidence is gathered, how limitations are understood and how findings are used.

4.2 Minimum evaluation standard

Element	Minimum requirement
Governance	A community-authorised evaluation governance group approves the framework, methods, risks, interpretation and release.
Purpose	Questions address community priorities, implementation quality, outcomes, unintended effects, equity and value - not compliance alone.
Methods	Quantitative, qualitative and Indigenous methods are combined where appropriate; cultural measures are locally validated.

Element	Minimum requirement
Safety	Ethics, free and informed consent, privacy, cultural and intellectual property, trauma-aware practice and family-safety protocols are documented.
Data	A binding data governance agreement establishes rights and responsibilities across the whole lifecycle.
Interpretation	Community representatives and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evaluators lead or share interpretation; contested findings are recorded.
Use	Findings are timed to decisions, returned to community, translated into accessible formats and linked to a funded improvement response.
Capability	Evaluation investment builds lasting capability and infrastructure in community-controlled organisations.

4.3 Indigenous Data Sovereignty in practice

Indigenous Data Sovereignty concerns the right of Indigenous peoples to govern data about their peoples, lands, cultures, resources and interests. It operates across creation, collection, access, analysis, interpretation, management, dissemination and reuse. A data-sharing clause drafted solely around agency access and privacy compliance is insufficient.

Project-level agreements should address:

- who owns or exercises control over datasets, derived variables, cultural knowledge and evaluation products;
- the purposes for which information may be collected, linked, analysed, published and reused;
- community access to unit-record, aggregate and contextual data in safe and useful forms;
- where data are stored, who can administer systems and how access is logged and reviewed;
- consent, cultural authority, privacy, confidentiality, suppression, withdrawal and breach response;
- community participation in analysis, interpretation, authorship and release approval;
- rules for automated decision systems and artificial intelligence, including prohibition of unapproved secondary use; and
- how data capability, infrastructure and benefits remain with the community after a project ends.

4.4 A male-relevant evidence agenda

A male-relevant evidence agenda should not create a single deficit profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. It should measure strengths and responsibilities as well as harm. Nationally comparable indicators should be supplemented by locally defined measures such as connection to Country and culture, trusted relationships, fathering and caregiving, restored family responsibility, stable housing, engagement in health care, reduced violent behaviour, completion of legal obligations, education, accredited training, employment, community contribution and sustained wellbeing.

For programs involving men who use violence, program completion is not a sufficient outcome. Evaluation should include independent and ethically governed family-safety feedback, changes in assessed risk, repeat police and court contact, compliance with orders, engagement in health and substance-use treatment where relevant, housing stability and longer-term behaviour change. Cultural supervision may strengthen accountability but must complement, not replace, statutory and evidence-informed safeguards.

5. Progress against the 17 socio-economic outcomes

5.1 National progress is mixed and structurally connected

The 17 outcomes should not be treated as separate program silos. The experience of one Aboriginal man may cross health, housing, education, employment, justice, family safety, cultural connection and digital access in a short period. Poor coordination transfers cost and responsibility between systems while the person and family remain unsupported. The Priority Reforms should therefore be assessed as cross-cutting enablers of every outcome.

The 2026 national snapshot contains genuine gains: the preschool enrolment target has been met; employment and land and sea rights or interests are on track; and five other targets are improving. These gains should be recognised and learned from. But life expectancy, education, youth engagement and housing improvements remain off track; healthy birthweight and youth detention show no change; childhood development, adult imprisonment, out-of-home care and suicide are worsening; and family safety, languages, digital access and essential services cannot yet be assessed reliably (Productivity Commission 2026b).

5.2 Four outcomes expose the male policy gap

Long and healthy lives

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male life expectancy of 71.9 years is lower than the female figure and 8.8 years below non-Indigenous males. A response must connect culturally safe primary care with prevention, chronic disease management, mental health, alcohol and other drug treatment, post-hospital support, disability, housing and justice throughcare. Outreach and continuity matter for men who avoid or are excluded from conventional services.

Adult and youth justice

Outcome 10 is worsening nationally. The 2025 male imprisonment rate was more than eight times the female rate. Although youth detention in 2024-25 was below the 2018-19 baseline, the rate for boys remained more than seven times the rate for girls. Justice reform should be linked to housing, bail support, legal assistance, health, disability assessment, cultural authority, on-Country options where lawful and community-supported, education, employment and throughcare. Proposed diversion, bail, community-order, parole or Elder-supervision mechanisms must remain subject to statutory, community, cultural, family-safety, workforce and operational approval gates.

Social and emotional wellbeing

The worsening suicide target and the 2023 male suicide rate require a dedicated response led with men, communities and Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations. Crisis services are necessary but insufficient. Prevention must also address racism, grief, trauma, cultural disconnection, justice contact, relationship breakdown, housing, debt, employment, disability, alcohol and other drug use and access to culturally safe care. Data quality cautions must be respected, but uncertainty is not a reason for inaction.

Family safety

The target cannot currently be assessed because comparable current data are not available. This gap should be corrected urgently. The 2026 First Nations national plan appropriately centres women and children and identifies self-determination, Indigenous-led healing solutions, institutional reform, evidence and Indigenous Data Sovereignty as core threads. Its implementation should include sustained community-controlled pathways that prevent violence and hold men who use violence accountable, integrated with victim-survivor services and multi-agency risk management (DSS 2026).

5.3 The remaining outcomes also require a male lens

Men's outcomes are shaped early and relationally. Healthy pregnancies, thriving children and school engagement are supported when fathers, grandfathers, uncles and other men are safe, healthy and involved. Education, training and employment pathways should respond to young men at risk of disengagement and adults returning from custody. Housing policy should recognise that the absence of safe accommodation can increase remand, homelessness, family risk and service disengagement. Land, waters and languages are not supplementary cultural matters; they sustain identity, authority, healing, intergenerational knowledge and economic participation. Digital inclusion must include capability, affordability, safe access and community control of information, not internet use alone.

Appendix A provides a concise gender-responsive assessment of all 17 outcomes. AMHC recommends that each outcome be accompanied by a public distributional analysis that identifies which groups are improving, which are falling behind, how Priority Reform actions are expected to change the trajectory and what corrective action will be taken.

6. Community-led approaches designed and delivered by men

6.1 Why male-led community control matters

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men may engage differently when services are trusted, culturally governed, relational, persistent and connected to Country, family and practical responsibilities. Male-led approaches can reach men who do not present to mainstream clinics or programs, translate between cultural and statutory systems, model non-violence and responsibility, and sustain support beyond a short intervention. This leadership must be locally authorised: no national organisation, program or cultural framework can substitute for the authority of each Nation and community.

Male leadership is not, by itself, a safety guarantee. Good governance requires clear conduct standards, conflict-of-interest controls, child-safe practice, women's and family-safety input, clinical governance where health care is delivered, evidence-informed risk management and external accountability. These safeguards strengthen rather than diminish cultural authority.

6.2 AMHC practice-informed model

AMHC's work and service development point to an integrated pathway rather than a stand-alone course. The model is a reform proposition for local adaptation, not a claim that one design should be imposed nationally. Its essential elements are:

- local cultural governance and community mandate, including clear authority, cultural protocols and relationships with local Aboriginal organisations;
- accessible entry through outreach, self-referral, family and community referral, health services, courts, corrections and other agencies;
- multidisciplinary intake covering immediate safety, health, social and emotional wellbeing, disability, alcohol and other drugs, housing, legal status, culture and family responsibilities;
- evidence-informed family-violence risk assessment, coordinated information sharing and a safety plan that keeps the man visible while protecting victim-survivors and children;
- culturally validated healing and clinical responses, delivered by an appropriately qualified and culturally capable workforce;
- residential or safe accommodation options where needed to stabilise risk, support bail or orders lawfully, prevent homelessness and enable sustained treatment;
- case coordination across health, housing, justice, child protection, family safety, education, training, employment and income support;
- on-Country and cultural healing components where authorised and safe, with cultural supervision complementing statutory obligations;
- fathering, relationship, responsibility and non-violence work that does not excuse behaviour or collapse accountability into trauma;
- accredited training, employment and enterprise pathways that build a lawful and sustainable future;
- long-term aftercare, peer and Elder support, relapse and risk response, and return pathways; and
- Indigenous-led evaluation and a community-governed data agreement established before delivery begins.

6.3 Safety and accountability architecture

Where men have used violence, victim-survivor and child safety must govern the model. AMHC recommends separate and independent channels for family-safety information; documented information-sharing thresholds; regular multi-agency risk review; clear escalation and emergency procedures; staff supervision; child-safe standards; and independent evaluation of safety outcomes. Cultural healing can address trauma, identity and responsibility, but must never be used to minimise violence, pressure victim-survivors, replace legal protections or promise safety that has not been independently assessed.

6.4 Investment and commissioning

Governments should commission for continuity and outcomes rather than isolated episodes. A single integrated pathway may generate benefits across health, justice, child protection, housing and employment, but fragmented budgets make it difficult to fund. Pooled or aligned investment should be governed jointly, with transparent contributions, a lead community-controlled partner, common outcomes, proportionate reporting and rules preventing one agency from withdrawing when benefits accrue elsewhere.

7. A practical implementation and accountability framework

7.1 Measure the transfer, not only the activity

Every jurisdiction should report a small set of reform measures that answer whether power and capability have shifted. At minimum:

- the number and proportion of material decisions made through arrangements meeting the shared-decision standard;
- the value and proportion of relevant expenditure controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, by sector, location, recipient type and funding duration;
- the number and value of services transferred to community control, with workforce, assets, data and transition support;
- community-reported experience of influence, trust, cultural safety, accountability and access to information;
- agency compliance with transformation duties and corrective actions;
- the proportion of relevant evaluations governed or led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- the number of operational Indigenous Data Governance Agreements and community data projects; and
- distributional outcome trends, including sex/gender and place, linked to specific reform actions and expenditure.

7.2 Funding transparency

Funding reports should distinguish money announced, contracted, paid and controlled. They should identify administrative overheads, intermediaries, mainstream and community-controlled recipients, geographic reach, contract duration and intended cohorts. Where a program is described as co-designed or community-led, the report should disclose who held the contract, intellectual property, data and final decision authority. This would allow the Commission and communities to assess whether investment is driving the Priority Reforms or reproducing existing service markets.

7.3 Staged implementation

Timeframe	Priority actions
Within 12 months	Agree Priority Reform measures; establish the men's partnership design process; adopt the shared-decision standard; publish funding baselines; require data-governance and evaluation plans for new initiatives.
Within 24 months	Commence the Men's Action Plan; execute sector and service-transition agreements; operationalise independent oversight; fund place-based male healing and accountability demonstrations with approval gates.
Within 36 months	Publish independently verified reform results and distributional outcomes; scale successful community-controlled models; correct or discontinue initiatives that do not transfer power or improve outcomes.

7.4 Independent oversight and consequences

Independent oversight should be co-governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, adequately funded, protected from political direction and able to obtain information, hear community evidence, publish findings and monitor corrective action. Accountability should support learning, but persistent failure cannot remain consequence-free. Consequences may include mandatory remediation plans, executive performance impacts, procurement or funding conditions, escalation to Joint Council and public reporting to parliaments.

8. Direct responses to the Commission's guiding questions

8.1 Governance, relationships and accountability

The governance bodies have created a national platform that did not previously exist, but effectiveness is constrained by incomplete implementation, distance from local communities, inconsistent power-sharing and weak consequences. Trust grows where authority is explicit, representatives have legitimate mandates, parties are resourced equally, information is shared early, commitments are tracked and decisions are returned to community. Independent mechanisms will be credible only if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people share their design and appointment, the bodies are structurally independent, and findings lead to timely corrective action.

8.2 Formal partnerships

Successful partnerships treat Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as strategic authorities, not stakeholders. They start before a preferred policy is chosen, share budgets and evidence, allow independent advice, recognise local cultural governance and use agreed dispute processes. Diverse voices should be included through transparent, community-controlled selection and funded engagement. Partnerships should coordinate through common outcomes and mutual reporting while preserving the distinct mandates of women's, men's, youth, disability, Elder and place-based structures.

8.3 Community-controlled sector

Trust and sustainability are undermined by short contracts, competitive tendering against larger mainstream providers, unfunded compliance, late payments, narrow outputs and responsibility without infrastructure. Governments should publish transition pathways, fund full costs, coordinate reporting and measure resources actually controlled by ACCOs. Success must be jointly defined and interpreted, with the community-controlled sector leading its own capability and evaluation agenda.

8.4 Transforming government

Meaningful improvement requires governments to acknowledge and act on institutional racism, embed cultural safety as an organisational duty and change the rules that shape daily decisions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must define cultural safety and test whether it is experienced. Transparency should include decision logs, funding flows, reasons for departures from partner advice, complaints outcomes and implementation recovery plans.

8.5 Data access, collection and governance

Communities need timely local data, analytical capability and genuine governance rights. Indigenous Data Governance should be implemented through binding agreements across the data lifecycle, not statements of intent. Priority Reform Four should be measured by changes in community control, capability, access, interpretation and benefit, alongside improvements in government data quality.

8.6 Policy cycle and public service capability

Shared decisions should occur at agenda setting, problem definition, options development, budgeting, design, delivery, evaluation and adaptation. Public servants need practical partnership capability, stable relationships, authority to work flexibly, cultural supervision and performance accountability. Joint capability-building should be funded in community-controlled organisations as well as government; otherwise the cultural and administrative load remains unequal.

8.7 Place-based partnerships and community authority

Place-based work succeeds when local cultural authority is clear, community mandates are maintained, backbone functions are funded, decision rights are real, data are available, government is coordinated and timeframes extend beyond pilots. Local government can contribute land, facilities, procurement, community development and local coordination, but it must not displace Traditional Owner or community-controlled authority. Accountability should be mutual: communities report on agreed outcomes and stewardship; governments report on enabling actions, expenditure, barriers removed and commitments delivered.

8.8 System enablers, barriers and outcomes

The strongest enablers are legitimate cultural governance, community control, long-term flexible funding, a stable workforce, integrated service pathways, safe accommodation, data capability, independent evaluation and government accountability. The principal barriers are fragmented commissioning, institutional racism, deficit framing, short-term funding, consultation without authority, inaccessible data, workforce and infrastructure gaps, policy churn and the absence of consequences. The Agreement can improve outcomes only when Priority Reform commitments materially alter these conditions at national, jurisdictional and local levels.

Conclusion

The second review comes at a decisive point. Australia is past the halfway point for many 2031 targets, yet the Priority Reforms still lack agreed measures and several outcome areas remain unassessable. More activity without a transfer of power will not close the gap.

AMHC asks the Commission to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys visible in the next phase of the Agreement - not only as subjects of adverse statistics, but as rights-holders, fathers, carers, cultural leaders, partners and designers of solutions. This requires formal representation with authority; a cross-portfolio men's action plan; community-controlled investment; integrated healing, accountability and opportunity pathways; Indigenous-led evaluation; and Indigenous governance of data.

The safety of women and children, the wellbeing and accountability of men, and the strength of families and communities are interdependent. Properly designed male-specific work strengthens the whole Closing the Gap project. It reaches people mainstream systems often miss, intervenes before crises compound, and locates healing and responsibility within culture, community and enduring relationships.

Final request: Recommend a measurable transfer from consultation to shared authority, from fragmented grants to sustainable community control, from government-owned evidence to Indigenous-governed knowledge, and from crisis response to community-led prevention and healing.

Appendix A - 17-outcome gender-responsive assessment

The national position below is based on the July 2026 Annual Data Compilation Report. 'On track' and other assessments relate to national target trajectories and do not imply equal progress across jurisdictions, places or population groups. Outcome 9 and Outcome 15 each have two targets.

Socio-economic outcome	July 2026 national position	AMHC male-specific and relational implication
1. Long and healthy lives	Improving, not on track. Life expectancy: 71.9 years for males and 75.6 for females (2020-22).	Fund male-specific prevention, chronic disease, mental health, disability, outreach and continuity pathways. Report male trajectories by place and remoteness.
2. Babies born healthy and strong	No change from baseline. 88.9% healthy birthweight (2023).	Include safe, healthy fathers and male kin in preconception, pregnancy and family supports where women choose and safety permits; address smoking, AOD, violence and social determinants.
3. Children engaged in early childhood education	Target met. Enrolment reported at 101.7% (2025), noting numerator/denominator limitations.	Move beyond enrolment to attendance, quality and cultural safety. Support positive father, grandfather and male-carer engagement.
4. Children thrive in early years	Worsening. 33.9% developmentally on track in all five domains (2024).	Connect child development with family safety, housing, health and support for safe fathering and male caregiving.
5. Students achieve learning potential	Improving, not on track. 68.1% of people aged 20-24 attained Year 12 or equivalent (2021).	Analyse outcomes for boys and young men; fund cultural mentoring, re-engagement and transitions for those in care or justice systems.
6. Further education pathways	Improving, not on track. 47.0% of people aged 25-34 completed Certificate III or above (2021).	Create flexible, culturally supported pathways for men, including remote learners, mature-age entrants and people leaving custody.
7. Youth in employment, education or training	Improving, not on track. 58.0% of people aged 15-24 fully engaged (2021).	Target young men at risk of disengagement through culture, mentoring, training, transport, digital access and employer partnerships.
8. Strong economic participation	Improving and on track. 55.7% of people aged 25-64 employed (2021).	Examine job quality, security, earnings and retention by sex and place. Link procurement and enterprise to men's reintegration and community priorities.
9. Appropriate housing and essential services	9a improving, not on track: 81.4% appropriately housed (2021). 9b: no data on essential services.	Recognise housing as health, family-safety and justice infrastructure. Fund safe accommodation, bail housing, transitional housing and remote essential services.
10. Adults not overrepresented in justice	Worsening. 2,500.2 per 100,000 adults imprisoned (2025); male rate 4,496.9.	Prioritise Aboriginal male-led diversion, bail support, healing, legal and health pathways, throughcare, housing and employment, subject to legal and safety gates.
11. Young people not overrepresented in justice	No change from baseline. 25.7 per 10,000 in detention (2024-25); male rate 44.3.	Invest early in boys, families and communities; reduce remand; strengthen culture, education, disability assessment, housing and community-led alternatives.
12. Children not overrepresented in child protection	Worsening. 52.2 per 1,000 children in out-of-home care (2025).	Work safely with fathers and male kin as part of family strengthening and reunification; maintain child safety and independent risk assessment.
13. Families and households are safe	No assessment available. Latest headline measure: 8.4% of females experienced physical or threatened physical harm (2018-19).	Protect women and children while funding sustained, culturally governed accountability and behaviour-change pathways for men; develop current outcome and perpetrator-pathway data.
14. Social and emotional wellbeing	Worsening. Suicide rate 33.9 per 100,000 people (2024); 2023 male rate 48.5.	Implement Indigenous male-led, culturally grounded suicide prevention across crisis care and social determinants; build postvention and long-term follow-up.

Socio-economic outcome	July 2026 national position	AMHC male-specific and relational implication
15. Land and waters	Land and sea targets improving and on track: 4,421,946 km ² land and 113,496 km ² sea subject to rights/interests (2025).	Translate legal recognition into community authority, on-Country healing, ranger work, enterprise and intergenerational roles for men, consistent with local governance.
16. Cultures and languages	No comparable assessment. 177 languages spoken or used (2025-26); methodological change limits trend assessment.	Support locally authorised male knowledge transmission, cultural mentoring and language work while respecting distinct gendered cultural authority.
17. Digital inclusion	No comparable assessment. 88.3% personally used the internet in the previous three months (2022-23).	Measure affordability, devices, connectivity, capability, telehealth access, service access and community data control; address digital exclusion after custody and in remote areas.

Source: Productivity Commission (2026b), supplemented by sex-disaggregated dashboard data for Outcomes 10 and 11 and AIHW (2026a) for the 2023 male suicide rate.

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