

Aboriginal Wellbeing

Spending for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is spread across most budget priorities and portfolios. There are sizeable investments in upgrading and increasing regional and remote housing stock for Aboriginal communities, which is highly welcome. Funding for the Early Years Partnership – while not entirely Aboriginal-specific – is pivotal for Aboriginal children aged 0-4 in Derby and Bidyadanga, will be significant.

This budget also includes a significant focus on infrastructure projects and the benefits they will provide to the economic development of Aboriginal communities such as in the Plan Our Parks initiative. While positive, it is important to note some of these investments are government obligations (such as the Fitzroy River Bridge Repairs) and should be considered in context of wider investment directly into wellbeing and economic self-determination initiatives. The Aboriginal Expenditure Review 2023-24 – a commitment under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – delineates how investment can be broken down to identify direct Aboriginal-specific expenditure versus program expenditure that includes Aboriginal organisations in delivery.

However, it is disappointing to see a lack of investment in long-term initiatives to empower communities to develop and lead their own place-based services and programs to deliver improved outcomes for their people. This was a missed opportunity to get behind programs such as Justice Reinvestment (see Justice fact sheet). The lack of investment to transform youth detention is also disappointing, with Aboriginal young people vastly over-incarcerated and therefore disproportionately impacted by the ongoing crisis inside youth detention.

Initiative	Social Housing Energy Performance Upgrade Initiative Co-Investment (BP2, V2, P504)
Investment	\$25 million over four years.
Description	To match Commonwealth funding, the WA Government has allocated \$25 million to improve energy performance for housing in Aboriginal Communities in the Kimberley and regional towns. To be managed by the Department of Communities. Only \$334,000 is being committed for 2024-25.
Implications	Improvements to regional social housing are critical, with many households reliant on ageing and inefficient infrastructure. The ongoing impacts of climate change mean many houses may be facing higher indoor temperatures alongside higher household bills.

Initiative	Health and Mental Health (1. BP2, V1, P332, 2. Aboriginal Wellbeing Budget Snapshot)
Investment	1. \$12 million over two years for the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program

	2. \$8 million for additional health and mental health services
Description	<p>1. Program providing mental health support in five communities, including one youth specific program in the Kimberley, delivered by ACCOs.</p> <p>2. This funding appears to be part of a larger package for health services. Funding flagged for Aboriginal communities is spread across several initiatives, including renal dialysis facilities in Karratha and Newman, eye services and suicide prevention.</p>
Implications	<p>1. This is welcome funding for health and mental health support in the regions, especially the support that focuses on youth mental health in the Kimberley. The Kimberley has seen unacceptably high rates of youth and child suicides in recent years, resulting in a Parliamentary Inquiry into the matter. Additional youth support delivered by ACCOs is needed.</p> <p>2. This funding was a consolidated figure from the Aboriginal Wellbeing Budget Snapshot across a number of portfolios and smaller initiatives. It is unclear how funding for eye services and suicide prevention has been allocated, and whether this investment is directly in services led by or specifically for Aboriginal people and communities, or if this is in services that Aboriginal people and communities will access.</p>

Initiative	Community Wellbeing (1. BP2, V2, P504, 2. BP2, V2, P406)
Investment	<p>1. \$6 million over two years for Aboriginal Representative Organisation and Aboriginal Family Led Decision Making</p> <p>2. \$6 million over four years for Community Liaison Officers</p>
Description	<p>1. These are organisations and programs that will support better outcomes for Aboriginal children in care, and support efforts to reduce the overrepresentation of Aboriginal children and young people in care which is a key target of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p> <p>2. This funding will increase the number of Community Liaison Officers by 10 FTEs across key regional and metropolitan locations. The Community Liaison Officers aim to encourage positive engagement and collaboration between police officers and local communities.</p>
Implications	<p>Funding for Aboriginal-led and culturally secure initiatives are highly welcomed, particularly funding for Aboriginal Family-Led Decision-Making. Improving the capability, capacity, and diversity of ACCO-delivered services is a priority under multiple government strategies to improve service access for Aboriginal people and can have economic benefits by boosting employment. Community wellbeing initiatives like Community Liaison Officers work best when they employ genuinely local individuals and are supported by frameworks that ensure they deliver on the outcomes they are projecting. Detail is needed to understand how this project will ensure cultural safety.</p>

2024 - 2025 Budget

Initiative	Regional and Remote Communities (1. BP2, V2, P588, 2. BP2, V2, P504, 3. BP2, V2, P421)
Investment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. \$64.5 million over two years Regional Airfare Zone Cap 2. \$3.1 million over three years for Aboriginal Community Connectors Program 3. \$650,000 in 2023-24 for the Western Desert Justice Program
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cheaper airfares for regional residents for personal travel 2. The Aboriginal Community Connectors Program supports street present Aboriginal people in regional areas of WA to access services. This is an ongoing initiative and this funding will go towards implementing a contemporary funding model across the 13 service locations of the program. 3. To continue operation of the program which aims to reduce the contact that adult and young Martu people have with the justice system. This involves prevention, intervention, diversion and transition away from the justice system
Implications	Investment in making regional and remote communities more accessible, liveable, and workable for residents is welcome. Initiatives such as the Regional Airfare Zone Cap are practical measures to ensure regional communities can travel to access vital services, however additional policy initiatives and investment to address regional service gaps are needed.

Initiative	Jobs and Employment (1. BP2, V1, P162, 2. BP2, V2, P576, 3. BP2, V1, P376)
Investment	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. \$800,000 over two years for the Aboriginal Business Capability Building Program 2. \$15 million over two years for the Driver Access and Equity 3. \$4.2 million over four years for specialist services in the North.
Description	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To extend the Aboriginal Business Capability Program for a further two years, enabling the Department of Finance to complete comprehensive evaluation of the program by collecting performance data from suppliers, and engaging with other agencies/programs that provide similar support to Aboriginal businesses. This is intended to contribute to improving economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People and Communities, a key target of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. 2. A program to assist disadvantaged learner drivers obtain their driver's licence in the regions. 3. To continue providing specialist services at Job and Skills Centres for Aboriginal People in several regional towns in the Pilbara, Kimberley, Goldfields, Mid-West, Peel, Wheatbelt, Great Southern, and South West.
Implications	Investments aim to boost Aboriginal economic participation, entrepreneurship, transportation, and employment are welcome. More is still required for the government to meet its commitments under the 'Expanding Economic Opportunities' pillar of the WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy.

Initiative	Broome Aboriginal-Led Specialist Family Violence Court (BP2, V2, P434)
Investment	\$5.4 million in 2023-24
Description	This funding will provide an Aboriginal-led Specialist Family Violence Court in Broome that will prioritise ease of access for Aboriginal people who have experienced FDV and are seeking help and support
Implications	This project was committed to in the 2021-22 budget and is long overdue, with the court being delayed as project design work has been ongoing. There is urgent need for this service, and it is hoped it will soon become operational.

Initiative	Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation (BP2, V2, P520)
Investment	\$75.6 million over four years
Description	The East Kimberley region will receive \$21.2 million over four years for Aboriginal short-stay accommodation. Geraldton will benefit from a \$28.5 million investment over two years for similar projects. Meanwhile, Perth is set to get \$25.9 million over four years to support the same initiative.
Implications	Welcome additions to the other short stay facilities around WA. We look forward to culturally safe and accessible facilities that allow First Nation peoples access services and cultural ceremonies more conveniently.

Initiative	Aboriginal Cultural Centre (BP2, V2, P549)
Investment	\$45 million over the next three years
Description	For the ongoing development and establishment of the Aboriginal Cultural Centre which aims to be a central place of significance to empower Aboriginal people in telling stories, preserving history and demonstrating culture.
Implications	An important development being progressed that will promote the legacy of Aboriginal people in Western Australia and showcase the richness and depth of Aboriginal culture for Perth residents and tourists.

Initiative	Plan for Our Parks initiatives (BP2, V2, P695)
Investment	\$73 million over four years
Description	<p>\$58.3 million to facilitate implementation of Indigenous Land Use Agreements and joint management activities with Traditional Owners for both the South Coast Marine Park and the Fortescue Marsh Nature Reserve.</p> <p>This funding will support the creation of Aboriginal employment opportunities and includes \$13.7 million of capital investment in supporting start-up and visitor infrastructure.</p>

2024 - 2025 Budget

Implications	This investment indicates significant support for Aboriginal involvement in park management. This investment will not only enhance conservation efforts but also create employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.
---------------------	---

Initiative	Extending Home Stretch WA funding for young people leaving out-of-home care (BP2, V2, P504)
Investment	\$46.3 million over four years
Description	Additional funding builds on the \$32.7 million invested in 2019 in the Home Stretch pilot, making the program permanent. It supports young people from 18 to 21 as they leave care.
Implications	Aboriginal children and young people are overrepresented in out-of-home care. A total of nine ACCOs and three mainstream services will now deliver the program across the state – adding in the Goldfields-Esperance and Wheatbelt regions. (<i>Anglicare and Yorganup played a critical role developing the service model</i>). (see media release) <i>See Child and Families fact sheet</i>

Initiative	Aboriginal Heritage Legislation Amendment and Repeal Act (BP2, V2, P718)
Investment	\$22.5 million over four years
Description	Due to increased Aboriginal cultural heritage services under the amended Act, the Department will spend an additional \$13.3 million to support heritage assessments, surveys, and regional consultations with landowners and native title parties.
Implications	A new, simplified Aboriginal Heritage Legislation Act is important for protecting Aboriginal cultural sites.