Minister for Aboriginal Affairs;
Racing and Gaming; South West

Our ref: 77-24383

Ms Danielle Wood
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Dear Ms Wood

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION THREE YEARLY REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP – CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS

I am writing regarding the Productivity Commission's (Commission) Call for Submissions to the Three-Yearly Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement). I welcome the opportunity to provide a submission on behalf of the Western Australian Government.

The Western Australian (WA) Government considers that sustained progress against the Socioeconomic Targets (Targets) of the National Agreement depends upon the successful implementation of the four Priority Reforms. Consistent with feedback from Aboriginal partners and the findings of previous reviews of the National Agreement, Western Australia is increasingly focused on embedding the Priority Reforms within government systems, decision-making processes and service delivery arrangements.

The WA Government recognises that genuine and lasting change requires governments to work differently with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations. This includes strengthening formal partnerships and shared decision-making, increasing Aboriginal community control, transforming government organisations, and improving shared access to data and information.

The Commission's Review comes at an important time for WA. In June 2026, the WA Government released the WA Closing the Gap 2026-28 Implementation Plan (Implementation Plan), which establishes a coordinated reform agenda for the next three years and includes $10.1 million in dedicated funding to accelerate delivery of the Priority Reforms.

The Implementation Plan responds to longstanding feedback from Aboriginal partners, including the Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia (AACWA), the Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia (AHCWA) and the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia (CASWA), that stronger implementation of the Priority Reforms is necessary to achieve meaningful progress against the Targets.

The WA Government also recognises that effective implementation of the National Agreement relies on governments, Aboriginal organisations and communities

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having access to timely, meaningful and locally relevant information. While national reporting provides an important evidence base, access to localised and disaggregated Closing the Gap data remains a significant challenge for jurisdictions, Aboriginal organisations and communities seeking to understand outcomes, identify local priorities and monitor progress over time. Improving shared access to data and information remains critical to supporting accountability, place-based responses and informed decision-making under the National Agreement.

This submission outlines the actions being undertaken by the WA Government, in partnership with Aboriginal organisations, communities and leaders, to embed the Priority Reforms across government systems and support improved outcomes for Aboriginal people throughout WA.

Western Australia's Reform Agenda

In June 2026, the WA Government released the Implementation Plan, supported by $10.1 million in dedicated funding for five targeted reform initiatives:

- $5.8 million to deliver an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCO) Transition Pipeline to strengthen ACCO commissioning;
- $2 million to deliver Closing the Gap Regional Implementation Plans in each of WA's regions;
- $1 million to establish an Alliance between AACWA, AHCWA and CASWA to strengthen oversight and accountability of CTG outcomes;
- $800,000 to deliver a Community-Led Data Connection Project to strengthen ACCO connection with data; and
- $500,000 to commence an Anti-Racism Project.

The Implementation Plan and its initiatives were designed over 12 months between the WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet (the Department) and AACWA, AHCWA and CASWA as well as WA Government agencies and their Aboriginal Advisory Groups. AHCWA and CASWA will be critical delivery partners as the initiatives are implemented over the next three years.

The Implementation Plan and its initiatives will drive delivery of the Priority Reforms, formalise partnerships and deliver place-based outcomes tailored to WA's unique regions.

Priority Reform 1 – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making

The WA Government is working to strengthen formal partnership arrangements and shared decision-making structures that enable Aboriginal people and organisations to influence decisions that affect their lives and communities.

<u>East Kimberley Place-Based Partnership</u>

On 29 April 2026, Aboriginal and government partners met in Kununurra to sign the Partnership Agreement for the East Kimberley 'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Partnership, signalling a formal commitment to genuine partnership and shared decision-making.

The East Kimberley 'Little Footprints, Big Futures' Partnership is established under Priority Reform One of the National Agreement and brings all levels of government together with East Kimberley Aboriginal organisations and community representatives. The Partnership will drive implementation of the four Priority Reform areas at the local level with a community-led focus on early years outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families.

WA Aboriginal Health Collaboration (WA Collaboration)

The WA Department of Health and AHCWA have established the WA Collaboration, which is the principal partnership and cultural governance mechanism for collaborative and strategic implementation of obligations under the National Health Reform Agreement to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Through joint governance arrangements, the WA Collaboration will guide the development of investment priorities, funding proposals and implementation approaches, ensuring Aboriginal community-controlled perspectives are central to decision-making. This initiative aligns with Closing the Gap Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making by strengthening shared governance and partnership between government and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector.

National Skills Agreement

The WA Department of Training and Workforce Development (DTWD) has established inaugural Closing the Gap partnership agreements with CASWA and AHCWA and committed funding to Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations to build the capability, sustainability and growth of the Aboriginal VET workforce in WA and increase the cultural capability of the broader TAFE workforce.

DTWD is co-designing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnership Framework with CASWA, AHCWA, key Aboriginal stakeholders in the training sector, and TAFE colleges. The partnership will provide the foundations for ongoing collaboration to deliver positive training and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Kimberley Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Steering Committee (KAYWSC)

The WA Mental Health Commission (MHC) co-chairs the KAYWSC with the Aboriginal Regional Governance Group (ARGG) and provides executive support to the KAYWSC. The KAYWSC is a formal Partnership Agreement between relevant WA Government Directors General and the ARGG that supports shared decision-making and Aboriginal community-led approaches to improving Aboriginal youth wellbeing outcomes in the Kimberley region.

Additionally, the MHC continues to embed shared decision making and Aboriginal cultural governance through the Commission's Elders in Residence Program and regular collaboration with Aboriginal peak bodies.

AACWA and the Culture at the Heart (CATH) Forum

The AACWA supports WA's progress towards Closing the Gap by providing a formal mechanism for Aboriginal people to advise the WA Government on priorities affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Through its five annual meetings and

membership representing metropolitan and regional Western Australia, AACWA strengthens Aboriginal participation in decision-making and supports more responsive and culturally informed government policies and programs.

The CATH Forum, a key initiative of AACWA, provides a dedicated platform for Aboriginal Advisory Groups across Western Australia to identify priorities, influence decision-making and strengthen government accountability. The CATH Forum supports Aboriginal-led policy development and service design while enhancing whole-of-government coordination and responsiveness to community priorities.

The WA Government has committed $400,000 over four years (2024-2028) to support the delivery of two CATH Forums annually. This investment strengthens opportunities for Aboriginal communities and representative bodies to contribute to government decision-making, monitor progress on key priorities, and drive collective action to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people across Western Australia.

Priority Reform 2 – Building the Community-Controlled Sector

Increasing Aboriginal community control remains a key focus of WA's Closing the Gap reform agenda.

The WA Government is working with Aboriginal organisations to strengthen community-controlled service delivery, improve commissioning practices and support the long-term sustainability of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Service Model Pilot

The MHC funds the AHCWA to deliver the SEWB Service Model Pilot, a sector-led, culturally grounded model implemented by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in pilot sites across five regions in WA. An independent evaluation found the SEWB Service Model Pilot is delivering significant benefits for Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, including strengthened cultural connection, improved service engagement, reduced isolation and support for healing and recovery through culturally grounded and place-based approaches to care.

In recognition of these outcomes, the 2026-27 State Budget secured $48.6 million to continue SEWB services, including the SEWB Service Model Pilot.

ACCO Commissioning Framework

The WA Department of Communities has introduced its ACCO Commissioning Framework, increasing direct commissioning to ACCOs across homelessness, family safety and support services and child protection services, increasing ACCO design and delivery of specialist family and domestic violence services and initiatives, and securing funding to expand the Aboriginal Representative Organisations program.

Yule and Yamatji On-Country Meetings

The WA Government's participation in the Yamatji and Yule River forums is supporting WA's progress towards Closing the Gap by engaging with Aboriginal-led forums that strengthen partnerships between government and Aboriginal communities across the Mid-West and Pilbara. The forums support shared decision-making, enable government

agencies to respond directly to community priorities, and provide a mechanism for communities to monitor and receive updates on progress against the On Country Call to Action.

A clear example of this is the recent announcement at the Yamatji On-Country Forum of the intention to pilot the ACCO Transition Pipeline in the Mid-West Gascoyne region. This demonstrates action against community priorities relating to local economic participation, community-led service delivery, and long-term community aspirations. The WA Government has also committed $300,000 over two years to Yamatji Marlpa Aboriginal Corporation and the Midwest Aboriginal Organisations Alliance to support an Executive Officer and the implementation of Call-to-Action priorities. In addition, $2 million has been allocated to support the development of Closing the Gap Regional Implementation Plans across regional WA. Together, these initiatives demonstrate tangible progress in translating community priorities into targeted investment, strengthened Aboriginal-led service delivery, and improved outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities.

Priority Reform 3 – Transforming Government Organisations

The WA Government recognises that sustainable improvements in outcomes require changes to the ways government institutions operate, make decisions and engage with Aboriginal people.

Significant effort is being directed towards strengthening cultural responsiveness, addressing institutional racism and embedding Aboriginal perspectives within government systems.

WA Heath Aboriginal Anti-Racism Toolkit (Toolkit)

WA Department of Health, in collaboration with Edith Cowan University, has developed the Toolkit which will be launched in November 2026. The Toolkit in the form of a mandatory eLearning package will provide learners from across the health system with an understanding of the different types of racism that can manifest, anti-racism strategies and how to provide active allyship and reduce colonial load for Aboriginal staff. Complemented by the endorsed WA Health Anti-Racism Position Statement and the planned development of a Mandatory Anti-Racism Policy, these initiatives support Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3 by embedding anti-racism and driving transformation of government systems.

Department of Water and Environmental Regulation (DWER): Caring for Country: 10-Year Transformation Strategy (Strategy)

DWER is developing the Strategy, which sets a long-term approach to systemic reform across DWER's operations with particular focus on implementation of Priority Reform 3. The Strategy will guide long-term, transformative change by strengthening cultural capability, embedding Aboriginal worldviews and knowledge systems into core business, and aligning DWER's operations with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement. It will be underpinned by internal and external insights to provide an evidence base as to how individual and collective actions will give effect to transformative change. This includes an independent, Aboriginal-led review of DWER's

current practices in engaging with Aboriginal people, as well as institutional racism and unconscious bias in the department.

A key priority under the Strategy is the development of an Aboriginal-designed and delivered cultural safety and responsiveness professional learning program, including ongoing monitoring and evaluation of behaviours and staff practices.

Closing the Gap Budget Reform and Aboriginal Expenditure Review (AER)

The Department of Treasury and Finance (DTF) is working with Aboriginal partners and WA Government agencies to embed the Priority Reforms within State Budget processes. This includes strengthening the consideration of Aboriginal priorities in budget development and supporting Closing the Gap-aligned decision-making on investments that impact upon Aboriginal people and communities.

DTF has committed to delivering an annual AER to improve transparency of WA Government investment in Aboriginal outcomes, support shared access to data and information, and enable evidence-informed decision-making. DTF is currently in the process of finalising WA's third AER for publication in late 2026.

Priority Reform 4 – Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

The WA Government is working to improve Aboriginal access to and governance of data and information, recognising that shared access is essential to accountability, informed decision-making and community-led development.

WA Health Aboriginal Data Governance Policy

The WA Health Aboriginal Data Governance Policy was launched in July 2025 and aims to ensure the WA Health system recognises and upholds the rights of Aboriginal people in WA to govern the collection, ownership and use of data about their people and communities. The Policy was developed with extensive stakeholder consultation, including with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector. The WA Health Aboriginal Data Governance Committee provides governance for Aboriginal data contained within the WA Health system.

People WA

As WA's whole-of-government linked data asset, PeopleWA brings together de-identified data across government about social, health, education and economic outcomes. Through initiatives such as the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance's Our Story, Our Way project and work with Binarri-Binyja Yarrawoo in the East Kimberley, PeopleWA is helping Aboriginal organisations access locally relevant data and inform community-led priorities. These partnerships demonstrate how PeopleWA can support Aboriginal communities to use data and drive solutions that contribute to Closing the Gap.

Privacy and Responsible Information Sharing Act 2024 (PRIS Act)

The PRIS Act protects the privacy of personal information held by the WA Government and facilitates the responsible sharing of government information for permitted purposes. The PRIS Act establishes a pathway through which ACCOs may request

access to government information to evaluate outcomes, prioritise investment and identify service gaps. The PRIS Act also provides opportunities for Aboriginal people to be engaged in data sharing projects that primarily or especially affect Aboriginal people or communities.

Moving Forward

Whilst WA has made good progress on ten of the 19 Targets, the WA Government acknowledges that more progress is needed across all Targets and the Priority Reforms. Progress on the Targets depends on the strengthened partnerships, structural reforms and system transformations underway across government, particularly the embedding of the Priority Reforms, which provide the foundation for long-term change.

Through the Implementation Plan, the WA Government has outlined its vision for Closing the Gap to shift from a set of commitments to a whole-of-government way of working. To achieve this, delivery of Closing the Gap outcomes in WA over the next three years will focus on:

- Embedding Closing the Gap as a key pillar of the WA Government's delivery agenda;
- Strengthening genuine partnership-making in the WA Government's ways of working;
- Driving meaningful change and delivery against the Priority Reforms; and
- Understanding WA's unique regional story through place-based responses.

I look forward to reviewing the draft report of the Review and understanding how its findings can inform the WA story in Closing the Gap implementation and drive delivery of improved outcomes for all Aboriginal people in WA. I would encourage the Commission to continue its engagement with the Department as the Review continues.

Sincerely

HON DON PUNCH MLA
MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS;
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28 October 2026

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