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

About This Submission

This submission is made in response to the Productivity Commission's 2026 Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The review was brought to my attention through advice distributed by the Australian Local Government Association, which encouraged local government perspectives to inform the review and its focus on practical actions to accelerate progress towards Closing the Gap outcomes.

I am an elected Councillor of the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley since 2017 and have lived and worked in Kununurra for more than 21 years. During that time I have been involved in local business, community organisations, regional development and local government, providing direct experience of many of the issues discussed in this submission.

This submission is made solely in my personal capacity as an individual elected Councillor. It has not been considered, endorsed, adopted or authorised by the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley. Nothing in this submission should be interpreted as representing the views, policies, decisions or position of the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, its Council, Administration, employees or any other elected member.

The views expressed are my own and are intended to assist the Productivity Commission by providing a practical perspective from a regional community that continues to experience significant challenges across a number of Closing the Gap outcome areas.

This submission draws upon publicly available reports, government data, parliamentary records, local statistics and personal observations developed through long-term residence and involvement in the East Kimberley community.

Mathew Dear
Councillor, Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley
Submission made in a personal capacity

Key Recommendations Summary

This submission draws on more than two decades living and working in Kununurra, alongside information from WA Police, WA Parliament, the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, the ABS, WA Country Health Service, the Kimberley Development Commission, the Auditor General and local Aboriginal organisations. Most Aboriginal families in Kununurra and Wyndham are strong, and most Aboriginal people are working, raising families and contributing to the region — the problems described here do not apply to everyone. But a relatively small number of repeat offenders and family groups are driving a disproportionate share of harm, affecting Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents, victims and businesses alike.

After years of strategies, funding rounds and program launches, the evidence in this submission shows things are not improving in Kununurra and Wyndham — on several key measures, they are going backwards. Stolen-vehicle offence rates are no lower now than a decade ago. Regional unemployment rose over the past year. Nationally, the target for reducing children in out-of-home care is moving the wrong way. Community frustration is real and justified, and it should not be managed with more of the same. This submission is not a call for balance for its own sake. It is asking government to match real support with real consequences when things fail, and to admit plainly that progress so far has been too slow. Drastic, decisive action is needed now.

Closing the Gap will only work here if two things happen together: government and service systems have to coordinate and answer for outcomes, not just activity, and individuals, families and communities have to carry their own share of responsibility for child safety, school attendance, supervision, housing care and community safety. This submission makes eight main points.

1. Child Safety Must Come First

Where a child faces serious neglect, violence, harmful alcohol or drug use or an unsafe home, protecting that child must take priority over cultural or family-placement preferences. Culture and family connection matter

and can be protective, but they cannot be allowed to delay action when a child is at risk. Removal should never be automatic, and families should be supported to keep children safely at home wherever possible — but where serious risk remains, protecting the child comes first.

2. Targeted Alcohol Intervention, Not More Broad Restrictions

Kununurra and Wyndham already carry some of the State's most extensive alcohol restrictions. Before adding more, courts should be required to actively consider Banned Drinkers Register placement wherever alcohol is driving repeated violence, dangerous driving or child neglect, and government needs to prove these targeted tools are actually being used properly first.

3. Managed Income Where Genuinely Needed

Where a child's essential needs are going unmet because household income is being diverted to alcohol or drugs, targeted income management — based on individual assessment, not automatic or blanket application — should be available as one tool among several.

4. Support and Redress for Victims

Victims, particularly of bail-related harm, deserve real support. Where a child on bail commits a serious offence and an identifiable government failure contributed to that harm, victims should have access to real assistance, not merely a reparation order against a child with no capacity to pay.

5. Youth Bail Is Not Working and Needs to Be Tightened

These recommendations are directed at the government systems, services and accountability arrangements affecting progress against Closing the Gap Target 11. They are not intended as a general review of Western Australian criminal law. However, court and bail decisions cannot be considered separately from the adequacy of supervision, child protection, education, assessment, accommodation and family support provided around the child.

Children who repeatedly breach bail and reoffend are too often released again under the same arrangements that already failed. Repeat serious breaches should trigger an immediate, documented review of supervision, not a routine return to the same responsible adult without any change.

6. Housing Responsibility Must Run Both Ways

Government has real, documented maintenance failures, confirmed by two separate Auditor General audits, and these should be fixed on a defined timetable. Tenants also have a responsibility to care for the housing they are given, and that expectation should be reinforced as a shared partnership, not treated as an afterthought to government's own obligations.

7. A Premier-Led Response to Force Coordination

Up to nine WA Government departments are involved in youth-related services in Kununurra, with no single point of authority. A time-limited, Premier-led coordination framework should cut through this fragmentation and direct existing resources towards the highest-risk children and families.

8. Local Decision-Making Must Be Representative, Responsible, and Accountable

Local Aboriginal organisations should get a real seat at the table, including through an expanded East Kimberley Priority-Based Partnership. But authority, contracts and funding shouldn't go to an organisation just because of who it is — it has to earn that through capability, good governance, local support and results that can actually be checked. And decision-making needs more than one voice in the room: no single organisation speaks for everyone in Kununurra.

Other Matters Noted

This submission also addresses school attendance data, a Local Outcomes Framework, neighbourhood-level housing data and employment participation, each covered briefly. On youth programs specifically: government repeatedly points to Target 120 as evidence of success, but its own independent 2024 evaluation has never been made public. Until it is released, Target 120 should be treated as government's default answer to youth offending, not as a proven success.

The Local Context

The 2021 Census recorded 1,314 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Kununurra Indigenous Area, with a median age of 25 and 34.3 per cent of that population under 15 years of age. The Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley covers around 121,000 square kilometres, including Kununurra, Wyndham, Kalumburu and several smaller communities — remoteness that makes specialist services, staff retention and continuity between agencies truly difficult.

The Shire's own Draft Community Safety Plan 2025–2030 already identifies families, young people and alcohol as local safety priorities, confirming these are recognised local concerns, not individual observations. This submission refers directly to National Agreement Targets 9a (housing), 11 (youth detention) and 12 (out-of-home care), and Priority Reform Four (local data access), so the Commission can assess Kununurra and Wyndham against the specific measures this review examines.

Child Safety Must Be the First Priority

Culture, family and connection to Country matter, and are protective for Aboriginal children. But cultural and family-placement considerations should not delay action where a child faces serious neglect, violence, harmful alcohol or drug use, or unsafe housing. Removal should never be automatic and should never substitute for safe housing, family-violence support, treatment or parenting assistance — but where serious risk remains, protecting the child must come before administrative caution or pressure to achieve a preferred placement outcome.

The WA Department of Communities says children mainly enter out-of-home care due to neglect and abuse linked to alcohol and drug misuse, mental illness and family violence — issues inseparable from the housing, alcohol and family-support failures discussed throughout this submission. During 2023–24, 35 protection orders were granted for Aboriginal children in the East Kimberley and 56 in the West Kimberley. Nationally, Closing the Gap Target 12 is moving away from its goal of reducing children in out-of-home care, not towards it.

Children only get one childhood. Until they are safe, it is far harder to improve their education, health, employment and youth justice outcomes.

School Attendance Must Become a Priority in Kununurra

It is impossible to close the gap if children are not regularly attending school. In 2025, East Kimberley College recorded a primary attendance rate of 72.3 per cent and a secondary attendance rate of 62.4 per cent, compared with Western Australian public school averages of 89.1 per cent and 81.7 per cent respectively. Wyndham District High School recorded even lower rates — 60.5 per cent primary and 46.4 per cent secondary. A consolidated dataset covering attendance, persistent absence, retention and transitions into training or employment — not currently available in one place — should be published for Kununurra and Wyndham.

This is not simply about funding. The Commonwealth's own Remote School Attendance Strategy has seen attendance at its funded schools decline since 2016, more than eight percentage points below where it started — evidence that a funded, branded program is not the same as a working one.

Raising attendance figures will not be enough on its own. Local experience suggests that children who have had long periods of little or no schooling cannot simply be placed back into an age-based mainstream classroom and be expected to succeed. Without a bridge back into learning, these children are left trying to participate at a level well below their classmates, often withdrawing out of embarrassment or shame, while teachers are drawn into managing behaviour rather than teaching — to the detriment of the rest of the class as well. Kununurra and Wyndham schools need properly resourced, targeted bridging or re-engagement classes that rebuild foundational literacy, numeracy and classroom skills before a chronically absent child is returned to a mainstream class, rather than returning them directly to one that was never designed for their circumstances.

Youth Offending and Vehicle Theft

Vehicle theft causes substantial harm to families, businesses and agricultural/pastoral operations across Kununurra and the East Kimberley. Official WA Parliament figures for Kimberley Police District stolen-motor-vehicle offence rates (per 100,000 people) show 1,170 in 2016, falling as low as 830 in 2020, peaking at 1,710 in 2021, and sitting at 1,151 in 2025 to 18 November — a persistently high rate with no clear downward trend. Kununurra's 2022–24 recorded rates were 678 per cent higher than the WA average for motor vehicle theft and 1,107 per cent higher for violent crime.

Recent incidents illustrate the pattern: in October 2025, 22 motor-vehicle theft offences were recorded in Kununurra with 17 offenders processed, 11 of whom had prior processing for more than one such incident; in January 2026, four children allegedly stole a vehicle that became submerged in an Ord River irrigation channel; and further juvenile stolen-vehicle and evade-police charges followed in August 2026. Arrests and charges are not findings of guilt, but the pattern is clear and it is not improving — the same relatively small number of young people continuing to place themselves, passengers, police and other road users at serious risk, incident after incident, with no sign the cycle is being broken.

The practical scale of this harm can be roughly estimated. Kununurra's population was 5,494 at the 2021 Census. Local crime data indicates a motor vehicle theft rate of approximately 11,232 offences per 100,000 residents between 2022 and 2024, equivalent to around 617 stolen vehicles per year in a town of Kununurra's size. Using the Australian Institute of Criminology's most recent national cost-of-crime research, which estimated an average cost of approximately $6,000 per motor vehicle theft, this suggests a direct community cost of around $3.7 million per year from vehicle theft alone. This figure is likely conservative, as it excludes policing, court costs, insurance premium increases, business disruption, medical treatment, tourism impacts and the broader social harm experienced by victims and the community. Even on conservative assumptions, vehicle theft alone imposes a multi-million-dollar burden on a town of fewer than 6,000 people.

Government Accountability for Young Repeat Offenders

The following discussion is not intended as a general review of Western Australian criminal law or judicial decision-making. It is included because youth detention is directly measured under Closing the Gap Target 11, and because repeated offending, bail failure and detention cannot be separated from the performance of the government systems surrounding the child. These include child protection, education, youth justice supervision, developmental assessment, family support, safe accommodation and information sharing between agencies. Where the same children repeatedly return to the justice system, the National Agreement should require governments to examine whether these connected systems acted early enough, worked together and delivered the intervention that was promised.

The community should not have to choose between protecting children and protecting victims — both are necessary. Where a child repeatedly offends while already known to police, schools, youth justice and child protection, government needs to say plainly what intervention was tried, whether it was delivered, and what changed after earlier offences. This is about identifying where intervention failed, not shaming a child — and it should distinguish clearly between a family that was willing to engage but was let down by poor coordination, and a family that did not engage despite real support being offered.

Western Australian bail law generally gives children a qualified right to bail, often on a responsible-person undertaking. That signed undertaking should not be treated as evidence that effective supervision is actually occurring. Too often, children who repeatedly breach bail are released again under the same arrangements that already failed, with no documented review of what will be different this time and no properly resourced supervised-bail option available locally. A repeat serious breach should be treated as a Closing the Gap warning sign requiring immediate review, not a routine administrative event.

Where supervised bail is properly resourced, in-state evidence shows it works: WA's own Metropolitan Youth Bail Service recorded a 70 per cent successful bail-completion rate for young people who completed its program, compared with 50 per cent for a responsible-person undertaking alone. Research also shows bail support services are concentrated in metropolitan areas, with limited reach in regional and remote communities — a gap Kununurra experiences directly, where the current choice is an unsupported arrangement that has already failed or transport to detention in Perth. This is not an argument against

detention, which remains the right response for serious or repeated offending. It is evidence that a properly resourced local supervised-bail service would succeed more often than what is currently available here.

The doctrine of criminal capacity, which requires courts to consider a child's maturity and understanding, should not become an automatic loophole for repeat offenders. Where a child has already been through arrest, caution, court appearances or youth justice programs, that history is directly relevant to whether they understood the seriousness of further offending. There is little evidence that a neurodevelopmental diagnosis operates this way in practice: Western Australia's own research at Banksia Hill Detention Centre found 36 per cent of fully assessed young people met the diagnostic criteria for a neurodevelopmental disorder, yet 34 of those 36 had never previously been diagnosed — meaning these conditions are being significantly under-identified in the youth justice system, not relied upon as an easy defence. It should also be said plainly that there is currently no evidence that a confirmed diagnosis changes a child's trajectory for the better: a separate WA study found most justice professionals believe assessment and diagnosis would lead to a more appropriate response, but it measured perception, not outcomes, and found most of the same professionals did not feel equipped to act on a diagnosis in practice. Where capacity truly cannot be established, or where assessment confirms a disability or neurodevelopmental impairment, that finding ought to prompt a more responsive and accountable system response rather than a reduced one — ideally a documented, disability-informed supervision and intervention plan matched to the child's actual needs and capacity, with a named agency responsible for delivering and reviewing it. This is a recommendation for what should happen, not a claim about what currently does: building that capacity, and properly evaluating whether it actually improves outcomes, is itself part of the task.

The justice system must be willing to make difficult decisions when dealing with repeat youth offenders. Too often, community members are left with the impression that courts place greater emphasis on the circumstances of the offender than on the harm caused to victims and the wider community. Compassion is important, but compassion without accountability can become part of the problem. Where a young person repeatedly breaches bail, repeatedly reoffends, or commits serious offences, courts should not continue to apply the same responses and expect a different outcome. In many cases, a period of secure detention may provide the structure, supervision, education and behavioural intervention that the young person is not receiving elsewhere — but this cannot simply be assumed. Nationally, 84 per cent of young people released from sentenced detention return to sentenced youth justice supervision within 12 months, and controlled research has found no reliable deterrent benefit from custody over non-custodial penalties once prior offending history is accounted for. Detention breaks the cycle only where it is deliberately structured to do so: jurisdictions that have redesigned detention around small therapeutic units, integrated schooling, ongoing family involvement and intensive transition planning back into the community have achieved reoffending rates a fraction of those seen in larger, more institutional facilities. Judicial decision-making should place greater weight on community safety, accountability and the long-term interests of the child, including the need to break cycles of offending before they become entrenched — but government must in turn be accountable for ensuring any period of detention is actually structured to achieve that, not simply assumed to.

A Small and Recurring Cohort Requires Intensive Family-Level Intervention

During 21 years in Kununurra, the same local assessment has repeatedly come up: much of the most serious youth offending involves a relatively small, recurring group of children and families.

If offending really is concentrated this way, it is a manageable problem. High-risk children should be referred automatically to the proposed Kununurra High-Risk Children and Families Panel whenever they are charged with a serious offence while on bail, record repeated significant breaches, or cannot be safely supervised — treating these as signs the current arrangement is failing, not routine events. The aim is a real circuit-breaking intervention, not another referral pathway, without ever needing to publicly identify individual children or families.

Voluntary on-country and cultural diversion programs, such as the Wunan Foundation’s East Kimberley “Walk” program, which takes at-risk young people along the Bedford Downs Stock Route, should remain the first response for early intervention and lower-risk young people — though a program as recently established as the Walk has not yet been evaluated for its effect on reoffending, a gap that should be closed rather than assumed away. The same applies to the Aboriginal-led diversion facilities that are often raised in this debate, including the $15 million Myroodah facility and the still-unrealised plan for a Kununurra-based “safe place”

residential diversion option: these are worth pursuing, but their effectiveness has not yet been established and should be properly evaluated rather than assumed.

Existing Programs Are Not Yet Breaking the Cycle

When questioned about youth offending, government commonly points to Target 120, the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy, Operation Regional Shield and youth night spaces. Target 120 is the government's default answer, but its own independent 2024 evaluation has never been released — Parliament was told in December 2025 that this was because it was informing budget considerations, with release to be considered "in due course." A program repeatedly described as successful, whose own most recent evaluation is being withheld from the public and is only funded to 30 June 2026, should not be treated as proven — it should be treated as unproven until that evidence is published.

The $81 million Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy's own 2024 evaluation found communication problems, staff turnover, poor data sharing and limited long-term effect on crime rates or night-time street presence. The $24.2 million Operation Regional Shield police surge, extended in May 2026, responds after offending escalates rather than changing the conditions driving it. The temporary Kununurra Youth Night Space may prevent immediate harm, but cannot by itself fix unsafe housing, chronic school absence or inadequate supervision — it needs to feed into sustained case management, not stand alone as the response.

None of this means nothing is being done — money is being spent, police deployed, and services delivered. But activity is not the same as improvement, and the community can see the difference. The concern is that activity keeps being presented as evidence of success without proof the underlying cycle has actually been broken, while the same children, the same families and the same streets keep coming up again and again. Too much of what passes for a response here is lazy policy design — reactive measures that treat the symptoms without touching the causes of dysfunction, because that is the easier path for leaders in Perth and Canberra.

Victims Must Not Be Forgotten

Many victims of youth crime in Kununurra are Aboriginal people themselves, and policy discussion too often focuses on offenders and systems while overlooking the harm done to families who have vehicles stolen, homes damaged or relatives assaulted. This matters most where the offending happened while a child was on bail — where government's own supervision arrangement had already failed before the harm occurred.

This is not only a policy question observed from a distance. Over more than 21 years living in Kununurra, across two different properties, I have personally had my home or property broken into seven times — six of those by young offenders, and one occasion of property damage caused by an intoxicated adult. In my current employment I am also responsible, directly or indirectly, for reporting on a portfolio of properties, and over the past five years that portfolio has recorded 67 separate incidents of damage, vandalism or trespass, the large majority involving young people, with CCTV successfully capturing footage in most of these events — evidence that has done little to discourage repeat offending. These figures are personal and workplace experience rather than published data, and are offered here not as a substitute for proper statistics but as a reminder that the harm described in this submission is not abstract — it is repeated, cumulative and felt directly by residents, businesses and property owners across this community. Shire-wide police data recorded 1,718 burglaries between 2020 and 2024, which works out to around two to three burglaries per household over a comparable 21-year period. Spread across the two properties I have owned or occupied in that time, my seven incidents work out to roughly three to four per property — only marginally above what is typical for this community. Sadly, for many people, it only takes one such experience before they decide to leave the region.

Where an identifiable government failure to properly supervise a child on bail contributes to a further serious offence, victims should have access to a meaningful assistance pathway. Currently they do not: WA's Criminal Injuries Compensation scheme excludes stolen or damaged property entirely, leaving victims of vehicle theft with only an unenforceable reparation order against a child with no capacity to pay.

Housing: Supply, Maintenance and Household Stability Must All Be Addressed

Housing outcomes depend on both government delivery and how tenants care for the home they are given — neither side of this should be ignored. A Western Australian Auditor General audit (August 2025) found 85 per cent of public housing maintenance is reactive rather than planned, that the Department does not hold adequate property-condition data, and that maintenance costs rose 44 per cent between 2019 and 2025 — mainly from inflation and pricing, not from more work being needed. A second Auditor General audit into disruptive behaviour in public housing found the Department needs to better target complaints, and notably excluded the 2,662 community housing properties across 114 remote Aboriginal communities from its scope entirely — meaning even less oversight data exists for housing like Kununurra's.

A class action filed in the Federal Court in August 2024, and a September 2026 tenant survey by the Kimberley Community Legal Service (Broken by Design, 166 tenants across 22 communities, almost 7 in 10 waiting on urgent repairs), both point to serious, unresolved maintenance failure on government's side. These are significant, credible findings that government must act on with a defined timetable for the Auditor General's recommendations.

After 21 years of driving around Kununurra, I have too often watched brand-new homes handed over to individuals break down and fall apart faster than anything government's own maintenance obligations could reasonably explain. At the same time, tenants also carry real responsibility for the condition of the homes they are given, and that expectation should be reinforced rather than treated as secondary to government's own obligations. No public data currently exists that separates damage caused by neglect of maintenance from damage caused by tenant conduct — that data gap should be closed so responsibility can be properly and fairly attributed on both sides, rather than assumed in either direction. Practical measures — recognising long-term successful tenancies, tenant-led maintenance education, early support when a tenancy shows signs of difficulty — should sit alongside, not instead of, government meeting its own maintenance obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987.

The Northern Territory's “Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes.” partnership shows a shared-governance housing model can work at scale, with around 40 per cent Aboriginal employment on recent builds. But an Australian National Audit Office review found even that program's predecessor excluded property and tenancy management from what was funded — the same blind spot found in WA. Any future East Kimberley housing partnership should build tenancy management in as a funded, measured output from day one. Overcrowding also has a design dimension worth addressing directly: many publicly provided homes follow a standard model that does not fit the kinship structures and avoidance protocols in many Aboriginal families, where certain relatives may need separate living space within an extended household — housing design, not only dwelling numbers, should form part of the response.

Housing success should not be measured only by dwellings delivered. Government should publish a Kununurra and Wyndham Neighbourhood Outcomes Report covering disruptive-behaviour complaints, tenancy turnover, property damage, police attendance and vacancy rates by housing area, so the community can see whether investment is actually making neighbourhoods safer and more stable over time.

Alcohol Harm Continues to Undermine Kununurra and Wyndham

Kununurra and Wyndham already carry some of WA's most extensive alcohol restrictions, yet alcohol harm remains a top local safety priority — supply restrictions alone have not solved the problem. Most people who drink cause no harm to others; the issue is a smaller group whose repeated harmful use drives a disproportionate share of violence, neglect and police, hospital and ambulance contact. Reporting should distinguish total incidents from the number of unique repeat individuals involved, so resources go where they are actually needed.

Alcohol continues to contribute substantially to harm across the Kimberley. Government data provided during the 2026 liquor inquiry found alcohol-related offending in Kununurra occurred at 21.7 times the State rate, while alcohol-related family violence occurred at 29.9 times the State rate. Despite this, there is limited public reporting on how many repeat alcohol-related offenders are considered for, or placed on, the Banned Drinkers Register. As at 4 September 2026, 557 people were registered on the Register across the Kimberley. On its own, that number provides little insight into effectiveness because government does not publish the number of unique repeat alcohol-related offenders, the proportion placed on the Register, or subsequent reoffending outcomes. Government should publish this information and demonstrate that targeted

interventions such as the Banned Drinkers Register are being fully utilised and evaluated before relying on additional broad restrictions that affect responsible adults.

Parents and Guardians Must Be Held Accountable

Parents and guardians need to carry real responsibility for their children's safety, supervision and school attendance. Support without that responsibility will not create lasting change. That doesn't mean automatic financial penalties — but agencies do need to know who is responsible for a child, what support was actually offered, whether the family engaged with it, and what happens next when non-attendance, offending or neglect keeps repeating.

Targeted income management may be appropriate where household income is clearly being diverted from a child's essential needs to alcohol or drugs — but only based on individual assessment, not blanket or automatic application. The original evaluation of the combined Ceduna and East Kimberley Cashless Debit Card trial, administered by Indue, found 41 per cent of participants who drank alcohol reported drinking less frequently after nine months on the card, and 25 per cent reported binge drinking less often. But that same evidence base shows why blanket application undermines results: around a third of participants had no relevant alcohol, drug or gambling behaviour to begin with, roughly three-quarters of participants overall reported no measurable change in their behaviour, and almost half said their lives had become worse since the card was introduced. I personally saw this play out on the ground: after the trial ended, crime, antisocial behaviour and the general presentation of Kununurra noticeably worsened, which suggests the card was doing real good for the people who actually needed it, whatever the mixed aggregate figures show. A card applied broadly to an entire welfare caseload will always show weaker, more mixed results than one targeted at the people it is actually meant to help. This is why any use of income management here should be individually assessed, protect children's interests, include procedural fairness, connect to treatment, and be independently evaluated.

The cost of that same trial reinforces the point. Government documents released under Freedom of Information showed the establishment phase of the Ceduna and East Kimberley trial cost up to $18.9 million to cover around 1,850 participants — more than $10,000 per participant, including payments to Indue and departmental administration. Because the card was applied to whole communities rather than targeted at people with an identified alcohol, drug or gambling problem, a substantial share of that cost was spent on participants for whom the card could have no behavioural effect at all. Ongoing per-participant costs have since fallen as the program has matured, but the underlying lesson holds: a card applied broadly will always cost more per actual behaviour change than one targeted at the people who actually need it.

Employment Must Be About Local Participation and Independence

The Kimberley has billions of dollars in economic output and thousands of jobs, yet regional unemployment sat at 16.77 per cent in December 2025, up from 13.81 per cent a year earlier. However, unemployment statistics alone do not adequately describe the challenge. They measure only people who are actively seeking work and exclude those who have disengaged from the labour market altogether. In the Kimberley, Aboriginal labour force participation was only 35.4 per cent at the 2021 Census, compared with 83.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal people, indicating that many working-age people are not captured by unemployment figures at all. Creating jobs alone is therefore not enough. Annual reporting should track labour force participation, retention after six and 12 months, training completion rates and long-term employment outcomes, not simply initial job placements. Training pathways should also be aligned with industries facing genuine workforce shortages and local demand.

Kununurra Is Well Positioned for Greater Local Ownership

Kununurra is well placed to take a bigger role in shaping its own solutions. The Shire, the Alcohol Accord, local Aboriginal organisations, police, schools, health services, businesses and community members have shown again and again that they can work together on local issues. That local commitment is a real asset, and it's wasted while authority, funding and decision-making stay with government departments outside the region.

The East Kimberley Little Footprints Big Futures Partnership could be a useful model for this. It was named the East Kimberley's place-based partnership under Closing the Gap in 2022 and formally started in 2026,

focused on early years outcomes for Aboriginal children and families. So far, what's public says more about its governance arrangements and intentions than about what it has actually achieved. Showing real improvement in early childhood development, health and family wellbeing should come first.

If it can show that success — openly, with results people can actually check — then its role could reasonably grow into other areas such as youth justice, alcohol harm, housing and community safety. Any expansion should bring in local government, police, schools, health providers, local Aboriginal organisations, service providers and businesses.

Local decision-making only matters if it actually delivers better results — it isn't an achievement in its own right. Responsibility, authority and funding shouldn't move to any organisation just because of its status. Whoever wants public funding or decision-making authority should be judged the same way: can they do the job, is their governance sound, and are they genuinely backed locally.

As a Councillor, part of understanding where the service gaps are in Kununurra has meant becoming aware of just how many Aboriginal community-controlled organisations exist across the East Kimberley — far more than the size of the population would suggest are needed. The sheer number, in a largely unregulated sector, by itself raises real concerns about inefficient operations, duplicated staffing and program money wastage.

Where public funding is intended to strengthen Aboriginal communities, there should be transparency around employment ratios, leadership representation and the proportion of funding that is directly supporting Aboriginal employment and development.

No single organisation speaks for every Aboriginal person and family in the region. Local governance needs to reflect that diversity — families, Elders, victims, young people, service providers, businesses and residents all need a voice.

There are examples elsewhere in Australia of what this can achieve. On Groote Eylandt, local decision-making arrangements were followed by a substantial drop in youth offending. In Bourke, the Maranguka justice reinvestment model produced independently evaluated reductions in domestic violence and custody days, and real economic benefits. Kununurra isn't Bourke or Groote Eylandt, and these results won't simply transplant here — but they show genuine local ownership can work, when it's backed by solid governance and a real focus on outcomes.

Greater local ownership should be encouraged — but earned, not handed over in advance. More authority, influence or resources should follow proof that things are working, not come before it.

Kununurra Requires a Premier-Led Crisis Response Framework

Kununurra has spent too long in crisis-management mode: when offending becomes visible, police are deployed; when alcohol harm rises, restrictions are discussed; when children are on the streets, another activity is funded. These responses deal with the immediate incident, not the coordinated response the children and families repeatedly involved actually need. Up to nine WA Government departments reportedly provide funding or youth services in Kununurra, with services described locally as uncoordinated and duplicated.

The Premier should establish a time-limited, whole-of-government Kununurra Crisis Response Framework through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet — a governance and coordination reform directing existing departmental resources, not a large new funding program. A senior coordinator should be authorised to bring together information and intervention plans across Education, Health, Police, Justice, Communities and Housing, with each agency naming an accountable senior officer and lawful information-sharing under the Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024.

Western Australia has already shown that this kind of coordination can work. After the January 2023 Kimberley floods left the Fitzroy River Bridge irreparably damaged, the State Government appointed a dedicated State Recovery Coordinator and empowered an alliance delivery model that bypassed the normal agency-by-agency process — contracts were awarded in around eight weeks rather than the usual nine months — and the replacement bridge opened more than six months ahead of schedule, reconnecting the community less than twelve months after the floods. That was an infrastructure recovery, not a human-services problem, but the underlying lesson applies directly: when government deliberately removes its own silos and gives one coordinating role real authority across agencies, it can deliver results in a fraction of the

usual time. The same deliberate removal of silos — not simply more funding — is what Kununurra's children and families now need.

Kununurra already has a local group doing part of this. Yajany Yarrawoo Ngoondebtha (YYN) — Miriwoong for 'going together in a good way' — was formed in 2021 in response to rising crime and anti-social behaviour. Its members are leaders from a range of organisations, including major Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, and its job is to influence policy and funding outcomes for Kununurra rather than run programs or apply for funding itself. From what I've seen as a Councillor, it keeps a low profile and delivers more than its size would suggest. A State coordinator would need a local group like this to work with, not around.

This is not a proposal to publicly identify children or families — it is a proposal for government to use information it already holds in a coordinated, accountable way, with clear exit measures (improved attendance, reduced repeat offending, fewer stolen vehicles, lower alcohol-related contact) before responsibility transitions to a permanent, locally led partnership.

Recommendations

The Productivity Commission should recommend that the Commonwealth and Western Australian governments adopt the following thirteen recommendations.

1. Child Safety Must Come First

Place child safety and the best interests of children at the centre of all child-related decisions, while supporting cultural, family and Country connections where they are consistent with children's immediate and long-term safety.

- Require timely protective action where serious risks cannot safely be managed within the home, and direct intensive resources towards the small number of children and families at greatest risk rather than relying mainly on broad programs.
- Establish a Kununurra High-Risk Children and Families Panel with one accountable case lead, one written intervention plan, and a documented interagency review after serious repeat offending that distinguishes family non-engagement from government service-delivery failure.
- Assess whether a child can be safely supervised before routine release to a responsible adult following serious offending, and require appropriate assessment for disability, neurodevelopmental impairment, trauma and mental-health needs where indicators are present — with a confirmed diagnosis triggering a documented, disability-informed supervision and intervention plan with a named responsible agency, not a reduction in consequences or oversight.

2. Targeted Alcohol Intervention, Not More Broad Restrictions

Require alcohol-related reporting to distinguish between total incidents and the number of unique individuals involved, and publish de-identified information on repeat alcohol-related contacts across hospital, police, ambulance, protective custody and treatment systems.

- Require liquor-restriction reviews to examine repeat-contact data rather than relying mainly on aggregate totals, given that Kununurra and Wyndham's existing restrictions are already more stringent than most comparable areas.
- Require courts to actively consider an available order resulting in Banned Drinkers Register placement whenever alcohol materially contributes to serious or repeated offending — particularly family violence, assault, drink-driving, child neglect, property damage and repeated public-order offending — while preserving judicial discretion and procedural fairness, with the court record showing that placement was considered.
- Publish information showing how often court, police, medical, social-worker and voluntary pathways result in registration, and separate Banned Drinkers Register totals for Kununurra and Wyndham where privacy and data quality permit.
- Link register placement with alcohol assessment, treatment, mental-health assistance, family intervention and case management, and measure whether registration reduces later violence, offending, hospital presentations, police contact and child-protection involvement.
- Require governments to demonstrate that targeted mechanisms have been properly used before relying on additional broad restrictions affecting responsible adults.

3. Managed Income Where Genuinely Needed

Use targeted income management only where there is clear evidence that a child's essential needs are not being met because household income is being diverted to harmful alcohol or drug use, based on individual assessment rather than broad or automatic application. Any such measures should:

- be based on individual circumstances rather than race or location;
- follow a proper assessment;
- protect the interests of children;
- include procedural fairness and review rights;
- recognise victims of family violence;
- be connected with treatment and family support;
- have clear objectives and timeframes; and
- be independently evaluated.

School-attendance-linked welfare measures should not be applied automatically solely because a child is absent. The cause of the absence should first be assessed, including the parent's actions, the child's safety, accessibility of education and whether government agencies have carried out their own responsibilities.

4. Support and Redress for Victims

Investigate victim assistance where serious losses may have resulted from an identifiable failure to carry out a State supervision responsibility.

- Separately address the gap left by the Criminal Injuries Compensation scheme's exclusion of stolen and damaged property, which currently leaves victims of vehicle theft and property damage with no meaningful compensation pathway beyond an unenforceable reparation order against a child offender.

5. Youth Bail Is Not Working and Needs to Be Tightened

Treat serious or repeated youth bail breaches as a formal early-warning indicator for Closing the Gap Target 11, including bail compliance, alleged reoffending while on bail and school attendance while under supervision as leading indicators of progress.

- Require an immediate interagency bail-failure review where a child is charged with a serious offence allegedly committed while already on bail, supported by a verified bail-compliance report covering previous breaches, supervision arrangements, school attendance, youth justice involvement, child-protection concerns, services delivered and the suitability of the approved residence.
- Require courts to reassess whether the responsible person remains willing and practically capable of supervising the child following repeated non-compliance, and record what has materially changed before release under substantially similar arrangements to those that already failed.
- Establish a properly resourced supervised-bail option in Kununurra, including safe accommodation where required, daily supervision, school engagement, transport, family intervention and after-hours compliance support.
- Require repeated similar offending by a child aged 10 to under 14 — including repeated vehicle theft, burglary, robbery, violent offending or serious bail breaches — to trigger an escalated intervention review examining criminal-capacity evidence, previous justice-system contact, school attendance, child-protection involvement, developmental needs and family circumstances.
- Where detention is used, require it to be structured around evidence of what actually reduces reoffending — small therapeutic units, integrated schooling, ongoing family engagement and intensive transition planning — and require government to publicly report detention numbers, education participation, family engagement and 12-month return-to-supervision rates for children from Kununurra and Wyndham, so the public can see whether detention is reducing reoffending or merely managing it.

6. Housing Responsibility Must Run Both Ways

Require the Department of Housing and Works to implement, on a defined timetable, the 2025 Auditor General recommendations on property-condition data, planned maintenance, contractor oversight and control of overcharging, with public progress reporting.

- Require Housing and Works to collect and publish de-identified, property-level data distinguishing causes of repair need — age, build quality, weather and environmental factors, and reported damage — rather than reporting only aggregate maintenance totals.
- Ensure the pending remote-housing class action is resolved through a transparent process, and that its findings inform future maintenance contracting and funding decisions regardless of outcome.
- Where a shared-governance housing partnership modelled on the Northern Territory's "Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes." program is established for the East Kimberley, require that property and tenancy management be included as a funded, measured output from the outset, learning directly from the Australian National Audit Office's finding that this was excluded from the earlier NT agreement.
- Require government to demonstrate it is meeting its own statutory repair and maintenance obligations under the Residential Tenancies Act 1987 before introducing tenancy-responsibility expectations for tenants.
- Develop tenancy stewardship programs that support tenants to maintain homes and manage occupancy — paired with, not substituted for, government meeting its own maintenance obligations — and expand culturally-informed housing design for kinship living arrangements alongside additional dwelling supply.

7. A Premier-Led Response to Force Coordination

Establish a time-limited, Premier-led Kununurra Crisis Response Framework through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet — understood primarily as a governance and coordination reform directing existing departmental resources, rather than a major new funding program — with a senior coordinator authorised to bring together relevant agencies, information, funding streams and intervention plans.

- Require Education, Health, Police, Justice, Communities, Housing and other participating agencies to nominate accountable senior officers with decision-making authority.
- Use the Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024 and Priority Reform Four to establish lawful, transparent and secure information-sharing arrangements, with one coordinated intervention plan and one accountable lead agency for each high-risk child and family.
- Require agencies to record whether agreed services were offered, delivered, accepted, completed and effective, and publish de-identified progress reports on school attendance, repeat offending, vehicle theft, night-time street presence, family safety and repeat alcohol-related contacts.

8. Local Decision-Making Must Be Representative, Responsible, and Accountable

Expand the East Kimberley Priority-Based Partnership so it formally includes the Shire, the Kununurra Wyndham Alcohol Accord, schools, police, health providers, local services and businesses, alongside a wider range of community voices. Its job should grow beyond early childhood to take in youth justice, alcohol and housing, with a real say in local priorities and where services are overlapping or falling short.

- Don't hand over decision-making, contracts or funding automatically just because of what kind of organisation it is. Look at whether it can actually do the job and is well governed — and whether its approach genuinely supports child safety, school attendance, lawful behaviour and responsible use of housing, including being willing to call out harmful behaviour honestly and report openly on whether it's making a real difference.

- No single organisation — Aboriginal community-controlled or otherwise — speaks for everyone, so partnerships need room for other voices, and where government does give an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation a funding preference, it should say publicly why and whether it delivered. That same scrutiny on performance, finances and effect on the community should apply to every organisation taking public money, not just some.

- Only hand responsibility from the Premier-led crisis framework over to a permanent, locally led partnership once it has actually met agreed standards for governance, representation and results — not on a promise that it will.

9. School Attendance Keeps Being Ignored

Publish a consolidated, de-identified local dataset covering attendance, persistent absence, retention and transitions into training or employment for Kununurra and Wyndham schools, since this information is not currently available in one place.

Provide properly resourced, targeted bridging or re-engagement classes for children with chronic school absence, so they can rebuild foundational skills before returning to mainstream classes, rather than being placed directly into an age-based classroom they cannot yet participate in — which also disengages other students and shifts teacher time from instruction to behaviour management.

10. Government Must Measure What Actually Changes

Establish a published local framework reporting annually against National Agreement Targets 9a, 11 and 12, measuring outcomes rather than activity or funding, with future National Agreement reforms giving greater weight to responsibility and accountability alongside system reform.

11. Stop Calling It a Success Until the Evidence Is Public

Publish the withheld 2024 Target 120 evaluation and require independent, outcome-based evaluation of all youth programs funded in the region, including the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy and Operation Regional Shield. Target 120 should not continue to be treated as a proven success while its own evaluation remains unpublished.

12. Housing Success Means Safer Neighbourhoods, Not Just More Houses

Require an annual Kununurra and Wyndham Neighbourhood Outcomes Report covering property condition, disruptive-behaviour complaints, tenancy turnover and police attendance by housing area, so housing success is measured by neighbourhood and household outcomes, not only dwellings delivered.

13. Jobs Alone Are Not Working

Publish an annual local employment profile measuring job retention after six and 12 months, not just placements, and connect training pathways to industries with real local workforce demand.

Conclusion

Kununurra and Wyndham don't need another broad strategy restating problems the community already understands. People here have heard enough reviews and announcements. What's needed now is government willing to connect the systems that already exist, own the results, and move with real urgency.

The problem in Kununurra isn't mainly a lack of programs or spending. Considerable public money is being spent, services are being delivered, and activity keeps being presented as proof of success. The real problem is that government and service systems stay fragmented and nobody is made to answer for the results, and that local data — on youth offending, school attendance, alcohol-related harm and housing — is often missing or kept out of public view.

If serious youth offending in Kununurra is concentrated among a relatively small, recurring group of children and families, as local observation and the available evidence suggest, then high-risk children and families need one coordinated plan and one accountable lead agency — not another referral pathway or a further round of crisis-driven police deployments.

The same principle applies to alcohol-related harm. Kununurra and Wyndham already carry some of the State's most extensive broad alcohol restrictions. Before relying on further broad restrictions, government should properly and consistently use the targeted mechanisms already available, particularly the Banned Drinkers Register, and connect them with treatment.

Housing success has to be judged the same way. Counting dwellings delivered isn't enough. Government needs to show whether households are stable and whether neighbourhoods are actually becoming safer and more settled — something no current Western Australian housing audit has managed to show for Kununurra and Wyndham specifically.

Closing the Gap needs both system change and behaviour change. Governments, service providers and organisations need to own coordination and delivery. Communities, families and individuals need to carry their own share of responsibility too — for child safety, school attendance, supervision, housing care and community safety. Neither side gets to sit this out.

After more than two decades living and working in the East Kimberley, I remain deeply concerned that many of the same issues continue to be discussed generation after generation, while children keep growing up in unsafe circumstances and families keep losing patience. What is needed now is not another strategy, another

review or another committee. It is a real, practical willingness to coordinate what already exists, take difficult decisions where they are needed, and hold every part of the system — government and community alike — to account for results, starting now.

Success in Kununurra and Wyndham should be judged in practical terms: are children safer, is school attendance improving, is repeat offending declining, is alcohol-related harm reducing, is housing stable, are more local people in employment, and are families becoming stronger. On too many of these measures, the answer today is no, or not yet. If governments cannot answer these questions using clear local evidence, they cannot confidently say that Closing the Gap is working here — and the people of Kununurra and Wyndham deserve better than to keep waiting to find out.

Supporting Sources and Links

1. [Data] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census, Kununurra Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People QuickStats — population, age profile, households and other Census information for the Kununurra Indigenous Area. https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IARE504006
2. [Government webpage] Western Australia Police Force, Crime Statistics — official crime statistics, time-series information and explanatory notes concerning interpretation of recorded offences. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/western-australia-police-force/crime-statistics
3. [Research] Smith, R.G., Jorna, P., Sweeney, J. and Fuller, G. (2014), Counting the Costs of Crime in Australia: A 2011 Estimate, AIC Reports Research and Public Policy Series 129, Australian Institute of Criminology — the most recent comprehensive Australian cost-of-crime study, estimating an average cost of approximately $6,000 per motor vehicle theft (2011 AU$), used here to illustrate the scale of harm from local offending. https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/rpp129.pdf
4. [Data] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census QuickStats, Kununurra (Urban Centre and Locality) — total population of 5,494, used to estimate the town-wide scale of offending and its cost. https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/UCL515020
5. [Government webpage] Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, Draft Community Safety Plan 2025–2030 — local priorities concerning family support, young people, alcohol and other drugs, antisocial behaviour and community safety; also records shire-wide WA Police burglary counts for 2020–2024 (1,718 incidents total), used here to estimate average burglary exposure per household. https://www.swek.wa.gov.au/council-meetings/ordinary-council-meeting/ordinary-council-meeting-kununurra/169/documents/12311-attachment-1-draft-community-safety-plan-2025-2030.pdf
6. [Government webpage] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2025), Young People Returning to Sentenced Youth Justice Supervision 2023–24, Cat. no. JUV 146 — confirms 84 per cent of young people released from sentenced detention nationally returned to sentenced supervision within 12 months, and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are substantially more likely to return to supervision than non-Indigenous young people. https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/youth-justice/young-people-returning-to-youth-justice-2023-24/contents
7. [Research] Weatherburn, D., Vignaendra, S. and McGrath, A. (2009), The Specific Deterrent Effect of Custodial Penalties on Juvenile Re-offending, Contemporary Issues in Crime and Justice No. 132, NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research — found no statistically significant deterrent benefit from custodial penalties over non-custodial penalties once prior court appearances were controlled for. https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/dcj/bocsar/documents/publications/cjb/cjb101-150/cjb132.pdf
8. [Evaluation] Mendel, R.A. (2010), The Missouri Model: Reinventing the Practice of Rehabilitating Youthful Offenders, Annie E. Casey Foundation — documents Missouri's small-facility, education-integrated, family-engaged youth corrections model, which recorded substantially lower re-incarceration rates (for example, 14.5 per cent re-incarcerated within two years) than comparison states using larger institutional facilities (for example, 36.7 per cent in New Jersey). https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/publications/the-missouri-model-reinventing-the-practice-of-rehabilitating-youthful-offenders-2010/
9. [News] Ngaarda Media, "On Country Diversion Deal Announced," 23 November 2022 — reports the WA Government's $15 million Aboriginal-led on-country diversion facility at Myroodah Station, and a separate $240,000 allocation to Emama Nguda Aboriginal Corporation and Miriwoong Gajerrong Aboriginal Corporation to plan a "safe place" residential diversion option in Kununurra; no

subsequent evaluation of either initiative's effectiveness has been published. https://www.ngaardamedia.com.au/news/on-country-diversion-deal-announced
10. [News] Wunan Foundation (2024), Introducing "The Walk", a New Youth Diversionary Program Led by Wunan — describes an East Kimberley on-country program along the historic Bedford Downs Stock Route, run by two annual cohorts of 20 at-risk youth with 15 trained support crew, and notes the absence of published outcome or reoffending evaluation data. https://wunan.org.au/introducing-the-walk-a-new-youth-diversionary-program-led-by-wunan/
11. [Research] Mutch, R., Watkins, R., Jones, H. and Bower, C. (2013), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder: Knowledge, Attitudes and Practice Within the Western Australian Justice System, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, funded by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education — found most WA judicial officers (79 per cent), lawyers (92 per cent) and corrections staff (84 per cent) believed assessment and diagnosis would improve outcomes, but most of the same professionals (71–93 per cent depending on sector) said they needed more information to identify and respond to FASD, indicating a gap between perceived value and actual system capacity to act on a diagnosis. https://fare.org.au/wp-content/uploads/Final-report-fasd-justice-system.pdf
12. [Research] Bower, C., Watkins, R.E., Mutch, R.C. et al. (2018), Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder and Youth Justice: A Prevalence Study Among Young People Sentenced to Detention in Western Australia, BMJ Open, 8(2):e019605 — found 36 per cent of fully assessed young people in WA youth detention met FASD diagnostic criteria, and that 34 of those 36 cases had never previously been diagnosed, indicating substantial under-identification of FASD in the youth justice system rather than its use as a means of avoiding consequences. https://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/8/2/e019605
13. [Hansard] Western Australian Parliament, Legislative Council Question without Notice 1072 (Hon Julie Freeman), 18 November 2025 — Kimberley Police District stolen-motor-vehicle offence rates from 2016 to 2025 year-to-date, including 1,170 in 2016 and 1,151 in 2025 as at 18 November 2025. https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard/daily/uh/2025-11-18/16
14. [Hansard] Western Australian Parliament, Legislative Council supplementary answer to Question without Notice 948 (Hon Neil Thomson, asked 22 October 2025), 23 October 2025 — confirms 22 stealing-of-motor-vehicle offences recorded in Kununurra and 17 offenders processed as at 21 October 2025, of whom 11 had previously been processed for more than one motor-vehicle theft incident. https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard/daily/uh/2025-10-23/44
15. [Evaluation] Richards, K. and Renshaw, L. (2013), Bail and Remand for Young People in Australia: A National Research Project, Australian Institute of Criminology, cited in NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, An Evaluation of the Youth Bail Assistance Line (2021) — reports the Metropolitan Youth Bail Service (WA) achieved a 70 per cent bail-completion rate for program participants, compared with 50 per cent for a responsible-person undertaking alone, and finds bail support services nationally are concentrated in metropolitan areas with limited regional and remote coverage. https://bocsar.nsw.gov.au/documents/publications/cjb/cjb201-250/cjb237-report-evaluation-of-bail-assistance-line-2021.pdf
16. [News] WA Today, "Four children charged after Kununurra dam crash as youth crime returns to spotlight", January 2026 — four children allegedly involved in a stolen-vehicle incident that entered the M1 irrigation channel of the Ord River system near Kununurra Airport. https://www.watoday.com.au/national/western-australia/four-children-charged-after-kununurra-dam-crash-as-youth-crime-returns-to-spotlight-20260112-p5ntgg.html
17. [News] National Indigenous Times, Kununurra car chase video sparks renewed call for comprehensive approach to youth offending, 6 August 2026 — includes comments from Adrian McCann, CEO of Kununurra Waringarri Aboriginal Corporation, regarding coordination across government-funded youth services. https://nit.com.au/06-08-2026/25788/viral-kununurra-car-chase-video
18. [Government webpage] Western Australian Government, Target 120 — program age group, support period, tertiary-prevention focus and areas of intervention. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-communities/target-120-program
19. [Hansard] Western Australian Parliament, Legislative Council Question without Notice 1281 (Hon Julie Freeman), 10 December 2025 — confirms the independent Target 120 evaluation was completed in 2024 and had not been released as it was informing budget considerations, that release would be considered "in due course," and that Target 120 was funded to 30 June 2026 with

further funding subject to the normal budget process. https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/hansard/daily/uh/2025-12-10/35
20. [Government webpage] Western Australian Government, Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy — strategy description, total funding and East Kimberley initiatives. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-justice/kimberley-juvenile-justice-strategy
21. [Evaluation] Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy Evaluation, Findings and Recommendations — implementation, coordination, data-sharing, transparency and long-term outcome concerns. https://www.wa.gov.au/media/154382/download
22. [Government webpage] Western Australian Government, Operation Regional Shield — additional police deployment model and the May 2026 funding extension. https://www.miragenews.com/regional-shield-to-guard-wa-communities-1671445/
23. [Government webpage] Liquor restrictions applying in Kununurra and Wyndham — official information on local trading hours, purchase limits and Kimberley-wide controls. https://www.cits.wa.gov.au/department/publications/publication/takeaway-alcohol-management-system
24. [Government correspondence] Department of Local Government, Industry Regulation and Safety (WA), Racing, Gaming and Liquor, letter to the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, Inquiry into the Availability of Packaged Liquor in Kununurra and Wyndham (5 June 2026), Attachment 1 — official data compiled by the Chief Health Officer, Mental Health Commission and Commissioner of Police under section 64(1C) of the Liquor Control Act 1988, provided to the Shire in response to a request for the statistical basis of the inquiry. Not publicly available online; sighted directly by the author in a Council capacity.
25. [Government webpage] Western Australian Government, Banned Drinkers Register — legal framework, available pathways and regional registration numbers current at 11 September 2026. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/racing-gaming-and-liquor/banned-drinkers-register-bdr
26. [Legislation] Liquor Control Amendment (Banned Drinkers Register) Act 2023 — Western Australian legislation covering banned-drinker orders and the register. https://www.legislation.wa.gov.au/legislation/prod/filestore.nsf/FileURL/mrdoc_46648.pdf/$FILE/Liquor%20Control%20Amendment%20(Banned%20Drinkers%20Register)%20Act%202023%20-%20%5B00-00-00%5D.pdf?OpenElement
27. [Legislation] Criminal Injuries Compensation Act 2003 (WA) and Government of Western Australia, Compensation for Victims of Crime — confirms that the Criminal Injuries Compensation scheme covers personal injury only, excludes stolen or damaged property, and that property loss can only be pursued through a court-ordered reparation order against the offender. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-justice/commissioner-victims-of-crime/compensation-victims-of-crime
28. [Legislation] Western Australian Government, Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing — the Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024, its commencement and the role of the Chief Data Officer. https://www.wa.gov.au/government/privacy-and-responsible-information-sharing
29. [Government webpage] Government of Western Australia, Joint Media Release — New Fitzroy River Bridge opens six months ahead of schedule, 10 December 2023 — confirms the bridge was irreparably damaged in the January 2023 Kimberley floods, that contracts were awarded in around eight weeks instead of the usual nine months, and that the replacement bridge opened more than six months ahead of schedule, reconnecting the community less than twelve months after the floods. https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/Cook-Labor-Government/Joint-Media-Release---New-Fitzroy-River-Bridge-opens-six-months-ahead-of-schedule-20231210
30. [Government webpage] Government of Western Australia, State Recovery Coordinator appointed following devastating flooding in the Kimberley, 18 January 2023 — confirms the appointment of a dedicated State Recovery Coordinator to support Kimberley communities following the 2023 floods. https://www.wa.gov.au/government/media-statements/McGowan%20Labor%20Government/State-Recovery-Coordinator-appointed-following-devastating-flooding-in-the-Kimberley-20230118
31. [Government webpage] National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Outcome Targets and Priority Reform Four — national target definitions (including Targets 9a, 11 and 12) and provisions on regional data access, local decision-making and access to government information subject to privacy and security requirements. https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets

32. [Government webpage] Kimberley Development Commission, April 2026 Economic Snapshot — regional economic, unemployment, jobs, business and REMPLAN information for the Kimberley. https://www.kdc.wa.gov.au/publications/
33. [Government webpage] Kimberley Development Commission, Kimberley Residential Housing and Land Snapshot (2023) — confirms that at the 2021 Census, the labour force participation rate for Aboriginal persons in the Kimberley was 35.4 per cent, compared with 83.9 per cent for non-Aboriginal people and 55 per cent for both populations combined. https://www.kdc.wa.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Kimberley-Land-and-Housing-Snapshot-Final-Version-Reduce-Size.pdf
34. [Audit] Office of the Auditor General (WA), Management of Housing Maintenance Information, Report 1: 2025–26, tabled 6 August 2025 — performance audit of Department of Housing and Works maintenance data, covering reactive maintenance rates, cost drivers, contractor overcharging and vacancy management across the department's 54,000 properties, including East Kimberley Aboriginal housing; also cites Nous Group, Efficient system costs of Remote Indigenous housing (report for the National Indigenous Australians Agency, 4 July 2017), on the comparative cost of reactive versus planned maintenance. https://audit.wa.gov.au/reports-and-publications/reports/management-of-housing-maintenance-information/
35. [News] Slater and Gordon / ABC News, remote WA public housing class action, filed in the Federal Court, August 2024 — legal claim on behalf of thousands of tenants in remote WA communities, including the East Kimberley, West Kimberley, Pilbara, Wheatbelt, Mid West, Gascoyne and Goldfields-Esperance regions, alleging failure to maintain and repair public housing for tenancies between 1 July 2010 and 19 August 2024. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2024-08-22/wa-indigenous-public-housing-class-action-launched/104189272
36. [News] Kimberley Community Legal Service, Broken by Design (September 2026), and ABC News, "Seven in 10 Kimberley public housing tenants waiting on urgent repairs, report finds," 14 September 2026 — survey of 166 public housing tenants across 22 Kimberley communities finding widespread structural, electrical and plumbing failures, with recommendations for locally delivered maintenance and enforceable minimum housing standards. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2026-09-14/kimberley-housing-maintenance-report-chronic-delays/107143672
37. [Government webpage] Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments, Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory and NT Land Councils, "Our Community. Our Future. Our Homes." Remote Housing Investment Package — $4 billion, ten-year shared-governance remote housing partnership commencing July 2024, including delivery figures, Aboriginal employment outcomes and the Healthy Homes program. https://ourfuture.nt.gov.au/
38. [Audit] Australian National Audit Office, Remote Housing in the Northern Territory — performance audit finding that property and tenancy management was not included as a funded output or performance target under the earlier National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing NT, and reporting 2016 and 2019 NT-wide overcrowding estimates. https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/remote-housing-the-northern-territory
39. [News] ABC News / Guardian Australia (via PressReader), "Youth crime drops dramatically in Groote Eylandt," December 2022 — local decision-making agreements signed 2018 across housing, education, health, local government and law and justice, and subsequent reductions in youth offending from 346 recorded offences in 2018–19 to 17 in 2021–22, alongside the Gebie Gang mentoring program and the Peacemakers mediation program. https://smarterjustice.org.au/community-led-youth-justice/
40. [Evaluation] KPMG, Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project: Impact Assessment, November 2018, commissioned by Just Reinvest NSW — independent evaluation of the Bourke, NSW community-led justice reinvestment model, including reductions in domestic violence, bail breaches and custody days, and increases in Year 12 retention. https://www.indigenousjustice.gov.au/resources/maranguka-justice-reinvestment-project-impact-assessment/
41. [Government webpage] Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership, Meeting Outcomes, 19-20 March 2025 — confirms the East Kimberley Priority-Based Partnership as an existing local decision-making arrangement between East Kimberley Aboriginal organisations and governments, established under Closing the Gap Priority Reform Four, with an initial focus on early childhood. https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/east-kimberley-little-footprints-big-futures-partnership

42. [Audit] Office of the Auditor General (WA), Managing Disruptive Behaviour in Public Housing — performance audit of the Department of Communities' management of disruptive and illegal tenant behaviour in public housing, confirming its scope excluded the 2,662 community housing properties in 114 remote Aboriginal communities and the 5,300 Government Regional Officers' Housing properties. https://audit.wa.gov.au/reports-and-publications/reports/managing-disruptive-behaviour-in-public-housing/introduction-and-background/
43. [Government webpage] Guenther, J. et al., The Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) — analysis of My School attendance data showing average attendance at RSAS schools has declined since 2016 and remains more than eight percentage points below the level recorded when the strategy began. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1459004.pdf
44. [Government webpage] East Kimberley College Attendance Reports, Western Australian Department of Education Schools Online, 2023-2025 attendance data, including primary and secondary attendance rates compared with State averages. https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/attendance_ov_yrlev.do?schoolID=4123&pageID=SP10
45. [Government webpage] Wyndham District High School Attendance Reports, Western Australian Department of Education Schools Online, 2023-2025 attendance data, including primary and secondary attendance rates compared with State averages. https://www.det.wa.edu.au/schoolsonline/overview.do?schoolID=4108
46. [Government webpage] Department of Communities, Child Protection Activity Performance Information 2023-24 – district-level data on children and young people in care, protection orders, child-safety investigations and family-support interventions, including East Kimberley and West Kimberley statistics. https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2024-10/child_protection_activity_performance_information_2023_24.pdf
47. [Government webpage] Productivity Commission Closing the Gap Dashboard, Outcome Area 12: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system – Target 12 performance reporting, rates of out-of-home care and national progress assessments. https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/outcome-area/child-protection/
48. [Audit] Department of Social Services, Income Management and Cashless Debit Card Evaluation Reports, Australian Government Department of Social Services (2026), and Australian National Audit Office, The Implementation and Performance of the Cashless Debit Card Trial (2018) — evaluation findings from the East Kimberley Cashless Debit Card trial, including reported reductions in alcohol consumption and binge drinking among a proportion of participants, alongside the later consolidated evaluation's mixed findings on participant wellbeing and the ANAO's critique of the original evaluation methodology. https://www.dss.gov.au/income-management/reporting-and-data
49. [Research] Australian Council of Social Service, Cashless Debit Card Briefing Note (2018), and Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, review of the Cashless Debit Card — reporting that around a third of trial participants had no relevant alcohol, drug or gambling behaviour before the trial, that the majority reported no behavioural change, and that the card's blanket, compulsory application to the general welfare population in trial sites (rather than targeting based on individual need) was the most consistently raised criticism across independent reviews. https://www.acoss.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/010218-Cashless-Debit-Card-Briefing-Note_ACOSS.pdf
50. [News] ABC News, "Centrelink cashless welfare card trial costing taxpayers $10,000 per participant", 2 May 2017 — reports, based on documents released under Freedom of Information, that the establishment phase of the Ceduna and East Kimberley Cashless Debit Card trial cost up to $18.9 million to cover around 1,850 participants. https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-05-02/cashless-welfare-trial-costing-taxpayers-$10k-per-participant/8488268