

Strengthening First Nations-Led Wellbeing

National Wellbeing ALLIANCE

Submission to the Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap

October 2026

Executive Summary

National Wellbeing Alliance (NWA) is a First Nations-owned and led organisation delivering culturally safe social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) training nationally across Australia. NWA provides complementary delivery capability, working alongside communities, ACCOs, specialist service providers and government partners including NIAA.

NWA's work contributes to **Closing the Gap (CtG) Outcome 14, Social and Emotional Wellbeing**, by strengthening mental health knowledge, confidence and community capability. Through our network of independent First Nations trainers, NWA also creates income-generating opportunities and strengthens First Nations workforce capability, contributing to **Outcome 8, Employment and Economic Participation.**

NWA's experience, along with its founding organisation Corporate Culcha, demonstrates the value of combining national delivery capability with strong local partnerships. NWA brings a national First Nations trainer workforce, operational coordination and specialist logistics capability, while working with communities and local partners so that delivery can respond to local priorities, cultural protocols and the circumstances of particular cohorts including youth, adults and elders, and settings.

Our submission identifies three ways to strengthen delivery of First Nations-led community wellbeing and support Closing the Gap Priority Reforms 1 and 2, namely to:

1. Invest in cross-system community wellbeing continuity, not just program delivery
2. Enable locally responsive delivery
3. Enable complementary First Nations-led partnerships

NWA's vision and difference

Who we are

NWA is a First Nations-owned and led organisation strengthening social and emotional wellbeing for First Nations peoples through culturally grounded SEWB training, community engagement and workforce capability building.

Working nationally across metropolitan, regional and remote Australia, NWA brings together First Nations Community Engagement Leads (CELs) and trainers to work alongside communities and organisations.

Our vision

Everyone heard, seen and valued.

Our work contributes to this vision by strengthening social and emotional wellbeing, building on the strengths, knowledge and capability already within First Nations people and communities.

Our difference

National capability, grounded in community.

NWA's national First Nations trainer workforce brings relevant lived experience, coordinated by a specialist operations and logistics team that navigates complex delivery across metropolitan, regional and very remote Australia, including correctional and educational settings.

Our CELs build and maintain relationships with communities, ACCOs and suitable service providers, while our trainers bring the learning to life. Working alongside local and specialist partners brings different strengths together, builds continuity and trust over time, and keeps our national capability grounded in the communities we work with.

NWA's pathway to impact

How NWA's activities lead to positive change

NWA's activities...

... directly lead to postive outcomes that evolve into long-term impacts ...

... that contribute to NWA's long-term objectives and vision



Pathway to impact

How NWA's activities contribute to CTG outcomes 14 and #8 over time

Activities



- Facilitate culturally grounded early intervention and preventative SEWB training and yarning circles
- First Nations facilitators bringing cultural, professional and lived expertise
- Community engagement and local adaptation before delivery
- Coordination with local and specialist partners
- First Nations trainer and workforce development

Outputs

- Tailored, culturally safe SEWB training
- Yarning circles
- SEWB-aware people and communties, spanning regional and remote communities
- SEWB aware organisations (e.g. schools, health services, community services) that participate in NWA training
- Increasingly capable First Nations trainers, including trainers from community
- Partnerships with First Nations-owned businesses e.g., Yilabara, Thirrili
- Trainer scholarships for First Nations people
- First Nations-owned businesses formed by trainers

Direct outcomes



Empowering individuals

- Increased access to culturally safe early intervention and preventative wellbeing training for youth, adults and Elders.
- Greater knowledge and confidence to recognise when people need support
- Greater confidence to have conversations about mental health and wellbeing
- Increased awareness of local support networks and services



Strengthening communities and organisations

- Increased connections within communities and across community organisations, service providers
- More organisations, including health, education and correctional services, are equipped to support the social and emotional wellbeing of their clients, students and staff.



Economic empowerment and development

- Greater First Nations training and workforce capability
- Increased paid opportunities for First Nations trainers
- Increased engagement of First Nations-owned businesses

Medium to long-term impacts



Empowering individuals

- Youth, adults and Elders applying wellbeing strategies in their everyday lives
- Earlier help-seeking and greater confidence accessing culturally safe support



Strengthening communities and organisations

- Stronger community connections and support networks
- Greater local capability to respond to mental health and wellbeing needs
- More culturally informed responses within organisations



Economic empowerment and development

- A stronger First Nations training workforce
- Greater sustainability of First Nations training capability and businesses

Long-term objective



Empower First Nations people and communities to strengthen their wellbeing in all aspects of life.



Notes: 1- New offerings will include AOD, DV, AMHFA and YAMHFA Blended Online training

Our impact

NWA's activities...

932 Mental Health First Aid workshops

80+ Yarning Circles

delivered to

12,461+ people

200+ communities

90% in regional and remote areas

35 trainer scholarships

... directly lead to postive outcomes...

1040+ organisations with better skills and cultural understanding including secondary and tertiary education institutions and correctional settings.

97.4% youth, adult & elder participants who would recommend the training to others

75+ First Nations trainers delivering to their home communities and others

... that evolve into long-term impacts

CTG #14 Empowering individuals

- ↑ Increase in people practising holistic wellbeing strategies and seeking support earlier
- ↓ Decrease in rates of psychological distress, self-harm and suicide

CTG #14 Strengthening communities & organisations

- ↑ Stronger community connections and greater shared learnings
- ↑ Better and more culturally informed mental health responses

CTG #8 Economic empowerment & development

- ↑ Continued growth in First Nations training and workforce capability

Reference: NWA program evaluation reporting from Dec 2021 – Sep 2026

Lessons learnt as they pertain to the Closing the Gap Framework

Invest in continuity around community wellbeing, not just program delivery

NWA has learnt that the value of our programs goes beyond the training itself.

Strong relationships, local connections and follow-through, including yarning circles, help turn individual programs into lasting community capability and support youth, adults and elders to put new practices into action.

Enable locally responsive delivery

National reach doesn't have to mean a one-size-fits-all approach.

NWA combines its national First Nations trainer network with local knowledge, relationships and cultural protocols, so delivery can respond to each community and setting. This includes Ranger groups, adult and youth correctional settings, high schools and tertiary institutions.

Complementary partnerships bring different strengths to Closing the Gap

There is an important role for different kinds of First Nations organisations advancing Closing the Gap outcomes.

NWA's experience shows the value and agility of First Nations-owned businesses working alongside ACCOs, communities and specialist partners, bringing different strengths together to achieve better outcomes.

Recommendations

Our recommendations to strengthen implementation of existing Closing the Gap commitments

Invest in continuity around community wellbeing, not just program delivery

Program funding should reflect the value of enabling activities that build and sustain positive community outcomes

- Recognise community engagement before delivery and follow-through afterwards as core fundable activities rather than overheads
- Provide longer-term funding arrangements so relationships and local capability can be built and sustained over time
- Measure success by youth and adult capability and connections built in community, as well as sessions delivered and participant numbers

Links to Priority Reform 2 and 3

Enable locally responsive delivery

National reach and local delivery can work together to strengthen community outcomes

- Recognise national and place-based approaches as complementary
- Value models that bring a national First Nations footprint and coordination, together with local First Nations trainers, knowledge, relationships and cultural protocols
- Agree outcomes between the funder and First Nations-led provider, with flexibility to adapt content and format to each community and setting

Links to Priority Reform 1 and 3

Complementary partnerships bring different strengths to CtG

Recognise and harness the strength of a mix of expertise in making a difference to First Nations outcomes

- Support partnership models that harness First Nations business and specialist expertise, steered by community-controlled sector leadership
- Recognise flow on benefits of delivery models, outside of direct program outcomes, such as First Nations trainer employment and growing Blak businesses

Links to Priority Reform 2 and Outcomes 8, 14



Supply Nation Certified
NWA is proud to be Supply Nation certified, demonstrating our commitment to supplier diversity and the growth of First Nations businesses. This certification connects us to a national network of corporate and government partners who support First Nations economic empowerment.