

28 January 2025

 **Ombudsman**
New South Wales

OCHRE 2024

.....
**Current status
and future direction**
.....



Journey Together by Jasmine Sarin



This artwork depicts the way families, communities and organisations connect. We connect when we want to share knowledge, information, and strengthen relationships.

The centre of the artwork is reflective of a gathering that involves many family groups. This gathering is where Elders and knowledge holders will pass on stories and songlines, discuss lore and trade.

These gatherings are essential to ensure clans and family groups are supporting each other and maintaining strong cultural ties and respecting each other and our mother earth.

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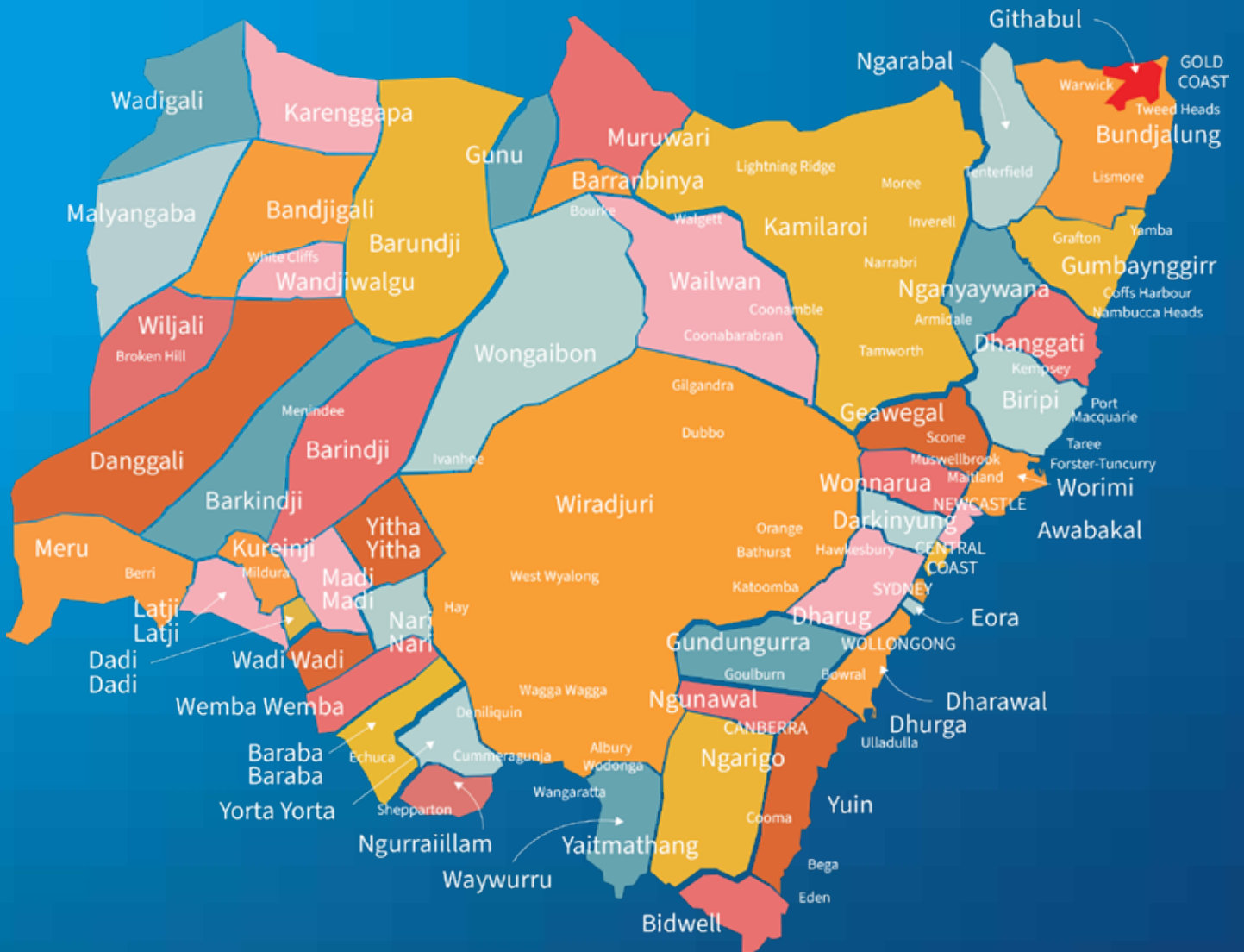
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Artist: Jasmine Sarin, a proud Kamilaroi and Jerrinja woman.

Aboriginal Nations/Languages in NSW & ACT



Acknowledgement

The NSW Ombudsman's Office pays tribute to Aboriginal Elders past, present, and emerging, acknowledging their ongoing connection to Country, their wisdom and rich cultural heritage. We express gratitude to all stakeholders, partners and individuals who dedicated their time, energy, and expertise to supporting our work monitoring, assessing and reporting on Aboriginal programs. We acknowledge the diversity of views within Aboriginal communities and recognise that our engagement with Aboriginal people, while meaningful, will not be representative of the views of all Aboriginal communities and people in NSW.¹

¹ In this report, when we say 'Aboriginal people' told us something, we are referring to the Aboriginal people we spoke to during this review. We also use the term 'Aboriginal' to describe all First Nations peoples as this is conventional in the NSW communities we engaged with.

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The Hon Ben Franklin, MLC
President
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The Hon Greg Piper, MP
Speaker
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
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Dear Mr President and Mr Speaker

Pursuant to section 31 of the *Ombudsman Act 1974*, we are providing you with a report titled: *OCHRE 2024: Current status and future direction* together with a separate Community Guide.

We draw your attention to section 31AA of the Act and request that you make the reports public forthwith.

Yours sincerely

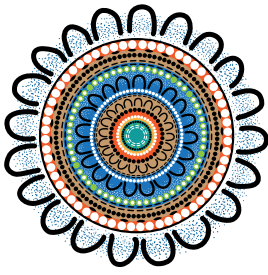
A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Miller'.

Paul Miller
NSW Ombudsman
28 January 2025

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Leanne Townsend'.

Leanne Townsend
Deputy Ombudsman, Aboriginal Programs
28 January 2025





Foreword

We are pleased to present this report, "OCHRE 2024: current status and future direction." Since its inception in 2013, OCHRE—Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment—has embodied a significant commitment by the NSW Government to empowering and improving outcomes for Aboriginal communities across the state.

Our core recommendation is: that the NSW Government unequivocally recommit to OCHRE as the state's overarching plan for Aboriginal affairs. Embedding OCHRE's principles into legislation, strengthening governance and accountability mechanisms, and ensuring sustained investment in its initiatives are some of the ways that such a commitment can be demonstrated.

Central to this report are the voices of Aboriginal people. Their perspectives, lived experiences, and aspirations are the foundation of our analysis and recommendations. These voices consistently emphasise the importance of self-determination, cultural identity, and equitable partnerships with the NSW Government in achieving meaningful and sustainable change true to beliefs and aims expressed when OCHRE was first launched a decade ago. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Aboriginal communities, leaders, and stakeholders who contributed their time, insights, and expertise to this report. Their input has been instrumental in shaping this report and the recommendations it puts forward.

It is our hope that this report serves as a catalyst for revitalising OCHRE, ensuring that it continues to advance the goals of opportunity, healing, and empowerment for Aboriginal people across NSW. As an independent oversight body, we remain steadfast in our commitment to monitoring the implementation of these vital recommendations.

Leanne Townsend
Deputy Ombudsman
28 January 2025

Paul Miller
NSW Ombudsman
28 January 2025



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Executive Summary

Overview

Since 2014, the NSW Ombudsman has been responsible for monitoring and assessing OCHRE – Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment – the NSW Government’s flagship plan for Aboriginal affairs.

A decade later, this report looks at its current status. We build on the insights presented in our 2019 Report,² drawing on observations from our ongoing monitoring, our engagement with Aboriginal people, and research over the last five years.

This assessment reflects on OCHRE's progress and impact to date, its current status, and perspectives offered by Aboriginal communities on directions for the future.

Central to our approach has been the inclusion of Aboriginal people’s perspectives and lived experiences, which have provided invaluable insights. Their contributions, alongside the support of Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff and key personnel from government departments and non-government organisations, were instrumental in enabling this report.

While the OCHRE Plan has made notable strides in some areas, we have observed that a decade on, it faces critical challenges. Its status and future direction are less clear now than 5 years ago when we presented our 2019 report.

OCHRE has struggled with inconsistent implementation and accountability, including the apparent stagnation of three of its seven core initiatives, including the initiative of ‘Healing’ that was not intended to be merely a stand-alone initiative but was supposed to underpin and permeate the plan as a whole.

Despite its promise of co-design, at every stage of the process the OCHRE Plan has fallen short of meaningfully engaging Aboriginal leadership and communities. This failure to fully embed Aboriginal voices in decision-making undermines the foundational principles of self-determination and empowerment.

² NSW Ombudsman, *OCHRE Review Report* (2019) https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/138060/OCHRE-Report_October-2019.pdf.

Significantly, OCHRE's alignment with the recent National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CtG) (2020-Present) remains poorly articulated and lacks cohesion, creating confusion and limiting effectiveness. There remains no clear and integrated relationship between OCHRE and CtG, and no apparent strategy for integration.

Insights from this report indicate that OCHRE is at a crossroads.

Generally, the findings from evaluations to date indicate that OCHRE initiatives have contributed to positive change in communities, by focusing on the strengths of communities and ensuring government collaborates with Aboriginal leaders and communities. These include:

- **For Connected Communities:** Children and young people are benefiting from the tailored support and services provided, with early years and children pre-high school benefiting the most.³
- **For Local Decision Making:** Community stakeholders reported satisfaction with the structure and the transparency of the negotiation process, stating that they felt that it was of great benefit that it involved local stakeholders.⁴ Further, there are examples where regional governance bodies are instrumental in securing improvements around community control over service delivery.⁵
- **For Opportunity Hubs:** Building strong relationships and networks with Aboriginal communities, and local schools was noted – particularly with young people and school leavers to support them with employment opportunities.⁶
- **For Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests:** Broad support from Aboriginal communities was noted and student feedback has been positive with the creation of tutoring positions resulting in increased job opportunities, albeit casual and sessional.⁷

Those same evaluation findings also noted significant areas for improvement and recommendations to strengthen initiatives.

However, since our 2019 report, the current state of progress appears to have slowed, and in some cases stagnated. What seems apparent is that there has been an overall reluctance over recent years to either clearly commit to OCHRE continuing as the NSW Government's overarching plan for Aboriginal affairs, or to decisively make and candidly announce a change in direction and approach.

The inertia around OCHRE presents itself as a significant issue, particularly given:

- The process by which the OCHRE Plan was developed with extensive consultation and genuine co-design.
- The plan's commitment to local Aboriginal empowerment and ongoing co-design.
- The structures and capacity that have been built, particularly through the Local Decision Making initiative.
- The continued belief in its outcomes and potential within both Government agencies and Aboriginal communities.
- Community disappointment and fatigue built over decades of ephemeral and abandoned strategies and programs.

It is our assessment that OCHRE should continue, and that what is required is a re-commitment to its core ethos and aims.

Our objective in this report is to reflect the current status of the OCHRE Plan five years after our last review, and to report, particularly on the perspectives we have heard from Aboriginal people, about how they see the Plan progressing, and their concerns and aspirations for it going forward.

3 NSW Department of Education, *Connected Communities Strategy: Final Evaluation Report* (2020) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/educational-data/cese/2020-connected-communities-strategy-final-report.pdf>.

4 Aboriginal Affairs NSW, Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (2015), Murdi Paaki LDM Accord negotiation evaluation, <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au>.

5 Australian National University, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2* (2023) 9 <https://caepn.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/preliminary-findings-ochre-local-decision-making-evaluation-stage-2>

6 UNSW Social Policy Research Centre (2018), *UCHRE Evaluation Stage 1 Synthesis Report* (2018) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/about-us/education-data-and-research/cese/evaluation-evidence-bank/reports/ochre-evaluation-synthesis-report>.

7 Ibid.

We make one core recommendation in this report – that there be a firm and unequivocal commitment to OCHRE. We have set out suggestions for how the NSW Government can make that commitment credible, robust, and sustainable.

This includes seeking Parliamentary imprimatur to embedding elements of OCHRE in legislation, prioritising sustained investment and ensuring accountability through transparent reporting. We also note that it is crucial that a clear and unified strategy be articulated to align the NSW Government's CtG priorities with the objectives of the OCHRE Plan. By fostering synergy between these frameworks, the overall impact and outcomes can be significantly enhanced.

Observations on current status

1. Unclear Government communication and commitment, including disconnect with Closing the Gap (CtG)

- The status and future of OCHRE as the overarching plan for Aboriginal affairs has, since 2020, been unclear, including a number of initiatives being dormant.
- Overlap between OCHRE and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap⁸ has created some confusion and competition for resources.
- OCHRE's community-led approach contrasts with and can clash – but also has unrealised potential to support – the more 'top-down' targets approach of the CtG framework.⁹
- Regional community members feel that the pre-eminence of peak bodies in CtG can detract or distract from local and place-based voices, programs and solutions.

2. Governance Challenges

- Aboriginal communities feel there is insufficient power-sharing and decision-making authority.
- Government agencies continue to have a "business-as-usual" mentality undermining systemic transformation.
- Government agencies have a lack of accountability and follow-through on commitments, leading to mistrust among Aboriginal communities.

3. Resources Allocation

- Majority of funding is directed to government providers (60.7%), with only 30.9% allocated to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), limiting community empowerment.¹⁰
- Short-term funding cycles disrupt long-term planning and capacity building.
- Aboriginal Regional Alliances reported under-resourced operations, further exacerbated by delays in funding disbursement.

4. Cultural Competency

- There are widespread cultural competency gaps in government agencies which hinders effective engagement with Aboriginal communities.
- There are concerns over non-local providers and mainstream service models that are failing to respect Aboriginal knowledge systems and values.

⁸ Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020) https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/ctg-national-agreement_apr-21-comm-infra-targets-updated-24-august-2022_0.pdf.

⁹ Australian National University, *The First Decade of Closing the Gap: What Went Wrong?* (2021) https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2024/11/CAEPR_Discussion_Paper_298_2021.pdf.

¹⁰ NSW Treasury, *NSW Indigenous Expenditure Report 2023-24* (2024) 46 https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2023-24-nsw-indigenous-expenditure-report-202405_v2.pdf.

Recommendations

Refer to page 57 for a detailed outline of our recommendations and actionable next steps.

A re-commitment to OCHRE

There remains, in particular, strong community support for the promise of the OCHRE Plan, and a broad consensus that its foundational beliefs and aims remain relevant.

Accordingly, the core recommendation in this report is:

Core Recommendation

That the NSW Government both articulate and demonstrate a renewed commitment to OCHRE, and to its continued status and future as the NSW plan for Aboriginal affairs in New South Wales.

Recommendation 1: Public statement of commitment

Clarify, by public statement (or via its response to this Report), the current status of, progress on, and intentions with respect to each of the existing OCHRE initiatives, including:

- a. Healing
- b. Solutions Brokerage
- c. Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework.

Timing: as soon as possible.

Recommendation 2: Expedite implementation of LDM Accords

Prioritise and expedite the finalisation of Accords with each Aboriginal Regional Alliance.

Timing: Signed Accords with all eligible ARAs no later than 1 February 2026.

Recommendation 3: Give OCHRE a legislative footing

Following consultation, including with the NSW Coalition of Peak Aboriginal Organisations (NSW CAPO); The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA); Aboriginal Regional Alliances (ARAs), introduce a Bill to give OCHRE a legislative foundation.

Timing: Legislation introduced by 1 July 2026, noting community consultation required.

Recommendation 4: Mandate transparent OCHRE reporting frameworks

Mandate transparent OCHRE Reporting Frameworks. This should include the publication of an annual performance report and expenditure reports.

Timing: Reporting should begin with the 2025–2026 financial year, with the first reports due by 1 October 2026.

Recommendation 5: Adopt multi-year funding commitments

Implement multi-year funding commitments by introducing minimum five-year funding agreements for OCHRE initiatives.

Timing: Five-year funding agreements should begin by 1 July 2026.

Recommendation 6: Clarify and strengthen the role of Aboriginal-led, central Government and inter-agency coordination

Clarify and strengthen the role and authority of the head of Aboriginal Affairs NSW (AANSW) to perform the role of 'Coordinator-General' for Aboriginal programs, including OCHRE (or establish and appoint a new role of Aboriginal Coordinator General for that purpose).

Timing: Appointment by 1 July 2025.

Recommendation 7: Act on outstanding evaluation recommendations and commit to ongoing schedule of implementation and outcome evaluations

Respond to the outstanding findings and recommendations of all evaluations of OCHRE initiatives. Communicate openly with the public and Aboriginal communities about the steps taken to address the recommendations of past evaluations.

Timing: Implementation Plan finalised by 1 July 2025.

Recommendation 8: Formally adopt and implement the OCHRE Practice Principles

Mandate all NSW Government Agencies adopt the 2023 OCHRE Practice Principles to improve cultural competency and collaboration.

Timing: All NSW Government agencies to have and publish OCHRE Practice Principles plans by 1 December 2026.

Recommendation 9: Clarify the relationship between OCHRE and other strategies and programs including Closing the Gap

Clarify where OCHRE 'fits' by defining the relationship between Closing the Gap and OCHRE, including by AANSW developing and publishing a clear framework outlining how the two approaches complement each other, emphasising their distinct yet interconnected roles.

Timing: Publish the framework by 30 June 2025

Recommendation 10. Response and implementation

We ask that the NSW Government provide, within no later than three months of tabling (28th April 2025), a response to this report and its recommendation, together with a plan for the actions that will be taken to effect the recommendations, including whether and when each of the steps suggested above will be taken.

We ask that AANSW provide us with a final report on the outcomes of the implementation of the recommendations and publish this report on its website no later than 1 December 2025. ■



1. Background

1.1 Role of the NSW Ombudsman

The NSW Ombudsman's Office is an independent integrity agency that pursues fairness for the people of New South Wales. We work to ensure that those entrusted with public power and resources fulfil their responsibilities and treat everyone equitably.

Our mandate includes monitoring, assessing, and reporting on the delivery of 'Aboriginal Programs' in NSW.¹¹

In particular, under Part 3B of the *Ombudsman Act 1974* (NSW) (*the Ombudsman Act*), we oversee OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment), the NSW Government's overarching plan for Aboriginal affairs. The Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) leads the work of the Ombudsman's Office in the monitoring, assessment, and reporting of OCHRE's implementation.

1.2 Overview of OCHRE

Since 2013, OCHRE (Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment) has been the NSW Government's overarching strategic plan for Aboriginal affairs. The NSW Government describes its aims as being to preserve Aboriginal languages and cultures, support education and employment pathways for Aboriginal youth, foster local leadership, and drive economic empowerment within Aboriginal communities.¹²

¹¹ This report concerns only our monitoring of the OCHRE Plan and does not cover any other Aboriginal programs. In August 2024, the NSW Parliament enacted the Ombudsman and Other Legislation Amendment Act 2024, introducing changes to Part 3B of the Ombudsman Act 1974. Previously the Aboriginal programs to which the Ombudsman's function applied were prescribed by regulation and, to date, the only Aboriginal Program that had been prescribed was the OCHRE Plan. Following the recent amendments, the term "Aboriginal Program" has been defined in the Act itself to encompass any government program primarily directed towards the health, cultural, economic, educational, or other wellbeing of Aboriginal persons or communities. This broader definition includes but is not limited to, the OCHRE Plan. The amendments specify the NSW Ombudsman is required to (continue to) monitor and assess the OCHRE Plan and is authorised to monitor and assess any other Aboriginal programs at its discretion.

¹² NSW Government, *About OCHRE* (Webpage) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/aboriginal-affairs-nsw/about-ochre>.

Figure 1: What OCHRE means:



1.3 Development of OCHRE

UCHRE was developed between 2011 and 2013, with the intention to improve outcomes for Aboriginal communities, focusing on education, employment, and service accountability. The immediate impetus was a report of the NSW Auditor-General, which found that the Aboriginal affairs policy then in place (Two Ways Together) was failing.¹³

A **Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs** (the Taskforce) was established in late 2011, primarily informed by extensive consultations, with over **2,700 people**, **over 200 written submissions being received** and **over 400 individuals participating in a survey** that evaluated initial recommendations that the Taskforce had put forward.¹⁴

The Taskforce was also informed by our reports to Parliament about our audit of the NSW Interagency Plan to tackle child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities (2012)¹⁵ and addressing Aboriginal disadvantage (2011).¹⁶

The final report of the Taskforce, released in March 2013, recommended a new state-wide plan for Aboriginal affairs that aimed to support strong Aboriginal communities where Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic, and cultural life. It recommended new frameworks for accountability and Aboriginal economic prosperity, and specific education, language and devolved decision-making initiatives.

The Taskforce also stressed that the overall approach should be flexible and place-based, build on existing strengths, involve a long-term commitment with realistic resourcing, and be subject to evaluations to build the evidence base.¹⁷

13 Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Performance Audit: Two Ways Together - NSW Aboriginal Affairs Plan* (2011) https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/tp/files/29275/two_way_together.pdf.

14 Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs Consultation Report* (2012); Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Getting it Right: The Findings of the Round Two Consultations of the NSW Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs* (2012); and Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs - Final Report* (2013). See also The McKell Institute, *Literature Review of Approaches to Aboriginal Affairs Policies & Case Study of OCHRE Development and Implementation* (2017) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-05/McKell-literature-review-FINAL-REPORT.pdf>.

15 NSW Ombudsman, *Responding to Child Sexual Assault in Aboriginal Communities* (2012) <https://cmsassets.ombo.nsw.gov.au/assets/Reports/ACSA-report-web1.pdf>.

16 NSW Ombudsman, *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently* (2011) https://cmsassets.ombo.nsw.gov.au/assets/Reports/SR_Aboriginal-disadvantage-report.pdf.

17 Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs - Final Report* (2013) 4.

1.4 OCHRE Objectives

OCHRE stated that in order to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life, we need to:

- Teach more Aboriginal languages and culture to build people's pride and identity
- Support more Aboriginal students to stay at school
- Support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs
- Grow local Aboriginal leaders' and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions
- Focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment
- Make both Government and communities more accountable for the money they spend.¹⁸

The core beliefs underpinning the OCHRE Plan, which it acknowledges to be 'evidence-based', include:

- Government should do things *with* Aboriginal communities, not *for* or *to* Aboriginal communities
- The strongest communities are those that drive solutions
- Recognising the diversity of Aboriginal communities is paramount.

In monitoring and assessing OCHRE, we focus on the extent to which the implementation of OCHRE has been consistent with these beliefs, and look to whether it is achieving its stated aims.

1.5 OCHRE Initiatives

The OCHRE Plan has seven key initiatives:

1. **Local Decision Making:** Seeks to empower Aboriginal Regional Alliances (ARAs) to influence service delivery and resource allocation in their regions.
2. **Connected Communities:** Utilises schools as service hubs, seeking to address barriers to education for Aboriginal students while promoting community involvement in school governance.
3. **Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests:** Seeks to revitalise Aboriginal languages through educational and cultural programs that promote intergenerational transmission of language and culture.
4. **Opportunity Hubs:** Provides school-based mentoring and guidance to support Aboriginal students in pursuing education, training, and employment pathways.
5. **Healing:** Aims to address intergenerational trauma and foster healing through culturally appropriate, community-led initiatives.
6. **Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework:** Aims to enhance Aboriginal employment, business ownership, and economic participation.
7. **Solutions Brokerage:** Facilitates inter-agency collaboration to address systemic issues and develop tailored solutions for community challenges.¹⁹

As of 2024, **four initiatives**—Local Decision Making, Connected Communities, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, and Opportunity Hubs—**remain active**, while three initiatives – Healing, Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework, and Solutions Brokerage – are inactive and appear to have effectively stalled.²⁰ The lack of clear public communication about the status of these programs is concerning.

¹⁸ Ibid, 5.

¹⁹ Aboriginal Affairs NSW, OCHRE: Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment – NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal affairs: education, employments & accountability (2013) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-06/OCHRE%20plan.pdf>.

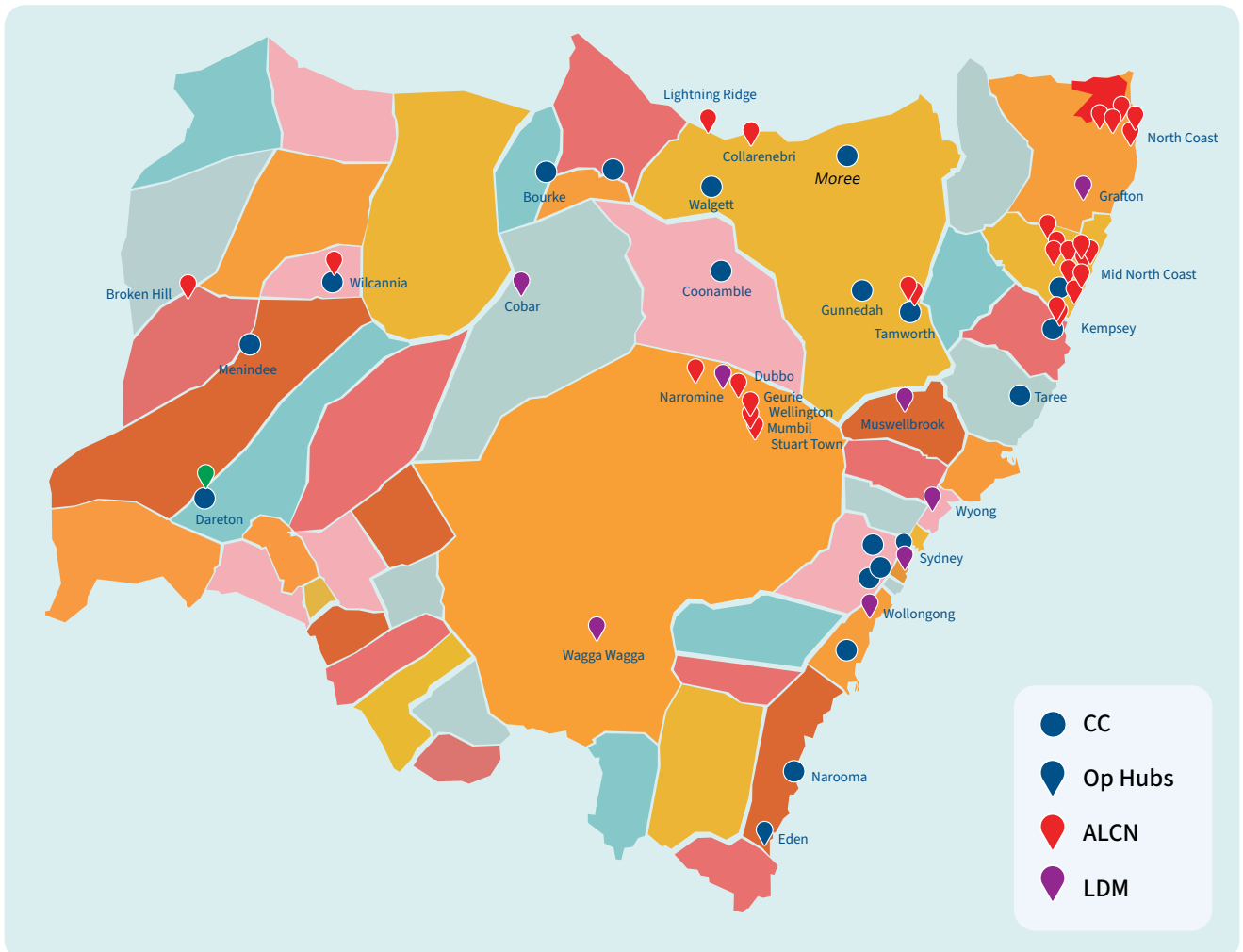
²⁰ NSW Government, About OCHRE (Webpage) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/aboriginal-affairs-nsw/about-ochre>.

Table 1: A summary of OCHRE's initiatives and lead government agencies

Initiative	Lead Agency
Healing*	All agencies
Connected Communities	Department of Education
Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests	Department of Education
Local Decision Making	Aboriginal Affairs NSW
Solutions Brokerage*	Aboriginal Affairs NSW
Opportunity Hubs	NSW Department of Education – NSW Training Services division
Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework*	Aboriginal Affairs NSW

*inactive initiative

Figure 2: Map of OCHRE Initiatives active in 2024 - indicative only*



*See page 20 for greater detail of LDM regions, page 28 for CC locations, page 33 for ALCN active regions, page 37 for Op Hubs locations.

OCHRE Funding 2019-2024

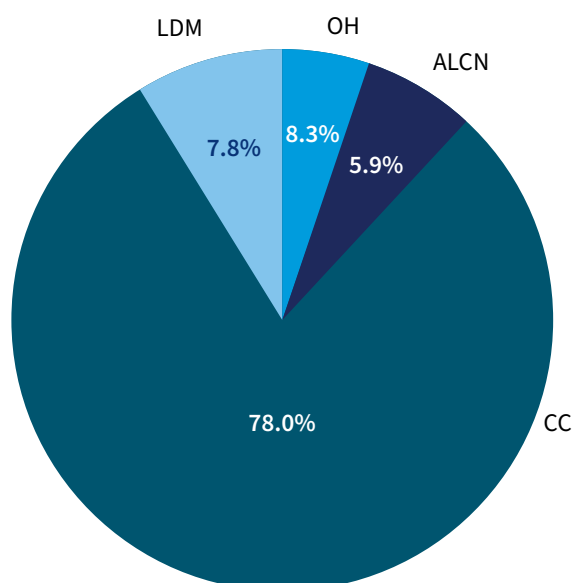
The pie chart (figure 3) shows the allocation of total program funding across OCHRE initiatives from 2019 to 2024, amounting to a total of \$167.7M. (Figures provided by NSW Treasury August, 2024).

Funding allocations for active OCHRE initiatives were:

1. **Connected Communities** received the majority of the funding, accounting for 78% or approximately \$130.8M.
2. **Opportunity Hubs** received \$13.9M (8.3%)
3. **Local Decision Making** received \$13.2M (7.8%).
4. **Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests** was allocated \$9.8M (5.9%).

Figure 3: NSW Government funding for active OCHRE Initiatives 2019-2024

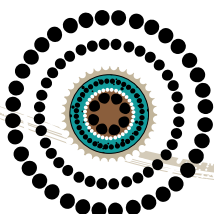
Distribution of Funding Across OCHRE initiatives



Forward estimates funding 2025-2027

The NSW Government has reserved \$96.5M for resourcing active OCHRE initiatives. The forward estimates over the next 2 years include:

1. **Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests'** allocation is approximately \$7.5M.
2. **Local Decision Making** will receive approximately \$9.5M over the same period.
3. **Opportunity Hubs'** specific allocations for 2025–2027 were unknown at the time of publication.
4. **Connected Communities** is allocated a substantial portion of funding, with \$79.5M for 2025–2027.



1.6 Our 2019 OCHRE Recommendations

In our 2019 Report,²¹ we called for improvements in how the NSW Government delivers and measures the impact of its OCHRE initiatives. Almost all recommendations were accepted, and many have been implemented. However, the outstanding recommendations from 2019 remain critically relevant, underscoring the need for continued attention.

Key Points

Total Recommendations in 2019: 69

Accepted Recommendations by the NSW Government: 68

Implementation Status:

- 55 Recommendations implemented to some extent.
 - 47 Recommendations fully or mostly achieved.
 - 8 Recommendations with some progress made.

- 14 Recommendations not implemented or with limited progress.
 - 7 Recommendations not achieved.
 - 6 Recommendations with limited progress.
 - 1 Recommendation not accepted by NSW Government.

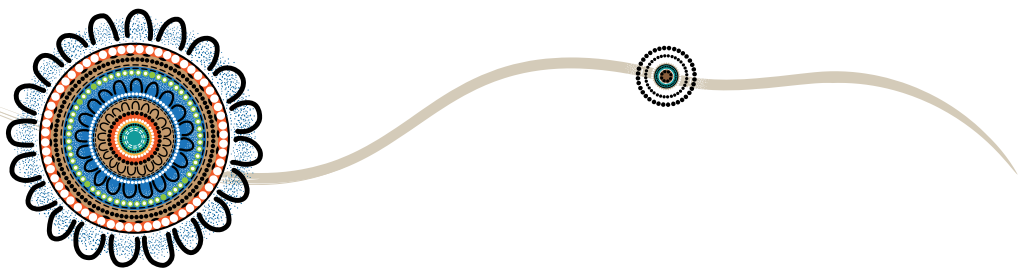
Current Status in 2024

We will incorporate the 2019 outstanding recommendations into our 2024 Recommendation Implementation Monitoring Plan.

1. Appendix C: Provides a detailed list of the 2019 recommendations for reference.

Table 2: Summary: 2019 OCHRE Report recommendations²²

Progress Status	Completed	Mostly Achieved	Partially Achieved	Not Achieved	Limited Progress	Discontinued
Count	29	18	8	7	6	1



²¹ NSW Ombudsman, *OCHRE Review Report* (October 2019) https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/138060/OCHRE-Report_October-2019.pdf.

²² Appendix C: Provides a detailed list of the 2019 recommendations for reference.



2. OCHRE Initiatives – Current status and issues

2.1 Local Decision Making

Local Decision Making (LDM) was officially launched in 2013. The first Accord was signed between the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) and the NSW Government in 2015. Administered by AANSW, the initiative currently includes eight active regional alliances.

2.1.1 Key features of Local Decision Making

Aboriginal Regional Alliances (ARA)

ARAs are community-led governance bodies representing Aboriginal communities within a region. These alliances collaborate directly with the NSW Government to identify and prioritise local service needs. Each ARA serves specific communities within its boundary and can be made up of a range of local-regional Aboriginal organisations working together for their communities. ARAs can adopt different governance structures depending on the needs and preferences of the communities they represent. Some choose to incorporate as formal legal entities, like Barang Regional Alliance, while others, like Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly, Three Rivers Regional Assembly, and Riverina-Murray Regional Alliance, operate as unincorporated assemblies. This flexibility allows communities to tailor their governance structures to best suit their local context.

Figure 4: NSW regions represented by Aboriginal Regional Alliances

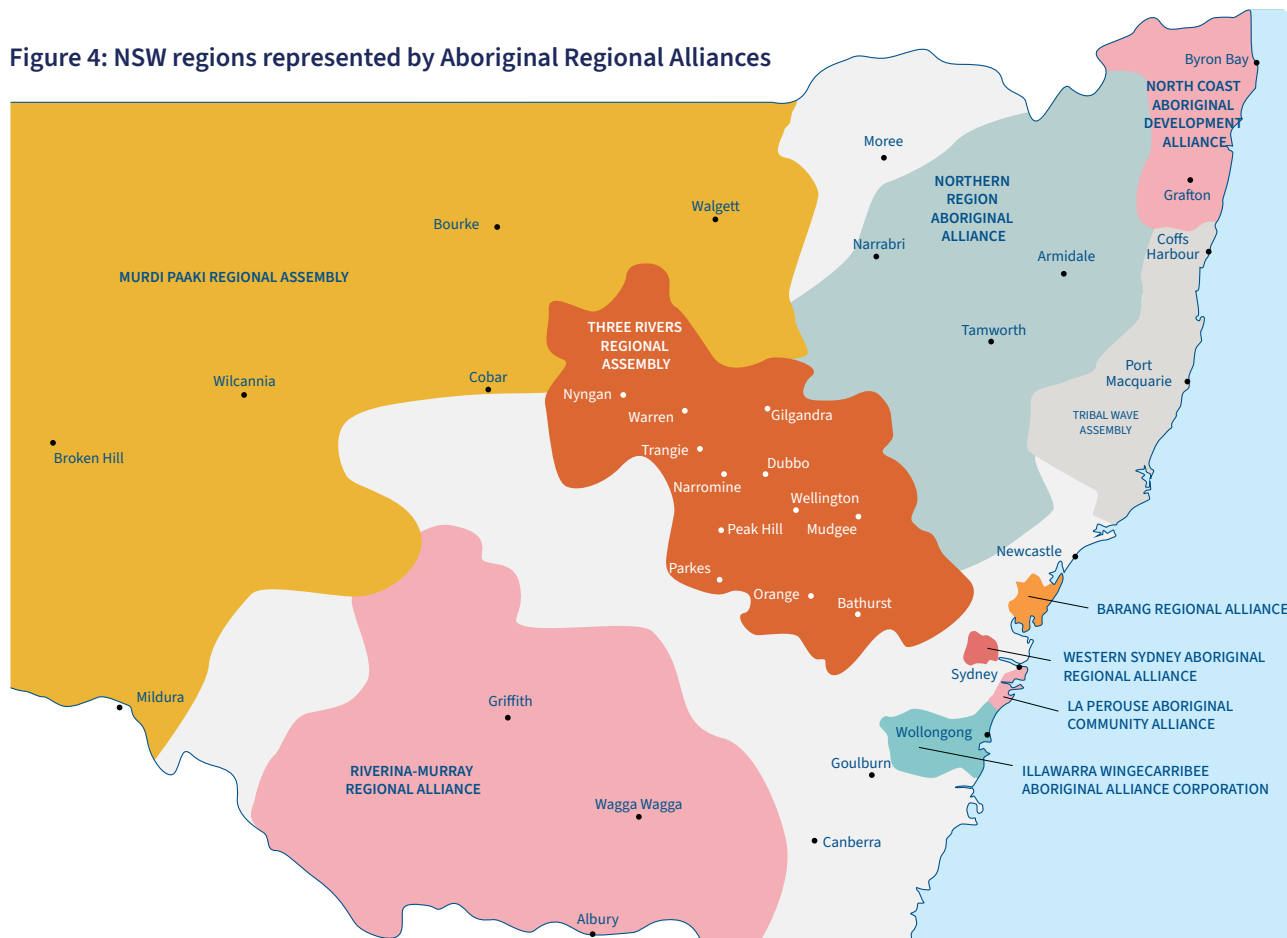


Table 3: Aboriginal Regional Alliances participating in LDM include:

Regional Alliance	Location	Year/Status of Accord
Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA)	Far Western NSW	2015, 2018 ² , 2020
Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC)	Illawarra and Wingecarribee region	2018
Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance (RADA)	North Coast	Not signed
Barang Regional Alliance (BRA)	Central Coast	Not signed
Three Rivers Regional Assembly (TRRA)	Central West NSW	2018
Northern Region Aboriginal Alliance*	New England and North West	Not signed
Tribal Wave Regional Assembly*	Lower North Coast	Not signed
Riverina-Murray Regional Alliance (RMRA)	Riverina-Murray	2020
La Perouse Aboriginal Community Alliance	La Perouse	Not signed
NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA)	Regional NSW	2019
Western Sydney Aboriginal Regional Alliance (WSARA)	Western Sydney	Not signed

*inactive regional alliances

2 MPRA auspiced Regional Housing Agreement

ARAs serve as the primary vehicles for Aboriginal communities to engage with the NSW Government in the design and delivery of services and programs under the LDM initiative. ARAs are intended to empower Aboriginal communities to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives and to ensure those services are culturally appropriate and meet community needs.

ARAs are formed through a process of community engagement and consensus-building, bringing together representatives from various Aboriginal organisations, including ACCOs, Local Aboriginal Land Councils (LALCs), and Community Working Parties (CWPs).

Accords (Formal Agreements)

Accords are structured agreements between ARAs and the NSW Government, outlining commitments, responsibilities, and timelines for addressing community-identified priorities.

While the content of each Accord varies based on the specific needs and priorities of each region, they outline:

- **Priorities:** Key issues that the Accord seeks to address.
- **Actions:** Specific steps that will be taken to achieve the desired outcomes.
- **Outcomes:** Measurable goals that the Accord aims to achieve.
- **Timeframes:** Deadlines for completing the agreed-upon actions.
- **Resources:** Funding and other resources that will be allocated to support the Accord.
- **Responsibilities:** The roles and responsibilities of each party involved in the Accord.
- **Measures of Success:** Indicators and metrics for evaluating the success of the Accord.

NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA)²³

NCARA is a statewide advocacy body for ARAs that fosters collaboration and strategic planning to address broad Aboriginal community needs. NCARA is made up of representatives from each ARA, and works with the Australian, NSW, and local governments on matters affecting Aboriginal communities across the state.



²³ NSW Government, *About NCARA - Resources (Webpage)* <https://www.nsw.gov.au/departments-and-agencies/aboriginal-affairs-nsw/about-ochre/local-decision-making/ncara-resources>.

LDM Funding 2019 – 2027

The funding allocation over 2019-2027 for the LDM initiative is 8.6% of the total NSW Government OCHRE initiative funding.

Table 4: LDM funding (figures provided by NSW Treasury August, 2024)

OCHRE Initiative	Lead Agency	Funding \$('000)							
		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Local Decision Making	AANSW	2,446	2,555	1,960	4,200	2,000	3,394	3,894	2,200
	Total	22,649							

2.1.2 LDM intended outcomes and evaluations

Intended outcomes

The stated outcomes sought through LDM are to:

- decrease the duplication of services.
- increase the effectiveness of service delivery to better meet local needs.
- increase the skills and capacity of Aboriginal governance bodies.²⁴

Evaluations

In addition to our 2019 OCHRE report, the following evaluations (and other reports) have been conducted in relation to the LDM initiative:

Table 5: LDM evaluations reviewed for this report

Document	Type	Year	Author
MPRA Accord negotiations Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2015	Circa on behalf of the NSW Government
MPRA Stage 1 LDM Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2018	UNSW Social Policy Research Centre on behalf of NSW Aboriginal Affairs
IWAAC stage 1 LDM Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2018	UNSW Social Policy Research Centre on behalf of NSW Aboriginal Affairs
SPRC Stage 1 OCHRE Evaluation Synthesis Report	Evaluation	2018	UNSW Social Policy Research Centre on behalf of NSW Aboriginal Affairs
NCARA report to Stage 1 OCHRE Evaluation	Report	2018	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
OCHRE Local Decision-Making Stage 2 Accords Negotiation Evaluation: Synthesis Report	Evaluation	2022	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research

²⁴ Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *Local Decision Making Policy and Operational Framework* (2017) 3 <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-06/LDM-POLICY-AND-OPERATIONAL-FRAMEWORK-JULY-2017.pdf>.

Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision-Making Evaluation Stage 2	Evaluation	2023	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
OCHRE Local Decision Making Stage 2 Evaluation: Three Rivers Regional Assembly Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2023	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
OCHRE Local Decision Making Stage 2 Evaluation: Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2023	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
OCHRE Local Decision Making Stage 2 Evaluation: NCARA-State Accord Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2023	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research
OCHRE Local Decision Making Stage 2 Evaluation: Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2023	ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research

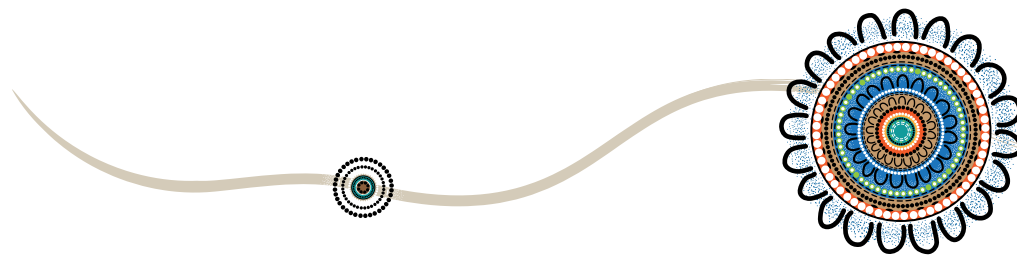
The Report on the preliminary findings of the OCHRE LDM Evaluation Stage 2 (commissioned by AANSW and conducted by the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research) concluded as follows:

‘[The report] discusses how regional governance bodies are providing NSW government agencies with a key point of access for community engagement and advice, and examples where regional governance bodies are instrumental in securing improvements around community control over service delivery. It describes occasions where regional governance bodies have worked with NSW Government agencies to secure new innovative approaches to the way that government does business with them.

While highlighting these examples of success, the report finds that progress under LDM has been ad hoc. LDM is not implemented well across the board. There have not been systematic transformations of relationships between Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government under LDM.’²⁵

This evaluation concludes with 13 recommendations, which have not been responded to by the NSW Government.

A final OCHRE evaluation synthesis report by the ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research is expected in 2025.



²⁵ Australian National University, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2 (2023)* ii <https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/preliminary-findings-ochre-local-decision-making-evaluation-stage-2>.

2.1.3 What we observed

Many stakeholders acknowledge that the bones of the LDM initiative hold much promise, but that the implementation and governance require further review and reimagining.

“If you’re committed to OCHRE then you need to be committed to the process that delivers OCHRE. That includes LDM.” – ARA Representative

Our Community Survey reported that only **19% of respondents agreed** the LDM initiative had done enough to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal people in NSW. Further, **81% of respondents disagreed** when asked if LDM had done enough to empower Aboriginal communities to make decisions around service delivery.

While many noted that the structure was generally sound, the implementation of LDM raised significant concerns.

“The work to properly implement LDMs across NSW has failed. There are committees established but the ‘stop/start’ funding creates momentum problems. It is difficult to maintain the confidence of communities and Aboriginal people, when we are continually stopping and starting due to late releases of funding, no funding, constant reviews, and lack of practical commitment to long-term implementation of the LDM concept.” - Community Survey Respondent

We also heard from some community members that governance of the LDM initiative is complicated by the ongoing need to re-educate new government staff, leading to a sense that progress is continually being delayed due to bureaucratic inefficiencies.

ARAs raised concerns about the effectiveness of LDM under OCHRE, with some stakeholders reporting poor communication and a perceived lack of support from the NSW Government. Importantly, this lack of responsiveness poses a significant barrier to progressing the LDM process. We were told that long periods of inaction, coupled with the impact of machinery of government changes and staff turnover, have led to delays in progressing key initiatives. This has caused frustration within communities, as the promise of local decision making has not been fully realised in practise.

“Local decision making dropped off the radar between 2019 and 2023.” - ARA Member

Community members painted a complex and nuanced picture of how the LDM initiative has impacted government-community relationships in NSW. While the initiative has introduced some positive changes, such as fostering greater collaboration and communication, community members encountered significant challenges, revealing persistent power imbalances and inconsistencies throughout implementation.

2.1.3.1 LDM Impacts

Enhanced Community Leadership and Governance

Aboriginal communities have strengthened their leadership and governance structures, enabling more effective participation in service delivery decisions. Regional governance bodies have provided NSW government agencies with key points of access for community engagement and advice.²⁶

²⁶ Australian National University, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2 (2023)* 1 <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/preliminary-findings-ochre-local-decision-making-evaluation-stage-2>.

Innovative service delivery solutions

LDM has in some cases facilitated creative, place-based solutions to entrenched issues. Through bottom-up, Aboriginal-led regional governance structures, community voices have reached Government agencies and are achieving stronger outcomes.

Improved Government–Community relationships

The initiative has fostered better working relationships between Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government, promoting shared decision-making and ownership of service delivery. However, the NCARA–State Accord Evaluation Report²⁷ notes that while LDM has enabled NCARA to elevate the voice of Aboriginal peoples in the regions to the state level, there is room for improvement in public sector engagement with NCARA.

“LDM ... was a well thought out process which Aboriginal Communities invested in to [try] a different way of working with government and make change on the ground where communities need it.” - Community Survey Respondent

2.1.3.2 LDM Issues

Accords

While community members agreed that the Accords hold significant potential, they also identified some challenges that they report to be inhibiting effectiveness, including:

- **Under-resourcing:** Limited funding and resources for both the Accord negotiation process and the implementation of the agreed-upon actions.
- **Lack of Genuine Co-design:** Negotiations often fail to fully incorporate community perspectives and priorities, leading to compromised outcomes that do not adequately reflect the aspirations outlined in the Statement of Claim.²⁸
- **Limited Government Transformation:** A lack of systemic change within government agencies to support the partnership model envisioned by the Accords, often resulting in a "business as usual" approach that undermines genuine shared decision-making.
- **Power Imbalances:** Despite efforts to create a more equitable negotiating process, power imbalances persist between government agencies and ARAs, particularly in relation to funding decisions and the ability to influence policy directions.
- **Lack of Accountability:** Inadequate mechanisms for holding government agencies accountable for fulfilling their commitments under the Accords, leading to delays, unfulfilled promises, and a loss of trust among communities.
- **Delays in Signing and Implementing Accords and Schedules:** Protracted negotiation processes and bureaucratic hurdles, including the time taken for ministerial sign-off, can significantly delay the implementation of Accords and their associated Schedules.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ A Statement of Claim is a document prepared by an ARA outlining regional priorities and outcomes. It serves as the basis for negotiations with the NSW Government to develop a Regional Accord Agreement.

Community members provided recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of the Accords, including:

- **Increased Resourcing:** Providing adequate funding to support all phases of the Accord process, from pre-negotiation community engagement to the implementation of agreed-upon actions.
- **Strengthening the Statement of Claim:** Investing in the pre-negotiation phase to support the development of robust Statements of Claim that accurately reflect community priorities and empower ARAs to negotiate from a position of strength.
- **Greater Transparency and Accountability:** Establishing clear accountability mechanisms, including regular reporting requirements, performance indicators, and consequences for failing to meet commitments.
- **Empowering Lead Agency Negotiators:** Granting government negotiators greater financial and administrative delegation to ensure they can effectively represent their agencies and make timely decisions that support the goals of the Accord.
- **Developing Ethical Guidelines and Cultural Competency Training:** Providing government officials with training on best practices for engaging with Aboriginal communities, including understanding cultural protocols and negotiating in good faith.
- **Improving Data Access and Sharing:** Making relevant data readily accessible to ARAs to support their decision-making and advocacy efforts.

Limited Signed Accords in Place

Presently, a significant part of the state is **not covered by an ARA** with two ARA's inactive: the Northern Region Aboriginal Alliance and the Tribal Wave Assembly. Ensuring Aboriginal communities in NSW are provided with a platform or mechanism to be engaged in government initiatives and programs is critical to facilitating an equitable landscape. **Stakeholders emphatically noted during our engagement, all ARAs should have Accords signed with the NSW Government as a mechanism to increase government accountability and commitment to Aboriginal-led service delivery and self-determination.**

Uneven Implementation and Accountability

A recurring theme is the inconsistent implementation of LDM across different government agencies and regions. While some agencies have embraced the principles of shared decision-making, others continue to operate with a "business as usual" approach. This inconsistency undermines the initiative's effectiveness and erodes trust with Aboriginal communities.

Limited Devolution of Power

Despite the aspiration for shared decision-making, the devolution of actual decision-making authority and budgetary control to Aboriginal communities remains limited. Many ARAs report that they are still primarily treated as "stakeholders" rather than genuine partners with the power to shape service delivery.

“Some Departments have work to do in fulfilling their agreements to work in partnership. There needs to be more accountability to make real change.”
- Community Survey Respondent

Insufficient Resourcing of ARAs

The capacity of ARAs to effectively participate in LDM and manage increased responsibilities is often hampered by inadequate and inconsistent funding. This limits their ability to engage with communities, develop comprehensive proposals, and monitor government actions.²⁹

²⁹ Australian National University, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2 (2023)* 41 <https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/preliminary-findings-ochre-local-decision-making-evaluation-stage-2>.

“The implementation of LDM in this region has suffered due to the stop/start nature of funding distributed by Aboriginal Affairs.” - Community Member

Lack of Clear Pathways for Redress

Community members point to the absence of clear and accessible mechanisms for communities to raise grievances and seek redress when government agencies fail to meet their commitments under LDM. This lack of accountability contributes to a sense of powerlessness and undermines the spirit of partnership.

Confusion about "Local" Decision Making, NSW CAPO, and Closing the Gap

The name "Local Decision Making" has created some confusion among ARA members as they feel like they do not have any decision making authority in their own communities.

The authority of LDM in a landscape where the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO)³⁰ and other Aboriginal peak bodies are also prominent stakeholders presents another point of contention. ARAs remain unclear about the roles that each plays in the design and delivery of Aboriginal programs in NSW, especially alongside initiatives such as CtG. As OCHRE continues to evolve, defining the role of ARAs and their authority over Aboriginal programs and outcomes should be a nexus of discussion for all relevant stakeholders.

“LDM is a NSW Government initiative. The arrival of CAPO has confused the community and caused a level of competition between LDM and CAPO.” - Community Survey Respondent

We heard that ARAs perceive that the NSW Government has shifted its engagement to state and federal peak bodies such as NSW CAPO, and the ARAs feel sidelined and disempowered as a result. Some indicated that they perceive NSW CAPO as sometimes focussed more on organisational priorities or national or state wide concerns, than local community interests.

These perceptions undermine the LDM initiative and are having a negative impact on the relationship between the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities.

“State-level consultations cannot substitute for direct, place-based engagement that reflects the specific needs and aspirations of our ... community. The government’s reliance on peak bodies undermines its commitment to LDM and weakens genuine partnerships at the local level.” - Community Member

2.2 Connected Communities

The Connected Communities initiative, administered by the NSW Department of Education, began in 2013. Initially implemented in 16 rural and remote schools across NSW, the initiative aims to improve outcomes for students in complex and vulnerable communities. It has since expanded and now operates in 33 schools, serving 23 communities throughout the state.

The Connected Communities initiative was implemented in two phases to support high-need areas. Phase 1, launched in 2013, involved 15 schools in remote and regional locations such as Boggabilla, Bourke, and Walgett. In 2021, Phase 2 expanded the program to 33 schools, incorporating additional areas like Airds, Gunnedah, and Kempsey.

³⁰ NSW CAPO was established in 2011. The coalition was formed through a memorandum of understanding with the NSW Government signed by six Aboriginal peak bodies in NSW.

Schools currently participating in the Connected Communities initiatives are:

Table 6: Connected Communities participating schools

Phase 1 Schools (2013)	School Name	Location
	Boggabilla Central School	Boggabilla
	Toomelah Public School	Toomelah
	Wilcannia Central School	Wilcannia
	Walgett Community College – High School	Walgett
	Walgett Community College – Primary School	
	Bourke Public School	Bourke
	Bourke High School	
	Moree East Public School	Moree
	Moree Secondary College	
	Coonamble High School	Coonamble
	Hillvue Public School	Tamworth
	Taree Public School	Taree
	Taree High School	Taree
	Kempsey High School	Kempsey
	Melville High School	
Menindee Central School	Menindee	
Phase 2 Schools (2021)	School Name	Location
	Airds High School	Airds
	Bidwill Public School	Bidwill
	Bowraville Central School	Bowraville
	Brewarrina Central School	Brewarrina
	Coomealla High School	Dareton
	Coonamble Public School	Coonamble
	Curran Public School	Macquarie Fields
	Dareton Public School	Dareton
	Gunnedah High School	Gunnedah
	Gunnedah Public School	
	Kempsey South Public School	Kempsey
	Kempsey West Public School	
	Lethbridge Park Public School	Lethbridge Park
	Narooma High School	Narooma
	Nowra East Public School	Nowra
	Peel High School	Tamworth
Shoalhaven High School	Nowra	

In September 2024, the NSW Department of Education announced the establishment of a Ministerial working group to ensure a whole-of-government focus on the continuation of the Connected Communities strategy. The Minister for Education and Early Learning announced the key purpose and role of the working group will be to “progress, through its respective agencies, the cross-government collaborations required to support Aboriginal students and families, while monitoring the progress being made and where responses are needed to fill the gaps.”³¹

While the announcement of this working group is a clear commitment from the NSW Government to improve interagency collaboration in delivering Aboriginal programs, it is unclear how well-communicated the establishment of this working group has been across both government and Aboriginal stakeholders. We propose that a community engagement and communications piece will strengthen and enhance its presence and function, and that the Department of Education should make this a priority moving forward.

2.2.1 Key features of Connected Communities

Executive Principals (EP)

Each Connected Communities school is led by an Executive Principal (EP) with the highest level of principalship in NSW. The EP works closely with the Local School Reference Group (LSRG) to ensure the school's programs align with community needs.

EPs are broadly responsible for the following:

- Leading strategic management and staff development to improve school outcomes.
- Collaborating with communities to align programs with local needs.
- Promoting cultural inclusion and trauma-informed practices for student wellbeing.
- Ensuring accountability and continuous improvement through monitoring and reporting.

Senior Leader Community Engagement (SLCE)

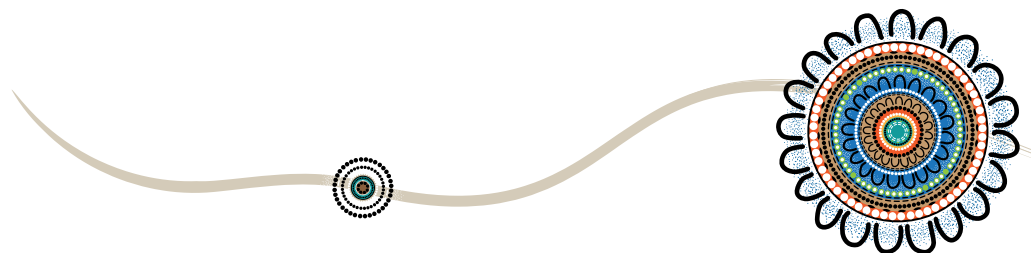
This full-time, Aboriginal-identified executive position provides strategic advice to the EP on issues related to Aboriginal students. The SLCE supports partnerships between the school, Aboriginal families, local agencies, and the broader community, serving as a vital communication link.

Local School Reference Group (LSRG)

Comprising local Elders, key community members, and representatives from the Parents and Citizens (P&C) association, this group co-leads and co-designs school programs. Chaired by the president of the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, the group ensures that the school's initiatives reflect the community's aspirations.

NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)

The group serves as a critical link between schools and Aboriginal communities, fostering mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration. AECG provides advice to the Minister for Education and Early Learning on all matters to do with Aboriginal education.



³¹ NSW Department of Education, *Connected Communities* (Webpage) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities/connected-communities-strategy#Ministerial3>.

Connected Communities Funding

The 2019-2027 funding allocation for the Connected Communities initiative is 79.6% of the total NSW Government OCHRE initiative funding.

Table 7: Connected Communities Funding. Figures provided by NSW Treasury (August, 2024).

OCHRE Initiative	Lead Agency	Funding \$('000)							
		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Connected Communities	Department of Education	8,743	17,947	25,709	38,779	39,657	39,696	39,765	-**
	Total	210,296							

* The Minister for Education’s announcement to continue Connected Communities for 10 years did not articulate funding.³²

** Unknown

2.2.2 Connected Communities intended outcomes and evaluations

Aligned with priorities under national and state education agendas, the Connected Communities initiative sought the following intended outcomes:

- Increased school readiness and early childhood development for Aboriginal students.
- Culturally responsive and inclusive school environments.
- Engaging Aboriginal families and communities into school governance.
- Effective leadership and governance.
- Enhanced support systems for Aboriginal students and families.
- Improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.
- Increased post school options for Aboriginal young people.
- Building of capacity of school staff to personalise their teaching to meet learning needs of all students and develop connections and understanding with Aboriginal people and communities.

Table 8: Connected Communities Evaluations considered in this report.

Document	Type	Year	Author
Connected Communities Strategy– Interim Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2016	Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (NSW Department of Education)
Connected Communities Strategy: Final Evaluation Report	Evaluation	2020	Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (NSW Department of Education)
A culturally responsive evaluation of the Connected Communities Strategy	Evaluation	2024	University of Newcastle, on behalf of the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (NSW Department of Education)

32 NSW Department of Education, *Connected Communities* (Webpage) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities/connected-communities-strategy#Ministerial3>.

These evaluations, spanning from 2016 to 2024, offer some beneficial insights about the achievements, challenges, and evolving approaches to evaluating the Connected Communities Strategy.

One of the most significant findings emerging from the reports is **Connected Communities (CC) positive impact on early years education**. Consistent evidence points to a significant improvement in Year 3 NAPLAN scores, particularly in numeracy and reading, for students who have been part of CC since Kindergarten. This suggests that early intervention and targeted support during the foundational years of schooling can yield tangible academic gains for Aboriginal students. Furthermore, the reports highlight an increase in primary school attendance rates following CCs introduction. This is a crucial outcome, as regular school attendance is a critical factor in academic progress and overall student success.

The reports emphasise the need for a long-term vision and sustainable funding to ensure the program's continued success. The 2024 report specifically recommends developing a continuation plan that outlines strategies for securing funding beyond the initial grant period. This is essential to build on the gains achieved and to address the remaining challenges, such as the need to attract and retain qualified teachers in remote areas and to develop effective interventions for secondary students. Furthermore, acknowledging and addressing environmental factors that impact program effectiveness is crucial. The reports recognise that factors such as remoteness and limited access to external services can create barriers to successful implementation. Strategies are needed to mitigate these challenges and to ensure equitable access to resources for all Connected Communities schools.

2.2.3 What we observed

Community members and government stakeholders recounted both successes and challenges with the Connected Communities initiative. These experiences mirror prior evaluations of the initiative, which have shed light on some positive changes, particularly for primary school students. These included improved school attendance and increased engagement of Aboriginal families and community members in school activities. However, outcomes vary across schools, and the impact on secondary student attendance and overall educational attainment has been less pronounced.

Our Government Survey completed in 2024, reported a favourable response towards Connected Communities, with **76% of respondents agreeing that the initiative has supported young Aboriginal students to stay in school, and 77% agreeing the initiative is improving educational outcomes**.

Government stakeholders also provided constructive feedback on the initiative, saying that research and understanding is needed to develop a hyper-local approach to implementing the initiative so that it meets the needs of individual towns and communities. It was noted that it is critical to ensure that staff stay in roles in an ongoing capacity to build trust with community and students, and that individual relationships can “make or break” initiatives in regional areas.

Additionally, the strategy has shown promising results in improving educational outcomes, particularly for students in their early years. The primary school cohort of students who have experienced Connected Communities for their entire time at school appear to be showing the greatest benefit from the strategy in terms of NAPLAN results and appear to be more developmentally ready for school than earlier cohorts.

2.2.3.1 Connected Communities Impacts

Strong Leadership

Effective, initiative-taking leadership has been integral to the success of the strategy, shaping positive school dynamics and driving improvements in student outcomes. A key part of leadership under this initiative is also the role of SRG. For example, several survey respondents working at Connected Communities schools in areas with functional SRGs report more positive feedback, particularly surrounding cultural competency, and awareness.

Improved sense of belonging and safety

Some Connected Communities stakeholders told us they believed their schools have become safer and more inclusive, recognising cultural sensitivities and fostering a greater sense of belonging among Aboriginal students.

During our engagement, one school indicated that prior to participating in the Connected Communities strategy, the school had a poor public reputation, and staff had not participated in any cultural training, which continued to have a flow on effect in their community. After implementing the Connected Communities strategy, they have been able to lift the perception of the school and improve the relationship between themselves and the community.

These outcomes are supported in the 2024 evaluation report by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation and the University of Newcastle, which provides an in-depth analysis of the strategy's implementation and impact.

2.2.3.2 Connected Communities issues

Variability in implementation and outcomes

The effectiveness of Connected Communities varies across different schools. Factors such as location, community engagement, and resource availability contribute to this inconsistency. Some schools have reported positive impacts, particularly at the primary level, while others continue to face difficulties in achieving desired outcomes.

A community member told us that Aboriginal staff and community members do not have a voice, feel disempowered by Department of Education staff, and that communities “are deeply concerned at how the Connected Communities Program was rolled out and the negative impacts on ACCOs and community.”

Staff engagement and leadership

The success of the strategy heavily relies on the commitment and buy-in of all staff members. Ensuring that Executive Principals articulate a clear vision and foster high expectations for all students is crucial. However, maintaining consistent leadership and staff engagement remains a challenge in some schools.

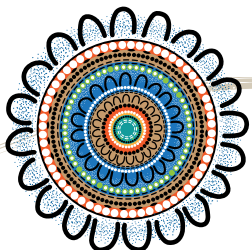
“Connected Community education is still working in silos. Individual schools and Executive Principals are expected to generate growth within the school setting; however, this is ultimately up to the principal to enact. There are great inconsistencies in communities where the strategy isn’t working.” - Community Member

Retention of staff, particularly appropriately trained Aboriginal staff, continues to be an issue for many schools involved in the Connected Communities initiative. During our engagement in 2024, we heard of high rates of vacancies in key positions in multiple schools across multiple regional and remote locations. When we raised these concerns with DoE it advised that issues concerning high vacancy rates, particularly in regional and remote locations, is a common issue beyond Connected Communities schools.

Secondary education outcomes

While improvements have been seen at the primary level, secondary education outcomes have not shown significant positive effects. Challenges such as lower attendance rates and engagement among older students persist, indicating a need for targeted interventions at the secondary level.

Further, our 2024 Community Survey reported that across primary and secondary education 75% of respondents disagreed that the initiative improved school retention, and only 18% of respondents agreed that the initiative was improving educational outcomes.



Inter-Agency Collaboration

The NSW Department of Education commissioned 2024 evaluation did not mention OCHRE and it lacked an analysis of how the OCHRE Plan and other OCHRE Initiatives influence and interface with Connected Communities schools. For Connected Communities to become more effective, it must engage and collaborate with Government Agencies and Community Organisations that deliver on the Opportunity Hubs, Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, and most importantly, Local Decision Making. The Department of Education and Executive Principals should work with Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Aboriginal Regional Alliances to ensure what is happening in the schools is aligned with community and regional priorities and protocols. The recently announced Ministerial working group - Connected Communities (Sept, 2024) is a step in the right direction. The DoE's website notes the working group's key purpose:

“...will be to progress, through its respective agencies, the cross-government collaborations required to support Aboriginal students and families, while monitoring the progress being made and where responses are needed to fill the gaps...”³³

An example of systemic disconnect is apparent in the fact that there is another NSW Government program called ‘Connected Communities’ run by the Community Engagement Group within the NSW Premier’s Department. The initiative focuses on strengthening social cohesion and democracy while combating hate and extremism in NSW. This duplication in program names highlights issues with inter-agency communication and collaboration and contributes to community confusion.

2.3 Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests

The purpose of the ALCN initiative is to **provide Aboriginal communities with opportunities to maintain, reclaim, and revitalise their Aboriginal languages**. This is achieved through connections with schools, TAFE, universities, and other community language programs or groups.

ALCNs aim to address the historical decline of Aboriginal languages caused by policies of assimilation and suppression. This initiative is seen as a way to empower Aboriginal communities to take ownership of their language and cultural heritage, supporting self-determination and cultural continuity.

There are 7 Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests³⁴:

- **North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest:** Dubbo, Narromine, Peak Hill, Trangie, Gilgandra, Wellington, and Mudgee.
- **Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest:** Coffs Harbour, South Grafton, Bellingen, Urunga, Dorrigo, Northern Beaches, Sawtell, Toormina, Nambucca Valley, and Orara.
- **Bundjalung Language and Culture Nest:** Lismore, Kyogle, Tweed Heads, Ballina, Evans Head, Woodenbong, Grafton, Tabulam, Coraki, Casino, and Bonalbo.
- **Paakantji/Baakantji Language and Culture Nest:** Broken Hill, Wilcannia, Menindee, Bourke, Mildura, and Coomealla.
- **Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay Language and Culture Nest:** Collarenebri, Walgett, Lightning Ridge, and Goodooga.
- **Dunghutti Language and Culture Nest:** Bellbrook, Crescent Head, Kempsey, South West Rocks, Walcha, and their surrounding areas.
- **Gomeri Language and Culture Nest:** Gunnedah, Walgett, Boggabilla, Moree, Lightning Ridge, Tamworth, Narrabri, Quirindi, Collarenebri, Mungindi.

³³ NSW Department of Education, *Connected Communities* (Webpage) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities/connected-communities-strategy#Ministerial3>.

³⁴ A nest footprint is a geographical location or a designated area in which schools may access Nest funding to teach the relevant Aboriginal language and culture under the nest structure.

2.3.1 Key features of Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests (ALCNs)

Collaboration

ALCNs are collaborative efforts, with the NSW AECG partnering with the NSW Department of Education and Local Reference Groups to lead the initiative. Community members and other agencies, such as TAFE NSW, also play key supporting roles.

Community-Based approach

The initiative prioritises a community-based approach which aims to create a continuous learning pathway for Aboriginal people, both within communities and in educational settings. The approach acknowledges and values the existing language skills and knowledge held by Aboriginal community members, and recognises that community members with language proficiency are invaluable resources for the initiative.

Local contributors

Community members with language proficiency contribute to the initiative through activities like endorsing Nest teachers and content, participating in local projects focusing on cataloging, restoring, and revitalising Aboriginal languages, and working as employed Nest tutors and teachers.

Aboriginal Language & Culture Nests Funding

The funding allocation over 2019-2027 for the ALCN initiative is 6.6% of the total NSW Government OCHRE initiative funding.

Table 9: ALCN Funding (figures provided by NSW Treasury August, 2024)

		Funding \$('000)							
OCHRE Initiative	Lead Agency	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
Language and Culture Nests	Department of Education	1,679	1,679	1,679	1,679	3,111	2,663	2,676	2,179
	Total	17,345							

2.3.2 ALCNs intended outcomes and evaluations

ALCNs objectives include:

- improve knowledge of, and competency in, local Aboriginal languages.
- strengthen Aboriginal identity, pride, and community resilience.
- increase the number of language learners and language teachers.
- contribute to increased school attendance and retention.

Table 10: ALCN evaluations considered in this report

Document	Type	Year	Author
OCHRE Evaluation Stage 1: North West Wiradjuri Language and Culture Nest (final report)	Evaluation	2018	Social Policy Research Centre, the University of New South Wales, on behalf of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.
OCHRE Evaluation Stage 1: Gumbaynggirr Language and Culture Nest (final report)	Evaluation	2018	Social Policy Research Centre, the University of New South Wales, on behalf of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

One of the most significant similarities between the two reports is the **overwhelming community support** for the teaching and learning of Aboriginal languages and cultures. In both the Gumbaynggirr and Wiradjuri communities, students, parents, and community members expressed a deep desire to see their languages and cultures remembered, respected, and revived. This shared desire stems from the recognition that language is intrinsically linked to culture and identity.

As one community member explained,

“Language is a way to develop and maintain culture. If you have no culture then you have no identity, so language is the start to culture and identity.”

Despite this shared commitment to language revitalisation, the two evaluations reveal **divergent perspectives on the effectiveness and cultural appropriateness of the Nest model**. In one community, some participants expressed concerns about the Nest's location within a government school setting, arguing that it limits community control and may not be the most culturally respectful approach. Some felt that funding should be directed to existing community-based programs that are already successfully teaching local language and culture.

In contrast, other community members generally viewed the Nest model favorably. While some participants acknowledged that learning language and culture “out bush” would be ideal, they recognised that the Nest provides a valuable opportunity for students who wouldn't otherwise have access to language and culture education. One community member stated,

“[The Nest] is a good way [to learn] otherwise they wouldn't learn”.

Both reports emphasise the importance of **ongoing support and resources** for the success of the Nest mode, and the need for **culturally safe and appropriate learning environments**. In the Gumbaynggirr community, the report recommends that language classes should be based on traditional ways of teaching and learning, emphasising oral language over written language and facilitating the inclusion of Gumbaynggirr Elders in content development and teaching. In the Wiradjuri community, the report stresses the importance of providing Aboriginal cultural safety training for all school staff to create a more welcoming and inclusive environment for Aboriginal students and educators.

2.3.3 What We Observed

The ALCN initiative received mixed feedback from all stakeholders. Many praised the initiative's efforts to revitalise Aboriginal languages and strengthen Aboriginal communities, but there were significant concerns about the initiative's sustainability, resources, funding, and availability of appropriate tutors to deliver Nest programs.

2.3.3.1 ALCN Impacts

Language revitalisation and cultural connection

The Nests have significantly contributed to the revitalisation and maintenance of Aboriginal languages and cultural knowledge within schools. By providing structured programs, they have enabled Aboriginal students to learn local Aboriginal languages, fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal heritage.

“Language funding and supporting the revitalisation has been great for local communities and it is good to see it being implemented and taught in schools.” - Community Member

There was a favourable response towards ALCN amongst government employees, with 70% of our Government Survey respondents agreeing the initiative has helped to revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures in NSW.

Community involvement and employment

We heard that having a prominent community member in the role of a language and culture teacher is a critical success factor. This ensures communities actively participate in the Nests, with appropriate Elders and language experts sharing their knowledge. This collaboration has enriched the educational experience for learners and also created employment opportunities for language tutors, thereby strengthening community ties and promoting cultural pride.

Educational engagement and identity

The integration of Aboriginal languages into the school curriculum has led to increased student engagement and attendance in some sites. Aboriginal students have reported a stronger sense of identity and pride, which has positively impacted their overall educational experience.

*“[A]LCN is so needed within the schools - all about reconciliation and respect for each other but really has to be done in a way that is acceptable for our communities.”
- Community Member*

Policy support and expansion

The success of the Nests has been supported by legislative measures, such as the *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* (NSW), which acknowledges the significance of First Languages. Additionally, the establishment of the Aboriginal Languages Trust in 2020 has provided further support for language activities at local, regional, and state levels.

2.3.3.2 ALCN Issues

Resource Limitations

Some ALCNs expressed concerns with funding and resource problems, affecting their ability to provide consistent language programs and support for educators. The overwhelming sentiment was that language tutors are not receiving an adequate amount of work and are not being remunerated appropriately for their time.

*“The rate of pay needs to be looked at ... when you’re talking about a specialist language and a cultural matter - all of it needs to be looked at in a big way. The sooner the better. But what doesn’t work is having 1 project officer, covering 3 nests areas. It just doesn’t work, because you need someone on the ground that’s able to connect with the schools.”
- Community Member*

Community Engagement

Ensuring meaningful involvement of local Aboriginal communities in the design and management of ALCNs remains a challenge. Some community members express concerns about the extent of their input and the cultural appropriateness of language teaching methods.

“Language is sacred - it is hard to see non-Indigenous people learning and using our language without full understanding and respect.” - Community Member

2.4 Opportunity Hubs

Opportunity Hubs provide support for Aboriginal students in years 5 to 12 and focus on school-to-work transition programs as part of building the economic capacity in Aboriginal communities. Hubs aim to provide Aboriginal students with the support, confidence, knowledge, and resources to move from secondary school to further education and/or employment.

As of December 2024, Opportunity Hubs are operating in:

- Campbelltown
- Dubbo
- Tamworth
- Liverpool
- Greater Western Sydney

The locations were selected by the NSW Government based on factors like strong Aboriginal leadership, a significant Aboriginal student population, sustainable employment opportunities, non-government and business sector buy-in potential, availability of career champions and mentors, and the presence of VET or tertiary education providers.

2.4.1 Key features of Opportunity Hubs

Local service delivery

Training Services NSW (within the Department of Education) awards contracts to local service providers to run Opportunity Hubs. The Hubs operate within the framework of a Services Agreement that outlines performance indicators and service requirements.

Partnership approach

Opportunity Hubs focus on building local partnerships between schools, employers, education and training providers, and the local community, to facilitate employment, training, and further education opportunities matched to the aspirations of individual students.

School engagement

Hubs work closely with schools to identify and engage Aboriginal students, often starting in years 5-8 with group activities to foster early career awareness. In later years, the focus shifts to individualised mentoring and career advice to support transitions to post-school opportunities. Hubs prioritise developing personalised goal-setting, career, and transition plans for students in years 9-12.

Opportunity Hubs Funding

The funding allocation over 2019-2027 for the Opportunity Hubs initiative is 5.3% of the total NSW Government OCHRE initiative funding.

Table 11: Opportunity Hub Funding (figures provided by NSW Treasury August, 2024).

OCHRE Initiative	Lead Agency	Funding \$('000)							
		2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	
Opportunity Hubs	Department of Education (Aboriginal Initiatives - TSNSW)	2,440	2,350	2,320	3,370	3,400	*	*	*
	Total	13,880							

*at time of publication

2.4.2 Opportunity Hubs - Intended outcomes and evaluations

The overall goal of the Opportunity Hubs initiative is to improve post-school outcomes for Aboriginal young people, specifically education and employment pathways.

Intended outcomes include:

- partnering schools with local employers and training providers
- coordinating local opportunities including employment, mentoring, scholarships, internships and volunteer work
- matching local opportunities to Aboriginal students’ career aspirations that lead to jobs
- mentoring and supporting Aboriginal students each step of the way
- engaging Aboriginal students and their families early in their schooling school, and;
- tracking Aboriginal students’ progress including once they have transitioned to employment .³⁵

Table 12: Opportunity Hub list of evaluations considered in this report

Document	Type	Year	Author
Tamworth Opportunity Hub - Stage 1 Final Report	Evaluation	2018	Social Policy Research Centre, the University of New South Wales, on behalf of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.
Campbelltown Opportunity Hub - Stage 1 Final Report	Evaluation	2018	Social Policy Research Centre, the University of New South Wales, on behalf of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

The evaluations of the Tamworth and Campbelltown Opportunity Hubs provided some key learnings about the effectiveness and challenges of the initiative.

Firstly, **community ownership and control are crucial to the success of the Opportunity Hubs.** The Tamworth

³⁵ NSW Department of Education, *OCHRE Opportunity Hubs* (Webpage) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/skills-nsw/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/ochre-opportunity-hubs>.

Hub is directly managed by the Tamworth Local Aboriginal Land Council, demonstrating the effectiveness of a community-based approach. This model ensures cultural safety, strong community trust, and a deep understanding of local needs. While the Campbelltown Hub is operated by MTC Australia, a non-Aboriginal organisation, it incorporates a collaborative governance structure through the Campbelltown Opportunity Hub Advisory Group. This group includes representatives from Aboriginal organisations, schools, and Hub staff, ensuring significant Aboriginal participation in decision-making and program development. However, the report acknowledges that the Hub being run by a non-Aboriginal agency has been a point of contention for some community members, despite MTC's efforts to work collaboratively with the Aboriginal community. The evaluation recommends exploring options for greater Aboriginal control and long-term sustainability of the Campbelltown Hub to better align with the OCHRE principles.

Building trusting relationships is fundamental to the effectiveness of the Hubs. Both evaluations stress the importance of the connections forged between Hub staff, students, parents, carers, schools, and community organisations. In Tamworth, the report found the Hub acts as a bridge between families and the education system, addressing historical disengagement and fostering trust. Building these relationships is crucial for providing tailored support, connecting young people with necessary resources, and creating a culturally safe environment where they feel comfortable seeking assistance.

Despite some positive outcomes, both evaluations identified key areas requiring further attention and improvement:

- **Securing long-term funding is essential for the sustainability of the Hubs.** Both evaluations emphasise the need for financial certainty to ensure long-term planning and build trust with communities who have experienced the disruption of successful programs being defunded. The reports recommend secure, long-term funding arrangements to address this concern.
- **Current data collection and reporting mechanisms do not fully capture the impact of the Hubs.** While data is collected for contract compliance with the NSW Government, it fails to reflect the full range of activities and successes, particularly in areas such as well-being, cultural connection, and community engagement. Participants in both communities highlighted the need for reporting tools that better capture the less tangible, yet significant outcomes of the program. The reports recommend a co-design process to develop reporting and evaluation mechanisms that reflect community-determined measures of success and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the Hubs' impact.
- **Expanding access and engagement with other services is necessary to improve outcomes for young people.** The evaluations highlight the need to reach more young Aboriginal people by expanding the Hub's geographic reach and increasing participation in school-based programs. Improved collaboration with government agencies, particularly those involved in areas such as health, housing, and justice, is crucial for addressing the holistic needs of young people and their families.

2.4.3 What we observed

Many stakeholders believed that Opportunity Hubs provide critical support to Aboriginal young people, and that some Hubs were delivering important outcomes.

However, we also heard that the ability to consistently deliver these outcomes is tied to the stability of staffing and the strength of long-term relationships with students – areas currently threatened by funding insecurity.

2.4.3.1 Opportunity Hubs Impacts

Critical Service Delivery

Many Opportunity Hub service providers highlighted the critical role the initiative plays in addressing the broader wellbeing of students, particularly those facing mental health issues, homelessness, or violence. Around 25–30% of participants face significant barriers to full engagement in school. Opportunity Hubs provide essential interventions, including mentoring, cultural connection, and life skills development, which are seen as vital for the personal growth and academic success of Aboriginal students.

“The KARI Foundation Opportunity Hub has played a significant role in supporting Aboriginal social, cultural, and economic outcomes in Greater Western Sydney through a variety of targeted initiatives and partnerships in key areas such as: cultural empowerment and connection, employment and skills development, community engagement, support services, partnerships and collaborations.” - Community Survey respondent

Connection to Culture

Connection to culture remains central to the initiative, particularly in areas where Aboriginal identity is fragmented, such as in statutory care situations. Providers are focused on fostering cultural pride and belonging as part of their support for students, which we heard has resulted in increased engagement and retention in education.

However, in some regions, the need for tailored cultural programs is greater due to the weaker presence of Aboriginal cultural networks. Service providers stress that without a deeper connection to culture, many students risk disengaging from school altogether.

2.4.3.2 Opportunity Hubs issues

Funding Uncertainty

We heard there is ongoing uncertainty around funding for OH providers. This uncertainty has created a lack of security, particularly with no clear indication and poor communication from the NSW Government about the tender process or budget allocations moving forward. Providers reported there is no clear messaging regarding anticipated timeframes or process and state they find it difficult to maintain staffing levels and operational stability without clear and transparent communication from the government.

Communication issues and limited resources

Opportunity Hub providers told us that they are faced with an absence of feedback or communication from government agencies, particularly Training Services NSW. Several providers reported frustration at the lack of response or guidance on critical matters such as reporting and contract renewals. This lack of transparency and communication has created barriers to the effectiveness of Opportunity Hub programs, leading some providers to operate without the support they need to meet ambitious performance indicators (KPIs). This is particularly problematic given the already stretched resources and the lofty expectations placed on Opportunity Hub providers to deliver against specific targets, which many feel are unrealistic under current conditions.

“To meet the KPIs of the Opp Hub contract and to make the engagement meaningful, we would need at least double the staff and funding.” - Community Survey respondent

There is a clear need for better coordination and mapping of services across the state to prevent duplication and inefficiencies. Providers have indicated that without a comprehensive, state-wide mapping of services, there are risks of overlapping efforts and wasted resources, especially in regions with multiple service providers. This issue is compounded by limited resources, with some Opportunity Hubs relying on broader organisational support (such as from larger NGOs or Local Aboriginal Land Councils) to stay afloat.

Some community members also feel that the lack of government communication has also impacted the strength and presence of Aboriginal community voices.

“Opportunity Hubs were well supported for the first four to five years and [the] Aboriginal Controlled Organisation felt listened to and heard. The concept of OCHRE and the first five years were great, [but] Aboriginal voices have become less and less. Communities know their communities and government departments should take time to listen to what communities are saying.” - Community Survey respondent

Our Government Survey also reported mixed responses towards the effectiveness of the initiative. Only 42% of respondents agreed in some form that the initiative improved employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW, whereas 45% were unsure, and 14% disagreed. Additionally, multiple government stakeholders also identified that the Opportunity Hubs initiatives require more funding and locations to increase its breadth and impact.

One suggestion from a government stakeholder is to provide funding for additional mentors on the ground in communities to support more students and to expand the initiative to service more schools across NSW. ■



3. The OCHRE Plan - Community & Government Experiences, Observations, and Issues

In this section we consider the OCHRE Plan holistically, having regard not merely to each individual initiatives taken in isolation (as set out in the previous Chapter), but considering the plan as a whole, community and government perspectives, and themes arising from issues that cut across multiple initiatives and concern affect the OCHRE as a whole.

3.1 Experience of OCHRE – Surveys of Community and Government Members

We conducted two online surveys; one for OCHRE community stakeholders and another for Government employees. Community Survey participants included stakeholders from Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), Aboriginal peak bodies and organisations, and stakeholders with experience participating in, or working on various OCHRE initiatives.

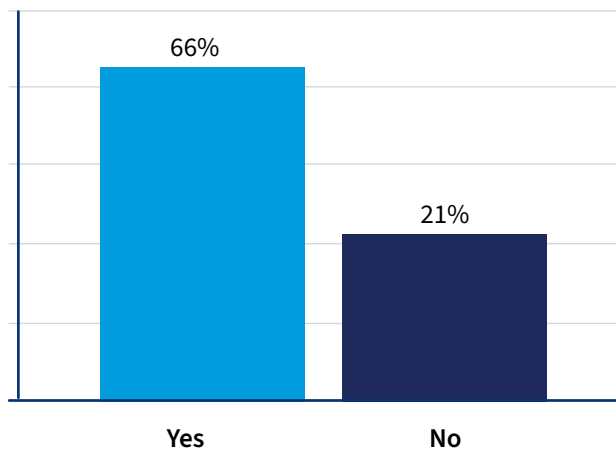
Figure 5: Map of places NSW Ombudsman staff engaged with OCHRE stakeholders.



Results from our Community Survey included:

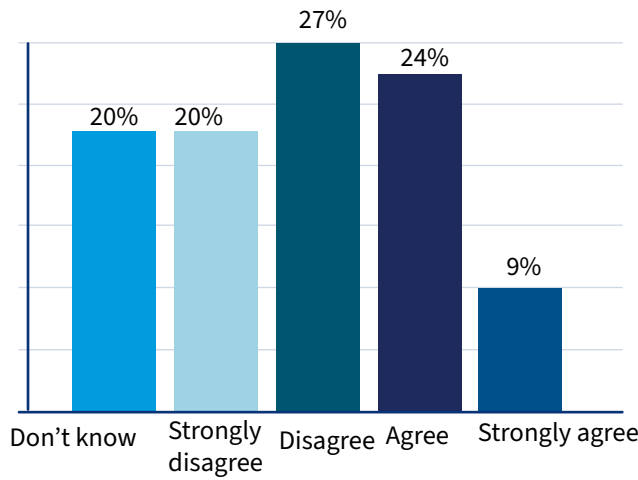
- 66% of respondents were aware of the OCHRE Plan.

Figure 6: Are you aware of OCHRE?



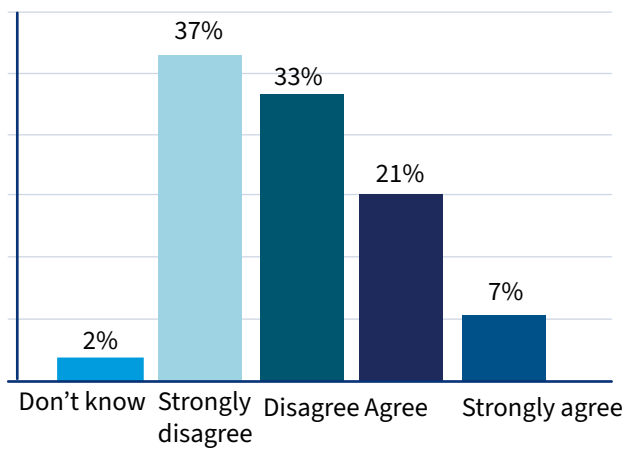
- 47% of respondents disagreed that OCHRE has achieved its overall aims, while 33% agreed, and 20% were unsure.

Figure 7: Has OCHRE achieved its aims?



- 70% of respondents disagreed that OCHRE has been effectively coordinated across all NSW Government Departments, while only 28% of respondents agreed that it had been.

Figure 8: Has OCHRE been coordinated effectively across all NSW Government Departments?



- 69% of respondents disagreed that OCHRE has done enough to increase the wellbeing and standard of living for Aboriginal peoples in NSW.

Participants in our Community Survey overall had a negative or mixed response concerning the extent to which the OCHRE Plan was achieving its aims. Their responses towards specific OCHRE initiatives mirror these results (which are discussed below in this report).

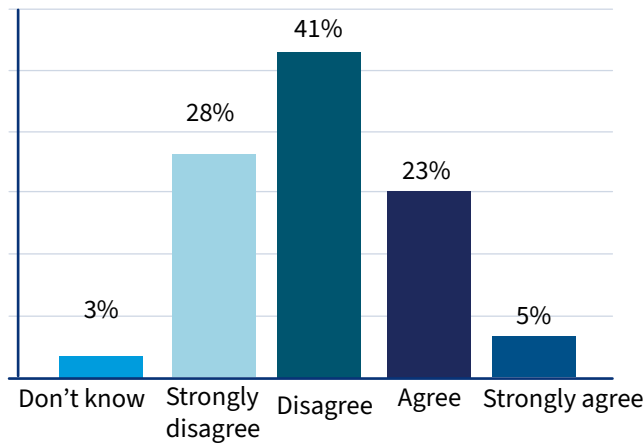
That only two-thirds of our Community Survey respondents were aware of OCHRE suggests that the communication about the delivery of the OCHRE Plan to Aboriginal communities could improve.

Participants of our Government Survey included employees from various NSW Government agencies responsible for delivering OCHRE initiatives, including Aboriginal Affairs NSW, NSW Department of Education, NSW Treasury, and NSW Training Services (a division of NSW Department of Education). Notably, 71% of our Government Survey participants work for the Department of Education.

Results from our Government Survey include:

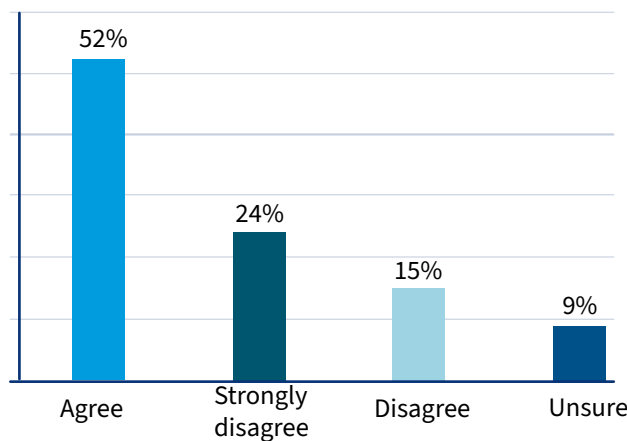
- 76% of respondents believed that overall, OCHRE achieves its goals and aims.

Figure 9: Has OCHRE increased the wellbeing and standard living of Aboriginal peoples in NSW?



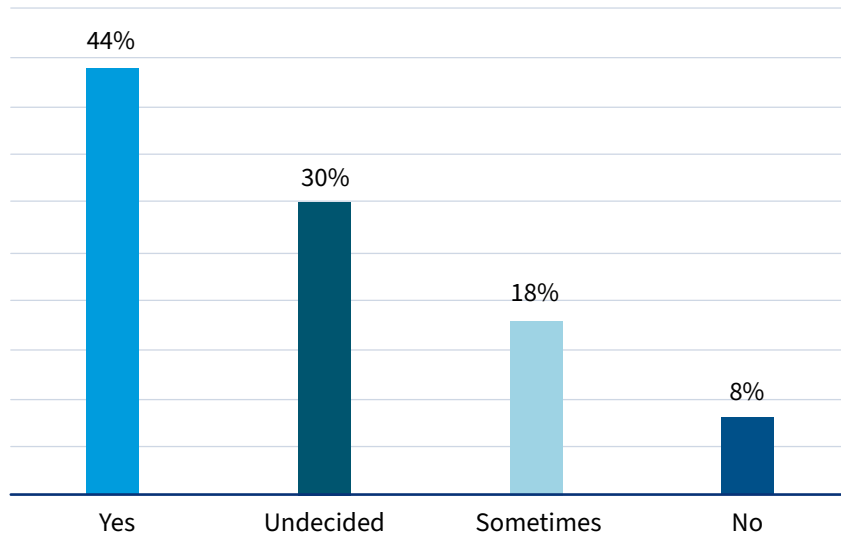
- 44% of respondents believed that OCHRE is mostly working in the best interests of Aboriginal people.

Figure 10: Do you believe OCHRE achieves its goals?



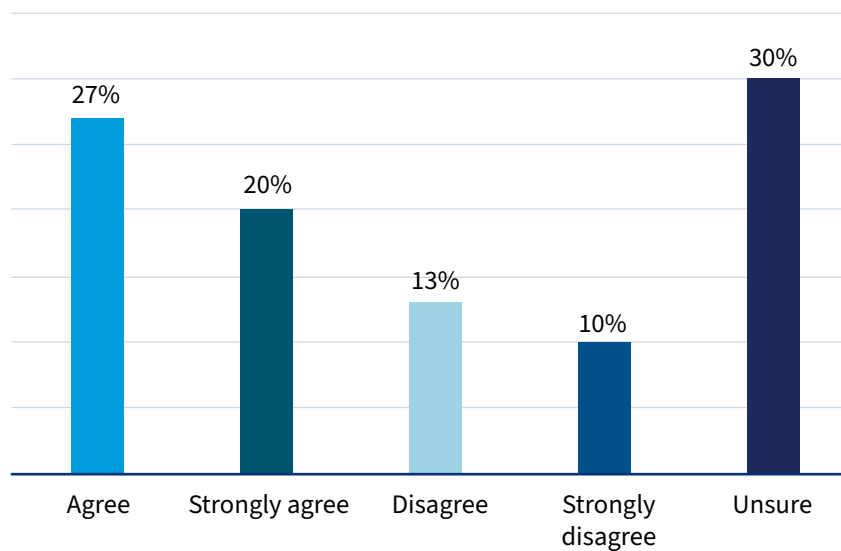
- 47% of respondents agreed that there has been an increase in the wellbeing and standard of living for Aboriginal peoples in NSW, while 23% disagreed, and 30% remained unsure.

Figure 11: Do you believe OCHRE is working in the best interests of First Nations people?



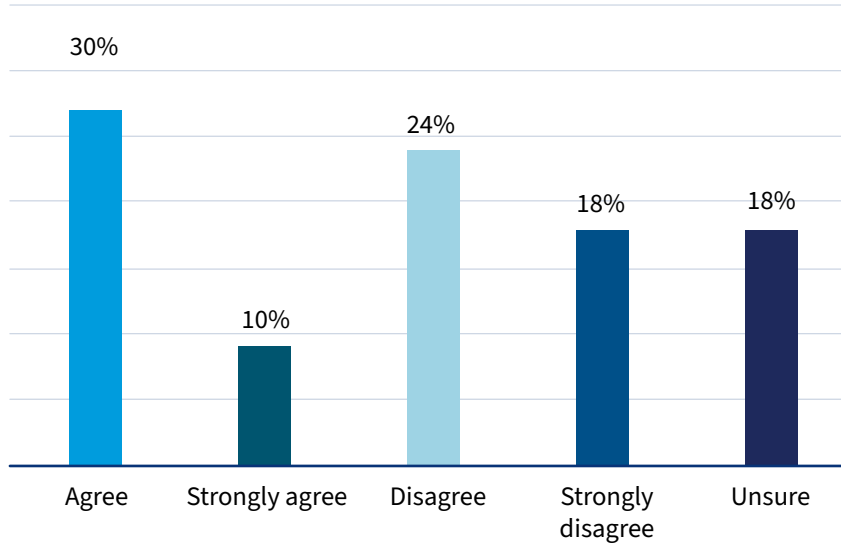
- Only 40% of respondents agreed that OCHRE is coordinated effectively across all NSW Government Departments, compared to 42% who disagreed.

Figure 12: Has OCHRE increased the wellbeing and standard of living for First Nations people in NSW?



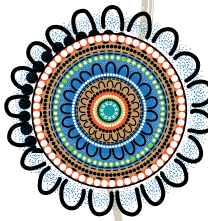
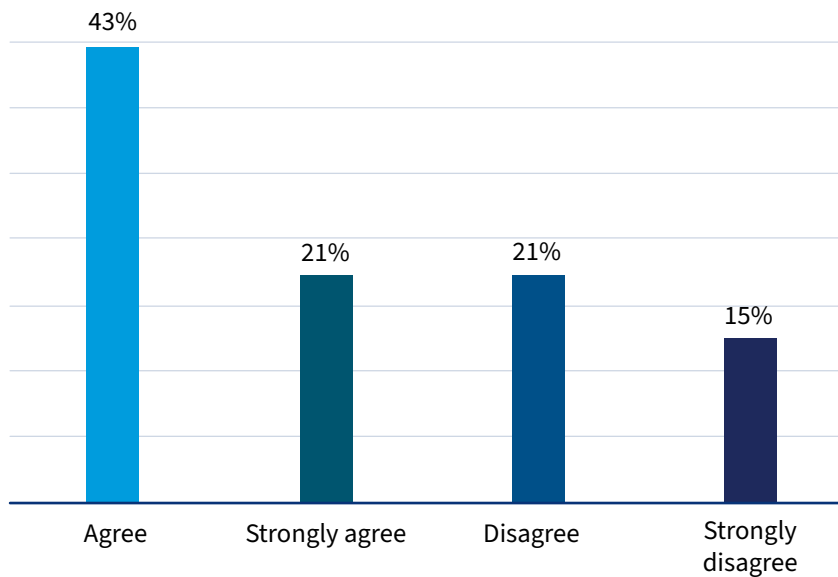
- 64% of respondents believed that OCHRE is appropriately resourced to achieve its goals.

Figure 13: OCHRE is coordinated effectively across all NSW Government Departments



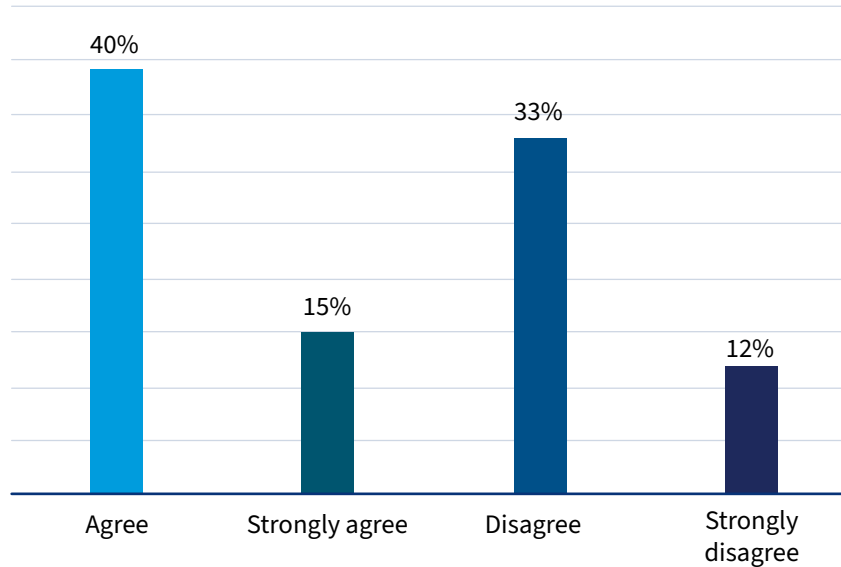
- 55% of respondents believed they have the appropriate resources to do their job, while 45% do not.

Figure 14: The OCHRE initiative I support is appropriately resourced to achieve its goals



- 87% of respondents believed that the OCHRE initiative they are working on is achieving its intended outcomes.

Figure 15: I have the appropriate resources to do my job



- 87% of respondents were satisfied with the NSW Government’s efforts to ensure accountability and integrity in its decision-making processes under OCHRE.

Overall, these responses show that NSW Government stakeholders hold a mixed view of how OCHRE is being delivered, and responds to, the needs of Aboriginal people across the state. While a large number of government respondents believe in OCHRE’s goals and believe that it is working to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people, it is also clear that resourcing and interagency communication and coordination present themselves as recurring issues. Interestingly, government respondents overwhelmingly believe the NSW Government is accountable under OCHRE decision-making, which is in contrast to community members' feedback.

Further, our online forums with Government and AECG stakeholders showed there were good improvements made in Connected Communities and ALCN sites. However, while issues such as retention rates, attendance rates, and NAPLAN results have experienced some localised successes, especially for primary school students, overall data does not demonstrate dramatic improvements, particularly amongst older students.³⁶ Participants unanimously agreed one major barrier is the lack of resourcing, funding, and availability of appropriately competent staff/tutors.

We heard from community members, and particularly ARA representatives, that while the OCHRE framework is promising and there is an appetite to expand it across NSW, it is challenging to navigate the framework with a lack of clear communication from the NSW Government about the current role and importance of OCHRE.

Despite the challenges, ARAs remain committed to OCHRE, with many of them seeing it as an essential framework for advancing Aboriginal self-determination. However, there was a clear sentiment that the NSW Government must demonstrate a stronger commitment by providing the necessary resources and support to implement OCHRE effectively and strategically.

³⁶ NSW Department of Education, A culturally responsive evaluation of the expanded Connected Communities Strategy (2024) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/educational-data/cese/2024-connected-communities-evaluation.pdf>.



4. OCHRE – Current Issues

4.1 Overview

Having regard to the analysis in the proceeding Chapter concerning the progress and status of the OCHRE initiatives, our stakeholder surveys, community engagement, and review of literature (including relevant evaluations), we summarise the current issues affecting OCHRE by reference to the following themes.

Our analysis revealed that all four active initiatives—Local Decision Making, Connected Communities, Opportunity Hubs, and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests—were affected by challenges rooted across all themes.

1. Unclear Government communication and commitment, including disconnect with Closing the Gap (CtG)

- The status and future of OCHRE as the overarching plan for Aboriginal Affairs has, since 2020, been unclear, including a number of initiatives being dormant.
- Overlap between OCHRE and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CtG)³⁷ has created some confusion and competition for resources.
- OCHRE's community-led approach contrasts with and can clash – but also has unrealised potential to support – the more ‘top-down’ targets approach of the CtG framework.³⁸
- Regional community members feel that the pre-eminence of peak bodies in CtG can detract or distract from local and place-based voices, programs, and solutions.

³⁷ Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020) https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/ctg-national-agreement_apr-21-comm-infra-targets-updated-24-august-2022_0.pdf.

³⁸ Australian National University, *The First Decade of Closing the Gap: What Went Wrong?* (2021) https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2024/11/CAEPR_Discussion_Paper_298_2021.pdf.

2. Governance Challenges

- Aboriginal communities feel there is insufficient power-sharing and decision-making authority.
- Government agencies continue to have a "business-as-usual" mentality undermining systemic transformation.
- Government agencies have a lack of accountability and follow-through on commitments, leading to mistrust among Aboriginal communities.

3. Resource Allocation

- Majority of funding is directed to government providers (60.7%), with only 30.9% allocated to Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), limiting community empowerment.³⁹
- Short-term funding cycles disrupt long-term planning and capacity building.
- ARAs reported under-resourced operations, further exacerbated by delays in funding disbursement.

4. Cultural Competency

- There are widespread cultural competency gaps in government agencies which hinders effective engagement with Aboriginal communities.
- There are concerns over non-local providers and mainstream service models that are failing to respect Aboriginal knowledge systems and values.

5. Implementation Shortcomings

- Initiatives like LDM and Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests are hindered by inconsistent funding, lack of coordination, and insufficient community involvement.
- Limited statistical improvements in key areas such as retention and attendance rates despite some localised successes.

4.2 Unclear Government communication and commitment, including disconnect with Closing the Gap

4.2.1 Confusing Government communications

Through the course of our review, we heard from many stakeholders that the NSW Government's communication around the OCHRE Plan is inconsistent and confusing.

Part of this confusion stems from a lack of clarity or consistency in describing what OCHRE is – it has variably been referred to by the NSW Government and OCHRE lead agencies as a plan, strategy, framework, set of principles, and set of initiatives.

It is notable that in recent years, OCHRE initiatives deviate from its intended whole-of-government approach. We found initiatives operate independently of each other which sees them being run and evaluated on their own. There is, for example, no mention of OCHRE at all in the Department of Education's recent Connected Communities evaluation.⁴⁰ That, and the fact that there are now two unrelated programs called 'Connected Communities' run by the NSW Government through different departments, and the lack of communication around inactive initiatives – all contribute to the confusing status, planning, and reporting landscape around OCHRE.

³⁹ NSW Treasury, *NSW Indigenous Expenditure Report 2023-24 (2024)* 46 https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2023-24-nsw-indigenous-expenditure-report-202405_v2.pdf.

⁴⁰ NSW Department of Education, *A culturally responsive evaluation of the expanded Connected Communities Strategy (2024)* <https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/about-us/educational-data/cese/2024-connected-communities-evaluation.pdf>.

Further, the NSW Minister for Education announced in September 2024 a stand-alone commitment to continuing Connected Communities for an additional 10 years. No other OCHRE initiative has the equivalent NSW Government clarity and commitment.⁴¹

4.2.2 Confusion around the status and effect of the OCHRE Practice Principles 2021–2024

In 2021, AANSW prepared draft ‘OCHRE Practice Principles’ and commissioned a review of them by UTS’s Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research.⁴²

While this work has the potential to be a valuable contribution to the implementation of OCHRE, it was published in 2024 on AANSW’s website with little context as to how these principles are to be utilised across the OCHRE initiatives and across the whole of government. The online publication, with no formal announcement or implementation plan, has served to add to the confusion around what OCHRE is or is not, and without further context does not clarify where OCHRE is at in its development.

The foreword written by the Deputy Secretary of AANSW states the motivation for the research was to:

‘...help reset the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and government as diverse equals, so that it is respectful, healing and productive of healthy futures for Aboriginal peoples in NSW.’⁴³ and;

‘...the relationship between government and Aboriginal peoples would benefit from a clearer alignment with an agreed vision statement and set of goals and values shared by both parties’⁴⁴

The **OCHRE Practice Principles Reset (2021–2023)** conceptualised a framework grounded in **Aboriginal standpoints**, redefining the relationship between Aboriginal peoples and the NSW Government. AANSW described the reset as the opportunity to strengthen a **whole-of-government approach**, embedding the **OCHRE Practice Principles** across all levels of government to ensure consistency, accountability, and a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination. However, the Principles are yet to be adopted by the NSW Government.

The researchers positioned the refreshed OCHRE Practice Principles as not to be limited to a single department or agency; instead, they are intended to provide a unified framework for all NSW Government entities.⁴⁵

As of May 2024, these principles have been available on the AANSW website, which we take to mean that they have the recognition and endorsement of the NSW Government. However, specific details regarding their formal adoption or integration into government policies and practices are not explicitly stated.

4.2.3 OCHRE and Closing the Gap

This report focuses on OCHRE. It is not about the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CtG) and how it is utilised in NSW. That said, our engagement revealed significant stakeholder concerns and confusion of OCHRE’s role in an Aboriginal policy landscape currently dominated by CtG.

41 NSW Department of Education, *Connected Communities* (Webpage) <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/connected-communities/connected-communities-strategy#Ministerial3>.

42 UTS Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, *OCHRE Literature Review Practice Principles (2023)* <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-05/OCHRE%20Literature%20Review%20-%20Practice%20Principles%20Report%2C%20accessible.pdf>.

43 UTS Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, *OCHRE Literature Review Practice Principles (2023)* <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-05/OCHRE%20Literature%20Review%20-%20Practice%20Principles%20Report%2C%20accessible.pdf>.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

However, it is important to note there is some overlap in terms of OCHRE's outcomes and the CtG outcomes. We heard from community members a desire for CtG to be more like OCHRE in that it is strengths-based in its approach:

“The language of OCHRE, championed by Minister Dominello, was about moving from disadvantage to advantage. Yet, the current focus remains heavily centred on deficit-based language. If OCHRE is to fulfil its vision, there must be a fundamental shift toward empowerment and advancement, not merely tracking ‘gaps.’” – Community Member

While OCHRE and CtG both aim to address the inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, they are inherently different frameworks. Importantly, the institutions (NCARA and NSW CAPO) and frameworks (OCHRE and CtG) in NSW overlap, sometimes in ways that are complementary, and sometimes in ways that are not aligned.

These views identify points of tension arising from the operation and interaction of these frameworks, including:

- **Competition for Attention and Resources:** Community members told us that OCHRE and CtG are sometimes perceived as competing for government attention and resources. Many ARAs feel that the NSW Government has consequently not been focused on OCHRE for several years.
- **Policy Inflexibility:** The inflexibility of existing government policies can hinder the negotiation of Accord schedules under OCHRE and obstruct the achievement of its reform goals. This inflexibility is particularly problematic when other NSW policies clash with the intentions of OCHRE. For instance, the Department of Education’s adherence to the CtG framework and its existing partnership with the AECG sometimes prevented it from fully embracing the LDM commitments.
- **Conflicting Priorities:** Although LDM outcomes often contribute to CtG targets, previous evaluations⁴⁶ caution against inflexibly aligning Accord-making processes with the CtG framework. This is because LDM prioritises bottom-up, community-led agendas, while CtG tends to operate on a sectoral basis, potentially overlooking the holistic needs of communities.

4.3 Governance and Decision Making

Governance and accountability are key points of concern for stakeholders, and community members feel there is inadequate government accountability when it comes to the delivery of the OCHRE Plan.

“A plan is simply that, a Plan. It lacks the independence and accountability mechanisms to ensure progress. The lack of intersections between Government commitments also enables inconsistent outputs that haven't achieved the desired outcomes. Busy for the sake of being busy. No real change for the community unless you are directly employed by the plan or an LDM.” - Community Survey Respondent

Community members expressed the need for stronger accountability mechanisms to ensure the NSW Government is genuinely committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal communities and delivering on their promises.

“Some Departments have work to do in fulfilling their agreements to work in partnership. There needs to be more accountability to make real change.” - Community Member

Most (73%) respondents in our Government Survey (who were all government employees) were either satisfied or somewhat satisfied with the NSW Government’s efforts to ensure accountability in its decision-making processes under OCHRE. However, this result is at odds with most community members we engaged with, who called for

⁴⁶ Australian National University, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2 (2023)* 1 <https://caep.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/preliminary-findings-ochre-local-decision-making-evaluation-stage-2>.

greater transparency and reporting on the progress and outcomes of government programs aimed at supporting Aboriginal communities.

We heard from many Aboriginal community members and stakeholders that the governance arrangements around the relationships between the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities needs to improve. Aboriginal people and organisations told us they often feel they are not respected, listened to, or prioritised. Aboriginal people and organisations feel like they cannot have self-determined lives or programs because they are unable to gain the power and resources necessary to control their situation or engage in prominent decision-making capacities. Aboriginal people and organisations often feel like their lives and programs are determined by non-Indigenous people who do not understand their culture, life experience, or aspirations.

Stakeholders also noted that the NSW Treaty⁴⁷ process might play a role in determining what governance structures are used or set up to develop agreements and relationships between Aboriginal people and the NSW Government. It is unclear at the time of writing this report how the NSW Treaty process will interface with OCHRE.

4.4 Partnerships, Collaboration, and Coordination

Transparent, respectful, and genuine partnerships are critical to the success of OCHRE. This includes the way the NSW Government works with Aboriginal communities and organisations, and the power-sharing that shapes these relationship dynamics.

It also includes the relationship between NSW Government departments, who should ideally be working together to drive and deliver outcomes for Aboriginal peoples. Inter-agency coordination is critical to success.

“For OCHRE to really work, we need health and education services to work together seamlessly. When they don’t, it can create gaps or duplications, which means students and families miss out on the full support they need.” - Government Survey respondent

The OCHRE Plan identified building capacity with the NSW Government as essential to working in true partnership with communities. However, community members asserted that the Government’s focus remains on bureaucratic targets, with minimal attention paid to the transformative potential of LDM as a mechanism for change.

Embedded within partnerships is also a shared commitment to healing, which is an outcome that takes a sustained amount of time, respect, transparency, and a willingness to learn.

“They [the Government] must take the time to build the relationships and hear the truth telling and help us heal along that journey. They need to deeply listen to the truth and our own way of moving forward.” - Community Member

“Building genuine trust with our local Aboriginal communities is crucial but takes time, especially given past experiences with government programs. It’s all about making sure families know their voices are heard and that we’re working on their priorities.” - Government Survey Respondent

Some community members also believe that the Government’s recent focus on Closing the Gap has multiple impacts on relationship building, and that the Government is instead focusing on building relationships with peak organisations rather than ARAs.

“The original emphasis on place-based solutions has been sidelined by a growing

⁴⁷ NSW Government, *Consulting Aboriginal people on desire for a treaty process* (Webpage) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/nsw-government/treaty-consultation>.

reliance on consultations with state and national peak bodies such as [NSW] CAPO. This shift is unacceptable. State-level consultations cannot substitute for direct, place-based engagement that reflects the specific needs and aspirations of our ... community. The government's reliance on peaks undermines its commitment to LDM and weakens genuine partnerships at the local level.” - ARA Stakeholder

In many of our recent engagements with Aboriginal organisations, we were told to look at the feedback provided, and the recommendations previously made, in the past when agencies and evaluators, and even our office, have engaged with them. It is clear to us that many of the same issues are still present. The same recommendations are still relevant. Communities are frustrated, they feel they offer the same feedback and suggestions for change. Some community members see a lack of progress as evidence of the NSW Government not taking their partnership responsibilities with Aboriginal people seriously. Communities want to know how the NSW Government has or will respond to the myriad of past evaluations and review findings and recommendations.

“We urgently need clarity on how the findings from this and previous evaluations will drive structural reform. Communities like ours need more than rhetorical commitments - we demand transparency about how these outcomes will lead to actionable change.”
- ARA Stakeholder

Community members noted that the lack of open dialogue with Aboriginal communities regarding their previous engagement has many impacts. Firstly, the lack of transparency about how their data is being used erodes the trust and relationship between government agencies and Aboriginal people. Secondly, Aboriginal people who become fatigued from constant requests for engagement can become disillusioned with government agencies and refuse to participate in engagement activities, which means that valuable data and lived experiences are not being captured. Thirdly, “mining” Aboriginal communities for their data when these communities have not been given the support, structures, and resources to collect their own data impacts their ability to make informed decisions about the needs, aspirations, successes, and challenges of their own communities.

4.5 Funding and resource allocation

Many ARAs have reported not receiving crucial funding since 2022, which has severely limited their capacity to operate effectively. This has highlighted the need for more streamlined and responsive funding mechanisms that allow ARAs to work without constant resource instability.

“We don't have long-term solutions unless we have long-term funding.”
- Community Member

A lack of reliable funding and sufficient resources has presented itself as a recurring theme across all streams of engagement. The pattern of underfunding, understaffing, and insufficient resources to both Aboriginal communities and NSW Government agencies delivering the OCHRE Plan has echoed throughout our engagement with community members and continues to be a pervasive issue hindering positive outcomes for Aboriginal people.

As identified through our survey responses, 63% of government employees believed that OCHRE is appropriately resourced to achieve its goals. This contrasts with the number of community members and stakeholders who raised concerns about ongoing and inadequate funding.

“We're often working with tight budgets and not enough staff. This stretches us thin and can hold back some of the programs we want to roll out fully.” - Government Survey Respondent in relation to the LCN Initiative

Inadequate funding and resources also create onerous workloads for people already delivering initiatives. We heard

recurring feedback about people doing excessive amounts of unpaid work, and in some cases, volunteering their time to perform important work for their communities. ARAs also are often under-resourced, relying heavily on volunteerism and lacking the capacity to effectively participate in LDM activities. There is also inadequate funding to implement initiatives agreed upon in LDM Accords. This underfunding hinders the realisation of commitments and undermines the effectiveness of the LDM process.

We also heard from ARAs that there has not been enough long-term funding for communities to invest in capacity building. Short-term funding has kept ARAs, and their community groups and associations caught in grant-seeking cycles with limited and unpredictable resources. It is too hard to build capacity to plan, implement, and sustain progress. Further, short-term funding also creates a competitive landscape for Aboriginal organisations, with a risk of pitting them against each other.

“OCHRE promised long-term, sustainable change, but this has not been reflected in funding commitments. Short-term funding cycles actively undermine our ability to build the capacity needed for parity at the negotiating table.” – Community member

Community members told us that they want the NSW Government to fund ARAs for a minimum of five years at a time, with future funding to be agreed and secured at least one year prior to a funding agreement ending. This will provide the necessary certainty to enable them to invest in people and operations that can generate the capacity to deliver on community aspirations.

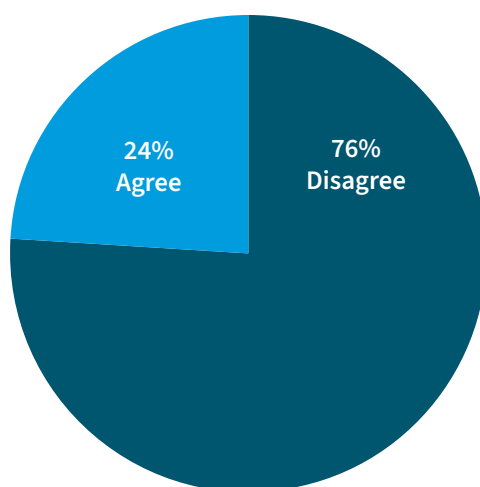
Community members also told us that multi-year funding arrangements would provide stability and certainty for Aboriginal communities to focus on the actual delivery of programs and services, rather than being distracted by concerns and negotiations about future funding.

4.6 Cultural Capability

Cultural capability is a continuum, extending from basic awareness to proactive actions that create culturally safe experiences, environments, and programs.

In our Community Survey, respondents overwhelmingly (76%) disagreed when asked if OCHRE supported improved cultural capability outcomes in NSW.

Figure 17: Community survey question: OCHRE supports improved cultural capability outcomes in NSW



Stakeholders highlighted that one of the most significant challenges in both building cultural capability and implementing the OCHRE Plan is the lack of coordination between government agencies. Although there are several OCHRE initiatives happening across different departments, they often operate in silos, which prevents the holistic,

place-based, Aboriginal-led approach that OCHRE is supposed to represent.⁴⁸ Most stakeholders (including NSW Government employees) agreed that the Government needs better inter-agency collaboration and leadership in order to effectively deliver the OCHRE Plan.

We heard that cultural competency and capability has always been a large component of the success of the CC and ALCN initiatives. However, community members felt that there was an overall lack of consideration given to the importance of having culturally sound and supported tutors to provide lessons.

“If we want our children to learn language and culture authentically, then we must be willing to pay the best people for the job. Without this we run the risk of not having language and culture taught authentically.” - Community Member

The issue here is twofold. Firstly, underpaying people for providing specialist Aboriginal cultural expertise shows a deep lack of cultural capability and competency from the government and risks devaluing such Aboriginal knowledge and services. Secondly, inadequate remuneration can result in adverse outcomes: appropriate and highly skilled Aboriginal people might forgo work for more sustainable employment options, and/or culturally inappropriate and under skilled people may step into these roles, which may cause more harm than good, such as decreased student participation in the initiative.

Community members also raised concerns about CC schools engaging with Aboriginal culture in inappropriate ways and enacting cultural appropriation when the community is not engaged in program delivery. In one region, community members voiced issues with schools teaching Aboriginal language and art without properly teaching Aboriginal principles and values. These principles and values would guide non-Indigenous people in how they engage with Aboriginal language, art and culture in an appropriate way. Embedding cultural capability into programs such as CC requires a holistic and robust approach to Aboriginal culture, where respect for Aboriginal knowledge and experiences are weaved into all facets of program planning and delivery.

“It made me feel terrible hearing a non-Indigenous person using our language inappropriately.” - Community Member

Cultural capability also remains a key area of concern for ARAs, who expressed the sentiment that many government departments fail to engage meaningfully with the cultural and social needs of Aboriginal communities. ARAs particularly stressed the need for Elders and cultural leaders to be involved in decision-making processes from the outset.

Community members also take issue with the fact that government contracts are awarded to non-local service providers, reducing opportunities for local Aboriginal organisations to build capacity and deliver services tailored to their specific community’s needs. We also heard concerns over the cultural appropriateness of services being delivered by external providers, and the tension arising from non-local organisations delivering services in place of local Aboriginal organisations and expertise. ■



48 NSW Government, *OCHRE Practice Principles Summary Sheet* (May 2024) <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-05/OCHRE%20Practice%20Principles%20Summary%20Sheet.pdf>.



5. Recommendations and next steps

5.1 A re-commitment to OCHRE

A re-commitment to the OCHRE Plan is necessary, particularly given:

- The process by which the OCHRE Plan was developed with extensive consultation and co-design
- The Plan's commitment to local Aboriginal empowerment and ongoing co-design
- The structures and capacity that has been built, particularly through the LDM initiative
- The continued belief in its outcomes and potential within both Government agencies and Aboriginal communities, and;
- Community disappointment and fatigue built over decades of ephemeral and abandoned strategies and programs.

It is our assessment that OCHRE should be continued, and that what is required is a re-commitment to its core ethos and aims.

There remains, in particular, strong community support for the promise of the OCHRE Plan, and a broad consensus that its foundational beliefs and aims remain relevant.

Accordingly, the core recommendation in this report is:

Core Recommendation:

That the NSW Government both articulate and demonstrate a renewed commitment to OCHRE, and to its continued status and future as the Aboriginal affairs plan for NSW.

In the following section we propose practical recommendations for how that re-commitment can be made.

■ Recommendation 1: Public statement of commitment

Clarify, by public statement (or via the NSW Government's response to this Report), the current status of, progress on, and intentions with respect to each of the existing OCHRE initiatives, including:

- a. Healing
- b. Solutions Brokerage
- c. Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework.

Timing: as soon as possible.

■ Recommendation 2: Expedite implementation of LDM Accords

Prioritise and expedite the finalisation of Accords with each Aboriginal Regional Alliance, including:

- a. Allocating dedicated resources to support the negotiation and development process.
- b. Deploying personnel to facilitate timely finalisation of the Accords.
- c. Tracking progress regularly to ensure milestones are met.
- d. Addressing barriers to finalisation promptly with targeted solutions.
- e. Taking the lessons from evaluations of previous Accord finalisation processes.
- f. Demonstrating, through the Accord development process, the government's commitment to meaningful collaboration and achieving shared goals with Aboriginal communities.
- g. Highlighting finalised Accords in annual reports.

Timing: Signed Accords with all eligible ARAs by no later than 1 February 2026.

■ Recommendation 3: Give OCHRE a legislative footing

Following consultation, including with The NSW Coalition of Peak Aboriginal Organisations (NSW CAPO); The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA); Aboriginal regional alliances (ARAs), introduce a Bill to give OCHRE a legislative foundation.

Provisions of the Bill that could be considered include the following:

- a. Endorse, by way of preamble and/or the objects of the legislation, the foundational beliefs and aims of the OCHRE Plan.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Aboriginal Affairs NSW, *UCHRE Plan (2013) 5* <https://www.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/noindex/2024-06/UCHRE%20plan.pdf>.

- b. Provide that there is to be a plan for Aboriginal affairs in NSW known as OCHRE, and note that the current version of the plan is that adopted in 2013.
- c. Provide that the Plan is to make provision for each of its 7 initiatives.
- d. Establish a mechanism to add or vary initiatives, including mandating that this occur only following community consultation and co-design principles.
- e. Provide for the appointment of a senior Aboriginal executive with clear authority to lead, co-ordinate and report on the delivery of OCHRE. (This could mean requiring the Secretary of the Premier's Department to appoint a Deputy Secretary to the role of CEO of Aboriginal Affairs (NSW) under the *Government Sector Employment Act 2013 (NSW)* (as happens in practice now), or by providing for a new role to be established and styled as a kind of 'Coordinator General').
- f. Provide for the establishment of an OCHRE inter-agency committee convened by that co-ordinating executive.
- g. Impose a duty on heads of agencies to provide information to, and cooperate with, that coordinating executive in respect of OCHRE.
- h. Authorise agencies to implement solution brokerage solutions (including the expenditure or provision of any necessary funding, which is to be taken as appropriated to the necessary extent) as recommended by the coordinating executive.
- i. Authorise and impose a duty on agencies to apply the OCHRE Practice Principles, which could be prescribed in Regulation.
- j. Require the coordination executive to collate from relevant agencies, prepare and publish a consolidated annual report.
- k. Provide for the evaluation of OCHRE initiatives, including both implementation and outcome evaluations.

Timing: Legislation introduced by 1 July 2026, noting community consultation required.

Comments regarding the proposal for legislation:

The legislative status of OCHRE is currently limited and insecure. OCHRE is mentioned only in the *Ombudsman Act*, where it is referred to as an Aboriginal program that the Ombudsman is to monitor and assess. However, that provision provides no legislative 'backing' for OCHRE. It does not require that OCHRE necessarily continue, or that it be implemented, either at all or in any particular way. In some respects, the current legislation is anomalous: while Parliament has determined that OCHRE is to be monitored by the Ombudsman – which would seem to suggest a Parliamentary expectation that, at the very least, OCHRE continues to exist – it provides no legal status or requirement for OCHRE to exist. The legislation also 'locks in' our monitoring role with respect to OCHRE by reference to the 'program launched by the Government in April 2013', with no apparent contemplation that the plan may develop over time.

We acknowledge that legislation provides no guarantee of enduring status or sustainability. Legislation can be repealed and there are many examples where this has happened, even where, at the time of enactment, indications were that the legislation would be enduring.

However, enacting legislation, particularly in circumstances where there has historically been strong multiparty support, sends a clear message to community. It also means that, in future, OCHRE or its initiatives will not be able to be quietly abandoned or ignored, at least not without Parliamentary, and therefore publicly-transparent, explanations and accountability.

For the following reasons, therefore, we suggest that legislation to establish a statutory foundation for OCHRE could be an important step in implementing our recommendation to articulate and demonstrate the State's re-commitment to OCHRE:

1. Certainty and stability

- Legislation would safeguard OCHRE from transitory changes in political priorities or government leadership, better supporting long-term sustainability.

2. Strengthen Accountability

- Codifying OCHRE's aims, Practice Principles and processes would mandate, and enable government agencies to be held more clearly accountable, for implementing initiatives, meeting commitments, and delivering measurable outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

3. Promote Transparency

- Legislation would provide for clear reporting and monitoring mechanisms, enabling Aboriginal communities and the public to track progress and resource allocation.

4. Empower Aboriginal Communities

- Embedding OCHRE in law could provide an opportunity to formalise the operation of LDM in particular, including to legally recognise the role of Aboriginal Regional Alliances in administrative decision-making and resource allocation, reinforcing principles of self-determination and community-led governance.

5. Provide Clear Governance Structures

- Legislation would clarify roles, responsibilities, powers and processes within Government, reducing role and authority confusion, the potential proliferation of competing or overlapping programs, and improving coordination across government agencies.

6. Align with Broader Aboriginal Outcomes and Goals

- Legislating OCHRE demonstrates the NSW Government's commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and could provide a broader framework for alignment across all NSW Aboriginal policies and frameworks.

7. Support Long-Term Resource Allocation

- The certainty and stability of a legislative framework would support consistent and equitable funding for OCHRE initiatives, limiting the risk of interruptions due to administrative or political changes.

8. Build Trust and Credibility

- Perhaps most importantly, formalising OCHRE's principles in law would send a strong message to Aboriginal communities about Parliamentary commitment, fostering trust and collaboration.

If legislation is to be introduced to support OCHRE, however, it is important that the legislation itself, and the process by which it is developed, demonstrates a commitment to the OCHRE principles, including that there be close and collaborative engagement with Aboriginal communities.

Also, while legislation can establish a stronger, more stable and clearer authorising environment for OCHRE, care should be taken to ensure that it does not unduly reduce flexibility or adaptability, including the potential to add or improve initiatives over time, as the evidence base continues to build. Likewise, care should be taken to ensure that OCHRE remains responsive to local differences, issues and perspectives. For example, while LDM Accord-making processes could be provided for generally in the legislation, it would be important that these are not overly prescriptive in terms of outcomes and that they do not seek to impose a one-size-fits all institutional model.

■ Recommendation 4: Mandate transparent OCHRE reporting frameworks

Mandate transparent OCHRE Reporting Frameworks. This should include:

- a. The publication of an annual performance report (ideally prepared and consolidated centrally with information and co-operation obtained from relevant agencies). These should detail the progress, inputs (including resources allocated), activities, outputs and outcomes of the OCHRE initiatives.⁵⁰
- b. The publication of annual OCHRE expenditure reports. These could be prepared separately by NSW Treasury, or consolidated in the annual performance report above. They would include the detailed budgets and resource allocation plans for OCHRE initiatives, and outline how funds are distributed and spent.

All annual reporting should incorporate best practices for Indigenous Data Sovereignty, ensuring respect for, and alignment with, its principles.

Timing: Reporting should begin with the 2025–2026 financial year, with the first reports due by 1 October 2026.

■ Recommendation 5: Adopt multi-year funding commitments

Implement multi-year funding commitments, which would mean:

- a. Moving away from short-term funding cycles by introducing minimum five-year funding agreements for OCHRE initiatives, including, but not limited to, the funding provided to ARAs for LDM, to ensure stability and allow long-term planning.
- b. Funding agreements reviewed, and renewed if eligible, at least 12 months before existing agreements expire to avoid service disruptions.

Timing: Five-year funding agreements should begin by 1 July 2026.

■ Recommendation 6: Clarify and strengthen the role of Aboriginal-led, central Government and inter-agency coordination

Clarify and strengthen the role and authority of the head of AANSW to perform the role of ‘Coordinator General’ for Aboriginal programs, including OCHRE (or establish and appoint a new role of Aboriginal Coordinator General for that purpose). The role should:

- a. Remain Aboriginal-identified, of sufficient seniority (at least SES Band 3), and centrally located in the Premier’s Department.
- b. Oversee, coordinate, and where necessary, direct OCHRE’s implementation across government departments and agencies.
- c. Align NSW Closing the Gap initiatives.
- d. Convene a formal interagency coordination task force, at appropriately senior levels and with a regular (at least monthly) meeting schedule to streamline communication and collaboration among government agencies implementing OCHRE initiatives
- e. Set and monitor performance metrics of identified inter-agency coordination issues within six months.

⁵⁰ In our 2019 OCHRE report we noted that The NSW Government had not accepted the proposal that Aboriginal Affairs be moved to DPC, as it held the view that the whole-of-government authority it envisaged was being achieved through other means including Aboriginal Affairs having lead responsibility for OCHRE and solution brokerage. However, in subsequent changes to administrative arrangements made after the state election in March 2019, Aboriginal Affairs moved to DPC from 1 July 2019.

Timing: Pending legislation, clarify by way of Premier’s Memorandum or Premier’s Department Circular the role and authority of the head of AANSW. Formally establish the inter-agency committee by 30 June 2025 with its first meeting no later than 31 July 2025.

Timing: Appointment by 1 July 2025.

Comments on the proposal for clarified central leadership and coordination

There has, since before OCHRE was even established, been a strong current in Aboriginal communities calling for the establishment of some kind of Coordinator General role in Government to lead and coordinate government agencies, and to work with and champion Aboriginal communities, in the delivery of Aboriginal programs. We continue to hear this suggestion from Aboriginal people frequently.

When OCHRE was established the Minister explained:

“Initially, to implement the accountability framework, OCHRE proposed a new position of Coordinator General for Aboriginal Affairs and a new and independent Aboriginal Council. Aboriginal Affairs consulted with the Aboriginal representatives on the taskforce, a broad range of New South Wales government agencies, the New South Wales Auditor-General and the NSW Ombudsman to further develop the coordinator general proposal, including legislation to underpin the position. In the course of the consultation, Aboriginal community leaders suggested that, on the issue of accountability, it would be more effective to appoint an Aboriginal Ombudsman to monitor and assess specified initiatives and programs relating to Aboriginal affairs. It was decided that the deputy ombudsman idea was a stronger model for a number of reasons including, importantly, that it utilises an existing structure and process— the Office of the NSW Ombudsman—and that the Ombudsman has proven capacity and an excellent reputation amongst Aboriginal people in our State.”⁵¹

While the monitoring and assessment role of the NSW Ombudsman has been and continues to be an important element of the accountability framework for OCHRE, the NSW Ombudsman does not and cannot fulfil all of the functions envisaged of a ‘Coordinator General’. It may be that ‘on the issue of accountability’ the Ombudsman is ‘a stronger model’, but a Coordinator General role includes functions that go beyond accountability.

The active coordination role that was originally envisaged to be undertaken by the Secretaries Board (previously known as the Senior Management Council) never occurred, and the cross-cluster ‘Senior Executive Council’, which Aboriginal Affairs sought to establish in 2013–2014, fell into disuse.⁵²

If the head of AANSW is to perform the roles of coordination (or if a new role is to be established for that purpose) they will need clear authority within Government to do so. Suggested responsibilities include:

- **Strategic Oversight:** Align government actions with OCHRE objectives, monitor progress, and address systemic barriers.
- **Cross-Agency Coordination:** Facilitate collaboration across agencies, Aboriginal Regional Alliances, and other key stakeholders.
- **Accountability and Reporting:** Develop monitoring frameworks, publish progress reports, and update Parliament.
- **Advocacy:** Ensure Aboriginal perspectives and priorities are central in OCHRE initiatives and delivery.
- **Problem-Solving:** Address implementation challenges and resolve inter-agency conflicts.

⁵¹ Mr Victor Dominello’s second reading of the *Ombudsman Amendment (Aboriginal Programs) Bill 2014* (18 March 2014) <https://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au/bill/files/3170/2R%20Ombudsman.pdf>.

⁵² NSW Ombudsman, *OCHRE Review Report* (2019) 34–35 https://www.ombo.nsw.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/138060/OCHRE-Report_October-2019.pdf.

- **Resource Management:** Oversee funding allocation and financial accountability.
- **Capacity Building:** Support ARAs and Aboriginal organisations in building institutional development, leading programs and decision-making.
- **Policy Alignment:** Ensure OCHRE integrates, and is coordinated with, NSW Closing Gap and other legislated policies and programs.

■ Recommendation 7: Act on outstanding evaluation recommendations and commit to ongoing schedule of implementation and outcome evaluations

The NSW Government should respond to the findings of all evaluations of OCHRE initiatives by assigning **AANSW** to:

- Coordinate and create a centralised repository where all OCHRE evaluation reports, findings, and recommendations are collated.
- Assign a team to systematically review the evaluations and extract key findings, including:
 - Identify overlapping recommendations and prioritise them based on their potential impact, feasibility, and alignment with the current OCHRE goals.
 - Create a comprehensive action plan that addresses key findings and outlines clear steps for implementation.
 - Assign responsibilities for each action item to specific OCHRE lead agencies or teams within the NSW Government.
 - Set deadlines and define measurable outcomes to track progress.
 - Incorporate lessons learned from each round of evaluations for OCHRE initiative development, and future OCHRE planning.

Timing: Implementation Plan finalised by 1 July 2025.

Comments on the proposal for ongoing evaluation and outcome reporting

As part of committing to transparent communication and reporting of evaluation outcomes, the NSW Government should communicate openly with the public and stakeholders about the steps taken to address the recommendations of past evaluations by:

- Publishing summaries of evaluation recommendations and action plans on AANSW's website.
- Issuing periodic reports detailing the progress made, challenges faced, and adjustments made in response to evaluations.
- Establishing formal mechanisms to assess the impact of recommendations and use these insights to continuously improve OCHRE initiative delivery.

The NSW Government should also commit to culturally sensitive reporting by:

- Ensuring that evaluation findings are shared transparently with Aboriginal communities in culturally appropriate formats, such as community meetings, storytelling, or visual reports.
- Focusing on accessible language and ensuring that reporting respects Aboriginal ways of knowing and communicating aligned with the OCHRE Practice Principles.

The NSW Government should also make a long-term commitment to sustained outcomes by ensuring that evaluations are not treated as one-off activities, but rather as part of an ongoing process of continuous improvement.

■ Recommendation 8: Formally adopt and implement the OCHRE Practice Principles

Mandate all NSW Government agencies adopt the 2023 OCHRE Practice Principles to improve cultural competency and collaboration, including:

- a. AANSW developing a whole-of-government framework outlining how to integrate the OCHRE Principles into policies, programs, and operations.
- b. Each agency is required to create an OCHRE Practice Principles Plan detailing how the principles will be applied within their operations. The plans are to be created by 1 December 2026.
- c. AANSW facilitating regular inter-agency forums to share best practices and resolve challenges in implementing the OCHRE Practice Principles.
- d. The Premier's Department will design and implement a comprehensive whole-of-government cultural competency training strategy, aligned with the OCHRE Practice Principles and customised to the specific roles and functions of each agency.

Timing:

1. Whole-of-government cultural competency training strategy to be completed within 12 months.
2. AANSW to develop templates for agency OCHRE Practice Principles plans by 1 December 2025.
3. All agencies to have and publish OCHRE Practice Principles plans by 1 December 2026.

■ Recommendation 9: Clarify the relationship between OCHRE and other strategies and programs including Closing the Gap

Clarify where OCHRE 'fits' with respect to other strategies and programs, including:

- a. Defining the relationship between Closing the Gap and OCHRE, including by AANSW developing and publishing a clear framework outlining how the two approaches complement each other, emphasising their distinct yet interconnected roles. The framework should also:
 - i) Clarify Aboriginal community representative roles, responsibilities, and areas of focus for ARAs/NCARA, NSW CAPO, and other stakeholders to reduce role confusion, duplication and a sense of competition.
 - ii) Use NSW Closing the Gap's priorities as benchmarks and include co-designed culturally relevant metrics with Aboriginal communities.
 - iii) Bring consistency to the reporting (of both resources and performance) in respect of OCHRE and CtG.
 - iv) Provide for the alignment of funding and resourcing decisions to reduce duplication, to increase transparency as to which particular purposes funds are to be directed, and to facilitate meaningful evaluation of individual initiatives.
 - v) Clarify, and where appropriate, consolidate by bringing under the umbrella of OCHRE, other NSW Government initiatives including.

Timing: Publish the framework by 30 June 2025.

Comment on the suggestion to clarify the alignment of OCHRE and Closing the Gap

It is tempting, and from time to time has been suggested to us by government officials, that the OCHRE initiatives might be considered merely part of the way (the 'how') that government can choose to deliver the outcome (gap-closing) targets set by CtG (the 'what'). To some extent this approach appears to be reflected in the current NSW Government CtG Implementation Plan, which for example refers to 'Connected Communities' (without referencing 'OCHRE') as an action taken in pursuant of CtG outcomes.

However, this approach risks debasing the distinct role and objectives of OCHRE, undermining its effectiveness in delivering a ‘strength-based’ vision for broad-scale Aboriginal empowerment and a transformation of the relationship between Government and Aboriginal communities.

That said, it is apparent that there is a complementarity between CtG and OCHRE, such that the current competitive tensions that have been allowed to develop, largely as a result of Government’s failure to consider, clearly articulate and bring into alignment their respective relationship and roles, is neither essential nor constructive.

In seeking to bring the two into alignment, however, we highlight and echo the cautionary comments made in the preliminary report of the stage 2 evaluation of Local Decision Making, noting that these comments can readily be applied to OCHRE more broadly:

“Aboriginal Regional Alliances/Assemblies and their members potentially have an important part to play in actualising the priorities around Closing the Gap on the ground. This is not currently being done in any synergistic or coordinated way. Aboriginal Regional Alliances/Assemblies are attempting to change service delivery under LDM in communities and regions, while a separate structure representing the Aboriginal community-controlled sector at the state level directs the NSW Government’s formal roadmap to achieve meaningful reform under CTG.

Caution is needed with respect to attempts to align the LDM initiative with the architecture for implementing CTG in NSW. The work of Aboriginal Regional Alliances/Assemblies is not, and should not be, restricted to realising the CTG targets and priorities reforms. Part of the value of these governance bodies lies in their relative autonomy and their ability to conduct their own planning based on local and regional priorities rather than priorities set at the national or state levels. There is a risk that attempts by the NSW Government and its agencies to strategically align CTG and LDM will limit the scope of LDM and Accords to becoming a means of implementing CTG reforms. There is already evidence that Accord Schedules risk being the point at which NSW Government agencies silo their commitments to sector initiatives as opposed to LDM regional priorities. While both government agencies and the CTG initiative tend to work on a sectoral basis, the strength of LDM is to focus on the needs of community as a whole, and to push for reforms at a whole-of-government level. Too close an alignment between LDM and CTG risks losing LDM’s flexible and cross-sectoral focus, and its community driven approach to priority setting and planning.

This does not mean that Accord Schedules should not address broader socioeconomic targets in LDM regions. However, LDM is designed to be a vehicle for the voices of community and regions to reach NSW Government agencies through bottom-up, Indigenous-led regional governance structures. So, in keeping with the principles of LDM, those Schedules should stay true to community-led and self-determined agendas and progress regional priorities.”⁵³

■ Recommendation 10. Response and implementation

We ask that the Government provide, within **no later than three months of tabling** (28 April 2025), a response to this report and its core recommendation, together with a plan for the actions that will be taken to effect the recommendation, including whether and when each of the steps recommended above will be taken.

We ask that AANSW provide us with a final report on the outcomes of the implementation of the recommendations and publish this report on its website no later than 1 December 2025. ■

⁵³ ANU Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, *Preliminary Findings of the OCHRE Local Decision Making Evaluation Stage 2 (2023)*, 14 230308_Preliminary_Findings_of_OCHRE_Local_Decision_Making_Evaluation_Stage_2.pdf.



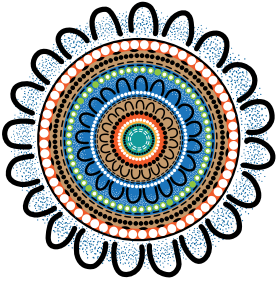
6. Appendices

Appendix A – Terminology

Table 13: Report terminology

Term	Definition
AANSW	Aboriginal Affairs NSW, which is located in the Premier's Department
ALCN	Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest, an OCHRE initiative
ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations
AECG	NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc.
AEPF	Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework, an OCHRE initiative
ARA	Aboriginal Regional Alliance
CAPO	See NSW CAPO

CC	Connected Communities, an OCHRE initiative
CtG	Closing the Gap
DPC	(former) The Department of Premier and Cabinet (inclusive of Aboriginal Affairs between 1 July 2019 to 30 June 2023). The Premier's Department and The Cabinet Office commenced operations on 1 July 2023 as separate but complementary agencies, replacing DPC.
Hubs	Opportunity Hubs
KPI	Key performance indicator
LALC	Local Aboriginal Land Council
LDM	Local Decision Making, an OCHRE initiative
MPRA	Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly
NAPLAN	National Assessment Programme – Literacy and Numeracy
NCARA	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances
NGO	Non-government organisation
NSWALC	NSW Aboriginal Lands Council
NSW CAPO	NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations
OCHRE	The NSW Government Plan for Aboriginal affairs: education, employment & accountability (OCHRE: Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment). Published in April 2013.
RADA	Regional Aboriginal Development Alliance
RMRA	Riverina-Murray Regional Alliance
SRG	School Reference Group
TRRA	Three Rivers Regional Assembly
TSNSW	Training Services NSW



Appendix B – Methodology

We used a culturally responsive methodology for this report. Central to this process has been amplifying the voices of Aboriginal communities and stakeholders, reflecting their perspectives and priorities throughout the assessment.

■ Data Collection

To capture a holistic view of OCHRE in 2024, we used the following methods:

Primary Data Collection

Engagements with stakeholders and communities were designed to elicit in-depth, firsthand insights:

- **In-Person Meetings:** Conducted 39 meetings with 136 participants, 101 of whom identified as Aboriginal.
- **Virtual Forums and Meetings:** Facilitated 31 online sessions, engaging 79 participants, including 58 Aboriginal representatives.
- **Community Surveys:** Distributed to 305 individuals,⁵⁴ with 144 responses received (93% from Aboriginal participants).
- **Government Surveys:** Shared with 230 government stakeholders, resulting in 46 responses (43% from Aboriginal participants).
- **Written Submissions:** Received four detailed submissions from Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Secondary Data Collection

A detailed desktop review was conducted to contextualise observations and supplement primary data, including:

- Analysing reports, publications, and evaluations from NSW Government agencies.
- Reviewing OCHRE's Practice Principles and their application in 2024.
- Examining related policy frameworks, including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CtG)⁵⁵ and NSW Treasury's First Nations Investment Framework.⁵⁶

■ Strengths and Limitations

Strengths

- Direct engagement with Aboriginal communities ensured their voices and experiences were central to our report.

⁵⁴ Survey participants were invited from the NSW Ombudsman's Aboriginal Programs Branch established list of OCHRE contacts, including Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, and NSW Aboriginal Land Councils. Our contacts were encouraged to share the survey with community members with experience in various OCHRE initiatives.

⁵⁵ Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (July 2020) https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-09/ctg-national-agreement_apr-21-comm-infra-targets-updated-24-august-2022_0.pdf.

⁵⁶ NSW Treasury, *First Nations Investment Framework* (2024) <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/documents/tpg24-28-first-nations-investment-framework>.

- A mixed-methods approach provided a robust and nuanced understanding of OCHRE's implementation.
- Cultural sensitivity and adherence to Aboriginal protocols strengthened the validity and community relevance of our learnings.

Limitations

- Logistical challenges limited the capacity of the review team to reach some regions in NSW.
- The lack of updated government data, including the absence of Aboriginal Affairs NSW's OCHRE annual reports since 2018, has hindered the ability to conduct a comprehensive trend analysis over time.
- This report does not undertake an evaluation of OCHRE initiatives outcomes.

■ Ethical Considerations

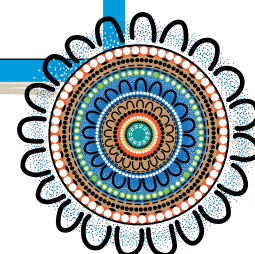
In conducting the field work for this report we adhered to ethical standards, including:

- Obtaining informed consent from all participants.
- Ensuring anonymity and confidentiality for survey respondents and interviewees.
- Upholding Indigenous data sovereignty principles to respect cultural protocols and ensure that findings benefitted the communities involved.
- Cultural safety served as a cornerstone of the information gathering process, and a variety of measures were undertaken to respect cultural protocols.

Summary of Data Collection

Table 14: Summary of data collection

Term	Definition	Participants	Aboriginal Participants
In-person Meetings	39 meetings with 136 participants	136	101 (74%)
Virtual Meetings & Forums	31 virtual engagements with 79 participants	79	58 (73%)
Community Survey	Sent to 305 people with 144 responses (30% response rate)	144	134 (93%)
Government Survey	Sent to 230 people with 46 responses (20% response rate)	46	20 (43%)
Written Submissions	4 written submissions from Aboriginal community-controlled organizations	N/A	100% Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations
Desktop Review	13 evaluations, reports, reviews, and agency publications	N/A	N/A
Total		405	159 (74%)





OCHRE Report 2019 Recommendations

Legend:

- = Was accepted and implemented*
- ◉ = Was accepted and partly implemented
- = Was accepted but not implemented
- = Was not accepted

*Some recommended actions were both accepted and implemented but are not currently being done for example the relevant OCHRE initiative has ceased to be active.








Table 15: OCHRE Report 2019 recommendations

Recommendation	Response
<p>The evaluation of OCHRE</p> <p>The Department of Premier and Cabinet, and Treasury should jointly develop, in collaboration with OCHRE implementing agencies, an overarching outcomes and reporting framework for all OCHRE initiatives.</p>	
<p>Healing</p> <p>2. In partnership with the Healing Foundation, the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should develop a state-wide healing framework, having regard to the outcomes of the regional healing forums held in 2017-2018 and the observations and recommendations in this chapter. In developing the strategy, consideration should be given to:</p> <p>A. funding the Healing Foundation to support initiatives that provide education to Aboriginal communities about trauma, its impacts, and strategies and services that can assist with healing and recovery [This recommendation was not supported as the Healing Fund is a Commonwealth initiative]</p> <p>B. supporting the Aboriginal community-controlled organisation sector to build its capacity to develop models of trauma-informed practice and deliver more services to Aboriginal people, including by enhancing the role and funding of the Education Centre Against Violence to support this work</p> <p>C. articulating relevant whole-of-government commitments and clarifying the obligation on public sector agencies to adopt healing and trauma informed approaches</p> <p>D. developing a comprehensive cultural capabilities framework for NSW public sector employees, which applies from recruitment onwards and is supported by ongoing training and professional development delivered by the Education Centre Against Violence</p> <p>E. ensuring that place-based approaches to service planning and delivery address the impact of intergenerational trauma, including through the establishment of healing places</p> <p>F. supporting ongoing opportunities for truth-telling by and as determined by Aboriginal communities</p> <p>G. building the evidence base for healing by investing in the evaluation, co-designed with Aboriginal people, of relevant programs, policies and initiatives, and in doing so, giving consideration to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. the cost-benefit analysis of the Murri School healing program by Deloitte Economics ii. the Healing Foundation’s forthcoming discussion paper on policy and practice issues related to addressing intergenerational trauma iii. closer monitoring of the delivery and impact of healing and wellbeing initiatives in Connected Communities schools (Chapter 9) Communities schools (Chapter 9) iv. information contained in the online healing portal hosted by HealthInfoNet. 	

Recommendation	Response
<p>3. The Department of Premier and Cabinet should work with Aboriginal Affairs and relevant Regional Leadership Executive groups to develop local plans for assisting ‘high-need’ communities to implement the healing priorities they identified at the regional healing forums in 2017 and 2018.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests</p> <p>4. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. consider establishing a salary structure for Nest Teachers which recognises the different levels of experience and skill brought to the role by individuals</p> <p>B. clarify its policy on the teaching of Aboriginal languages to students ‘on Country’ and provide appropriate guidance about this issue in the Language and Culture Nests Guidelines</p> <p>C. consider what opportunities could be leveraged to promote a collaborative approach by the government and non-government education sectors to Aboriginal language teaching in schools and pre-schools</p> <p>D. consider, in consultation with the NSW AECG Inc. and Department of Communities and Justice (Youth Justice), what resources and infrastructure are needed to allow the North West Wiradjuri and Gumbaynggirr Nests to engage with juvenile justice centres in their communities, if the relevant Local Reference Groups consider this a priority.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>5. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should ensure that language teaching workforce capacity is considered in the strategic plan developed to guide the work of the new Aboriginal Languages Trust.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>6. The Department of Education should work with the NSW AECG Inc. to:</p> <p>A. ensure that the changes to the employment of Nest Tutors, including the rationale and operational implications, are communicated to Nest stakeholders, for example, Local Reference Groups, Nest Teachers and Principals</p> <p>B. monitor whether the new employment arrangements for Nest Tutors effectively address the issues discussed in this chapter that are impacting on the language tutor workforce.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>7. The Department of Education should collaborate with the NSW AECG Inc. to:</p> <p>A. provide support for regular professional learning workshops for Nest Teachers and Tutors</p> <p>B. require schools that participate in the Nests to access the AECG’s Connecting to Country immersion program, or another appropriate cultural awareness program, and monitor compliance with this requirement.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>8. The Department of Education, in consultation with the NSW AECG Inc. and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs), should:</p> <p>A. clarify who is responsible for providing the human and financial resources needed to support a functioning and sustainable Keeping Place in each Nest and reflect this advice in the Language and Culture Nest Guidelines</p> <p>B. ensure that, as part of any future funding to extend or expand Language and Culture Nests, consideration is given to the different characteristics and preferences of communities in relation to the establishment and maintenance of Keeping Places</p> <p>C. give consideration to developing a remuneration package for Elders and other community members who provide expert endorsement of language and culture content and teachers for schools, whether in Nest locations or elsewhere.</p>	<p>●</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>9. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. ensure the Language and Culture Nest Guidelines include clear guidance about the initiative’s scope and funding for community-based (as opposed to school-based) language and culture activities, including whether Nest Teachers can be paid for these activities</p> <p>B. ensure the State-wide Steering Committee for Language and Culture Nests develops a plan for monitoring the Nests’ engagement with communities.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>10. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs), in consultation with the Department of Education and the AECG, should consider whether the Nests require additional funding/resources to meet the demand for community access to language and culture activities and if appropriate, develop a business case for consideration by the NSW Government.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>11. The Department of Education and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should:</p> <p>A. provide advice about the funding status of the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, including whether additional funding/resources will be provided in response to the capacity issues raised in the UNSW SPRC’s Stage 1 evaluation reports and this chapter</p> <p>B. ensure that prior to any expansion of Nests to other locations, an adequate assessment of community capacity, including a sufficient number of language speakers, informs the selection process – with consideration given to a staged approach to implementation if appropriate</p> <p>C. consider alternative strategies for supporting the revitalisation of Aboriginal languages in locations where the establishment of a Nest is not currently viable.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>12. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. review the operational needs of the Aboriginal Education and Communities Directorate in relation to effectively leading and monitoring the Nest initiative and if necessary, take steps to enhance the Aboriginal Education and Communities Directorate’s capacity</p> <p>B. in consultation with the AECG, ensure that the State-wide Steering Committee includes appropriate representation by key stakeholders, including (but not limited to) Aboriginal Affairs, NESAs and TAFE and identify ways of strengthening the linkages between the Steering Committee, Local Reference Groups and other local Nest stakeholders</p> <p>C. review and enhance the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest Guidelines, having regard to the observations in this chapter about the need to provide greater clarity about a range of issues</p> <p>D. in consultation with the NSW AECG Inc. and having regard to success measures identified by Local Reference Groups, establish a set of performance indicators for monitoring and reporting on the Nest initiative’s progress and a systematic plan for collecting the required quantitative and qualitative data needed to facilitate this.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>13. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should:</p> <p>A. consider the merits of preparing a business case for consideration of additional funding of language and culture centres and other Aboriginal community organisations that provide practical support for the implementation of Nests</p> <p>B. b. liaise with the Commonwealth Department of Communication and Arts to identify ways of ensuring ensure closer alignment and coordination of key Commonwealth and state government initiatives to support Aboriginal language revitalisation.</p>	<p>•</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>14. The Department of Education should ensure Nest Teachers are supported to undertake their role as members of the Languages Trust Advisory Group.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>Local Decision Making</p> <p>15. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs NSW) should:</p> <p>A. enhance the ‘Accord readiness’ self-assessment process by requiring each agency with responsibility for a priority area to individually confirm that issues for negotiation fall within its scope; consider and assess its readiness; and seek feedback on this assessment from the relevant Alliance</p> <p>B. work with Alliances that have not yet struck Accords to identify and address their capacity building needs; and ensure that Accords include details about governance mechanisms and capacity building support.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>16. The Department of Premier and Cabinet should ensure that:</p> <p>A. agencies improve their readiness for outstanding Accord negotiations, and have robust internal governance arrangements in place to effectively negotiate Accords in a timely fashion</p> <p>B. the authorising environment established to negotiate Accords (governance arrangements driven by senior executives, including the Executive Sponsor role) is maintained to drive Accord delivery and monitor results.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>17. The Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Treasury should, in partnership with the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA), examine how service needs, capacity and outcomes can be mapped at a local community level within LDM regions, and implement the agreed approach as a matter of priority. This work should involve examining approaches such as the Maranguka Just Reinvestment project in Bourke and the Inner Sydney Empowered Communities joint decision-making process for federal funding.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>18. The Department of Premier and Cabinet and NSW Treasury should:</p> <p>A. establish mechanisms to enable Alliances to share decision-making with agencies about regional service planning and commissioning once Accords are struck</p> <p>B. ensure agencies work jointly with community leaders to ‘co-design’ key performance indicators for service contracts – taking account of the observations in this chapter.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>19. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs NSW) should:</p> <p>A. progress the development of enhanced data collection and analytics systems to better capture outcomes from Accords and the Local Decision Making initiative as a whole</p> <p>B. ensure that line agencies are capturing and tracking outcomes data in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> I. government and funded service delivery at the regional level in the portfolios/sectors that Alliances identify as important II. how Alliances are being engaged for advice on policies and services, and how policies and services have changed (or not) as a result <p>C. provide regular reports on the outcomes achieved through Local Decision Making to Alliances to their local communities and the NSW Parliament.</p>	<p>⊙</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>20. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs NSW) should:</p> <p>A. develop a business case for adequate funding for Alliances and the Local Decision Making initiative over the full forward estimates, taking into account comparative programs and experience to date in estimating the required investment</p> <p>B. provide specific guidance and relevant practical examples to Regional Alliances about the NSW Government’s expectations relating to probity standards for individual representatives</p>	
<p>21. The Department of Premier and Cabinet should consider renaming the Local Decision Making initiative to reduce confusion about the level at which decision-making with Aboriginal communities is intended.</p>	
<p>22. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs NSW) should ensure that other mechanisms are in place and promoted to Aboriginal community leaders to engage directly with the NSW Government about local matters that are not suitable to be addressed through Accords or the LDM initiative, and receive an appropriate response.</p>	
<p>23. The Department of Premier and Cabinet and relevant agencies should expedite work to implement service redesign, devolved budgetary control, and supporting legislation, having regard to the observations in Chapter 5.</p>	
<p>OCHRE Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework</p>	
<p>24. The NSW Public Service Commission should consider, as part of implementing the next sector-wide Aboriginal Employment Strategy:</p> <p>A. providing guidance to agencies about encouraging funded services to increase their employment of Aboriginal staff</p> <p>B. supporting agencies to target Aboriginal employment strategies to locations with high unemployment and/or strong demand from Aboriginal people for government services but a shortage of staff to deliver them</p> <p>C. working with the Office of Local Government and sector representatives to support the adoption of Aboriginal employment strategies by local government.</p>	
<p>25. NSW Treasury, in coordinating the implementation of the NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy (APP) and Aboriginal Participation in Construction (APIC) policy, should:</p> <p>A. effectively track Aboriginal participation outcomes</p> <p>B. provide clear guidance to agencies, including practical case studies, to encourage consistent application of the policies</p> <p>C. examine the use of incentives and consequences by agencies where targets for Aboriginal participation are exceeded or not met by contractors, and promote these mechanisms to other agencies where compliance or outcomes are poor</p> <p>D. with relevant agencies (including Education), assess what capability support is required to facilitate the increased participation of Aboriginal people and businesses in jobs and supplier contracts generated through the APP and APIC</p> <p>E. ensure agencies publish and adhere to all aspects of their Aboriginal Participation Strategies required under the APP</p> <p>F. with relevant federal government agencies, strengthen the coordination of Aboriginal procurement policies in NSW, including by exploring mechanisms for sharing data about the performance of contractors in meeting relevant targets</p> <p>G. develop, with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) and relevant Aboriginal stakeholders, a consistent and robust process to confirm Aboriginal identity for the application of the Aboriginal procurement policies, and ensure its implementation by agencies and contractors.</p>	

Recommendation	Response
<p>26. Treasury should develop targets and strategies to achieve the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework commitment to address barriers to Aboriginal employment in NSW. B. provide specific guidance and relevant practical examples to Regional Alliances about the NSW Government's expectations relating to probity standards for individual representatives</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>27. The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should include in the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework the targets within the NSW Aboriginal Procurement Policy; targets for achieving Aboriginal employment and supplier contract outcomes through regional Industry Based Agreements; and targets within the NSW public sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy.</p> <p>B. provide specific guidance and relevant practical examples to Regional Alliances about the NSW Government's expectations relating to probity standards for individual representatives</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>28. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should work with human services agencies and Aboriginal leaders to identify additional strategies to support Aboriginal people to complete apprenticeships and traineeships.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>29. The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) and the NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should develop and include in the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework:</p> <p>A. a target for improving the employment outcomes for Aboriginal apprentices and trainees, and related strategies to achieve this, including stronger partnerships and collaborative planning with Aboriginal leaders, the vocational education and training sector, and industry representatives to target training to future industry need</p> <p>B. a target for improving attendance at quality early childhood education, and related strategies to achieve this, particularly in remote areas and high needs locations.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>30. The NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment should develop with Aboriginal stakeholders, including Local Aboriginal Land Councils, periodic reports to the Economic Development Committee about:</p> <p>A. the implementation and outcomes of strategies within regional and district plans to promote Aboriginal economic aspirations</p> <p>B. the periodic reports referred to in recommendations should feed into the related reporting by the Economic Development Committee in connection with the development of the Economic Blueprint.</p>	<p>Discontinued</p>
<p>31. The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should, in consultation with Treasury, clarify the Aboriginal enterprises target in the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework, and ensure appropriate strategies are in place to achieve the outcomes sought through the provision of support services.</p>	<p>⦿</p>
<p>32. NSW Treasury should:</p> <p>A. develop and publish an annual 'state of the NSW Aboriginal business sector' profile, based on relevant data and advice from the NSW Indigenous Chamber of Commerce and other sector representatives</p> <p>B. ensure business advisory programs and services are culturally competent and well connected to their Aboriginal-specific counterparts, and informed by regular advice from Aboriginal business sector representatives</p> <p>C. track the NSW Aboriginal business sector's support needs, capacity and diversity, and develop and implement supports to meet the needs of the NSW Aboriginal business sector where existing state/federal government and/or market options are insufficient.</p>	<p>⦿</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>33. The NSW Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) and NSW Department of Communities and Justice should:</p> <p>A. retain the social housing target in the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework, and test new strategies in partnership with Aboriginal stakeholders to enhance the number of positive exits</p> <p>B. consider adding a target focused on supporting Aboriginal home ownership beyond the social housing context in the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>34. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) and the NSW Department of Communities and Justice (Corrections) should:</p> <p>A. pilot a model to connect Aboriginal inmates to pre-release targeted skills training and post-release wrap-around support accompanying employment on government infrastructure projects</p> <p>B. expand the approach if positive outcomes result from the pilot.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>35. NSW Treasury and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should ensure the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Outcomes Framework captures all relevant outcome domains are actively used by agencies to drive policy development, commissioning and funding decisions</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>36. NSW Treasury, as chair of the Economic Development Committee, should request that the committee:</p> <p>A. examine the effectiveness of the strategies being used by implementing agencies to pursue the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework targets, as well as the outcomes being achieved</p> <p>B. consider how each Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework target and related strategies are fostering economic inclusion for specific cohorts including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Aboriginal people with disability ii. current and former detainees/inmates in prison iii. people with low levels of financial literacy and financially excluded communities <p>C. directs implementing agencies to better address the needs of these cohorts where necessary; and develops new Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework targets focused on the economic inclusion of these and other vulnerable cohorts where appropriate</p> <p>D. establishes a process of regular review for the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>35. NSW Treasury and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should ensure the Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Outcomes Framework captures all relevant outcome domains are actively used by agencies to drive policy development, commissioning and funding decisions</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>Solution Brokerage</p> <p>38. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should develop and implement a targeted and multifaceted communication strategy for Solution Brokerage that includes:</p> <p>A. engaging with Aboriginal community governance structures (including Regional Alliances), to encourage Aboriginal communities to bring forward issues for Solution Brokerage</p> <p>B. promoting Solution Brokerage to key local, state and federal government agencies to encourage awareness of, and support for future engagement with the initiative.</p>	<p>●</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>39. Having regard to the observations in this chapter, the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should amend the Solution Brokerage Framework to strengthen the initiative’s governance arrangements by including the following:</p> <p>A. more meaningful selection criteria for Solution Brokerage which address the significance and impact of issues on Aboriginal communities, and can accommodate flexible responses</p> <p>B. the feedback (including timeframes) and alternative resolution process that will apply when a nominated issue is assessed as not suitable for Solution Brokerage</p> <p>C. a requirement that when an issue is declared for Solution Brokerage, in consultation with the relevant line agency, it will nominate an appropriately senior officer in charge, together with a suitably senior back up delegate, from within that agency</p> <p>D. clear requirements for detailed reporting against approved milestones and to a suitably authoritative body (such as the Secretaries Board).</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>40. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should seek global funding for Solution Brokerage to enable resources to be provided to implementing agencies when they are responsible for leading a Solution Brokerage project and cannot meet resourcing requirements from within their own or another agency’s existing budget allocations.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>41. The Department of Premier and Cabinet should require lead agencies to:</p> <p>A. provide Solution Brokerage response plans, which include the composition of project teams and sustainability measures, to the Secretaries Board for approval</p> <p>B. require agencies to report on the implementation of individual Solution Brokerage projects, at significant milestones, to the Secretaries Board</p> <p>C. jointly declare issues, with Aboriginal Affairs, for Solution Brokerage</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>42. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should:</p> <p>A. seek advice from NCARA and/or individual Regional Alliances about where Solution Brokerage can be used to resolve multi-agency issues and how Regional Alliances can best contribute to Solution Brokerage projects</p> <p>B. monitor and report to the Secretaries Board on the overall progress of Solution Brokerage, including analysing and communicating to agencies the critical factors for success, and incorporate these into guidance documents</p> <p>C. enhance public reporting about the implementation of, and outcomes achieved through, Solution Brokerage, including through providing communities with regular feedback about performance and outcomes relating to projects involving their community</p> <p>D. ensure that Solution Brokerage is included in the ongoing independent evaluation of OCHRE.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>40. The Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs) should seek global funding for Solution Brokerage to enable resources to be provided to implementing agencies when they are responsible for leading a Solution Brokerage project and cannot meet resourcing requirements from within their own or another agency’s existing budget allocations.</p>	<p>•</p>





Recommendation	Response
<p>Opportunity Hubs</p> <p>43. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should:</p> <p>A. use the strategies suggested in section 8.3.1 to encourage government and non-government schools to take up the services provided by the new Liverpool Hub (and any further Hubs established in future)</p> <p>B. continue to work with Hubs to support the establishment of local governance models that involve government and non-government schools and regional executives from both sectors in service mapping and planning</p> <p>C. provide guidance to Hubs and schools about the factors it will consider when assessing the merits of any request to include additional schools or locations within a Hub’s Service Area.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>44. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should:</p> <p>A. monitor compliance with the requirement for Hub providers to coordinate services, provide links and avoid duplication of existing programs, particularly in relation to culture and wellbeing activities</p> <p>B. promptly finalise arrangements to ensure that Hubs and government and non-government schools in Hub Service Areas are consistently developing coordinated learning and career plans for students engaged with a Hub, and that data about these plans and related outcomes are captured and monitored accordingly</p> <p>C. continue to ensure that Hubs can work with Aboriginal young people who have left school without finishing their studies, as well as those who have completed their studies in the past 12 months, and closely monitor the requirement for Hubs to focus their efforts on emphasising outcomes for these young people</p> <p>D. support Hubs to focus on servicing highly disengaged Aboriginal students and other students with complex needs by ensuring that at a local/regional level, appropriate arrangements, including partnerships with schools, OOHC agencies, juvenile justice centres and juvenile justice community officers are in place to help Hubs to identify, access and provide these students with coordinated services.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>45. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should:</p> <p>A. ensure Hubs are engaging with a range of Aboriginal, community and government organisations in their Service Areas to increase their knowledge of relevant local services and resources available to Aboriginal students</p> <p>B. actively support and monitor Hubs’ efforts to build partnerships with local employers, training and further education providers to help generate or identify employment, training and work experience opportunities for Aboriginal students</p> <p>C. ensure that data about the number and outcomes of each Hub’s partnerships with employers, training and further education providers is collected, monitored and reported on, including data about the number of opportunities ‘banked’ by each Hub and the number of ‘banked’ opportunities resulting in outcomes for young people.</p>	<p>●</p>



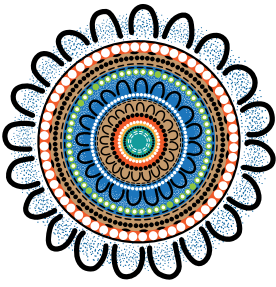
Recommendation	Response
<p>46. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should:</p> <p>A. in partnership with Infrastructure NSW, provide Hubs with ongoing strategic support to effectively leverage regional and state-wide infrastructure investments and industry initiatives that can provide employment and training opportunities for Aboriginal students</p> <p>B. support Hubs by brokering introductions to key industry associations and stakeholders; exploring and brokering options for corporate partnerships; and connecting Hubs with Aboriginal employment initiatives developed by NSW and federal public sector agencies</p> <p>C. ensure that Hubs are actively identifying and helping Aboriginal school leavers to apply for Jobs of Tomorrow scholarships, and that associated data including the outcomes of applications are collected, monitored and reported.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p>
<p>47. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should:</p> <p>A. establish governance arrangements that bring together appropriately senior representatives from the relevant business units of the Department of Education, non government school sector, the Department of Industry, Planning and Environment, and the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs), with Hub providers, to collectively plan and drive a targeted and coordinated strategic framework</p> <p>B. establish clear escalation and resolution processes for Hubs and schools at a local and strategic level</p> <p>C. once the new strategic governance and contractual arrangements have been settled, develop, in partnership with the Department of Premier and Cabinet (Aboriginal Affairs), an overarching strategy and program guidelines for Opportunity Hubs, including (but not limited to) the contract management arrangements that will be used by the Department of Education and clear information about how Hubs' compliance with their Services Agreement will be assessed.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p>
<p>48. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should consider the substantial benefits of maintaining a decentralised approach to the contract management arrangements for Opportunity Hubs and how Education's regional structure can be utilised to facilitate this, while ensuring that clear lines of reporting to and from the regions and head office are established.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p>
<p>49. Having regard to the observations contained in Chapter 8 (especially section 8.3.5), the NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW), as part of developing its digital platform for recording data and measuring outcomes for Aboriginal training programs (including Opportunity Hubs), should:</p> <p>A. consider whether the key outcomes for Opportunity Hubs are sufficiently defined and make adjustments as required</p> <p>B. consider whether the current key performance indicators for opportunity Hubs strike the appropriate balance between Hubs providing adequate coverage of Service Areas and targeting the highest need schools and students</p> <p>C. settle baseline data to measure progress (by individual Hubs and the Hubs initiative overall) against the key performance indicators for Opportunity Hubs and the necessary arrangements to access this data</p> <p>D. settle the sources of data that will be used to monitor school engagement and post-school outcomes for students engaged with Hubs and the necessary arrangements to access this data</p> <p>E. ensure that the digital platform is simple and practical for Hubs to use and contains clear definitions of key data terms</p> <p>F. ensure that the student-level data Hubs are required to collect can be disaggregated (at a minimum) by gender and Aboriginality.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">●</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>50. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) should annually monitor the continuing appropriateness of the key performance indicators and make relevant adjustments as data trends become clearer.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>51. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW) and Aboriginal Affairs NSW should:</p> <p>A. having regard to the refreshed Closing the Gap strategy, implement the SPRC’s recommendation in relation to building long-term outcome indicators into planning and reporting for Opportunity Hubs</p> <p>B. on an annual basis, publicly report outcomes data for individual Hubs and the overall initiative in a consistent way that is aligned with the key performance indicators for Opportunity Hubs.</p>	
<p>Connected Communities</p> <p>52. The NSW Department of Education (Training Services NSW), in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs NSW, should:</p> <p>A. communicate information about successful Hub practices to other schools, particularly those participating in the Connected Communities strategy, so that these practices may be adopted more broadly</p> <p>B. as part of the OCHRE refresh process, give specific consideration to the further steps that are needed to enable Aboriginal community-controlled organisations to operate Opportunity Hubs in future.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>53. The NSW Department of Education should consider ways to develop and extend the culture of collegiate leadership that has benefited Connected Communities to reach principals of schools in other high-need Aboriginal communities, and conversely, connect other schools delivering innovative approaches that have achieved success, with Connected Communities schools to create a community of practice.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>54. The NSW Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. consider further enhancing its Rural and Remote Human Resources Strategy to offer customised incentive packages that involve enhanced support to meet the relocation and adjustment needs of the partners and children of teachers</p> <p>B. monitor the success of the Rural and Remote Human Resources Strategy, particularly in relation to which aspects of the strategy appear to lead to improved teacher retention at Connected Communities and other remote schools, and adapt it as necessary.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>55. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. identify factors contributing to particularly successful SRGs and whether and how these factors could be encouraged in other locations</p> <p>B. in consultation with the NSW AECG and school principals, promote the School Reference Group model to other schools in high-need communities with a significant Aboriginal student population</p> <p>C. consider expanding the Senior Leader/Leader Community Engagement role to other targeted schools in high-need communities with a significant Aboriginal student population, having regard to additional strategies needed to strengthen and promote school and community partnerships in these locations.</p>	<p>⊙</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>56. The NSW Department of Education should promote the use of Personalised Learning Pathways (PLPs) at Connected Communities schools and ensure that schools have quality assurance mechanisms in place to track the development of PLPs and monitor their implementation.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>57. The NSW Department of Education should consider ways to further increase the teaching of Aboriginal language and content at Connected Communities schools, having regard to the circumstances of individual schools and the professional learning needs of teachers.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>58. The NSW Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. ensure the attendance, suspension and educational outcomes of students participating in specific healing and wellbeing initiatives at Connected Communities schools is tracked to help build an evidence base for what is working well and providing ‘value for money’</p> <p>B. provide teachers at Connected Communities schools with practical, context-specific training about the impacts of trauma on children and young people; the link between trauma and challenging behaviours; and strategies for engaging effectively with students affected by trauma.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>59. The NSW Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. explore how the Instructional Leader model can be extended to all Connected Communities schools, and assess whether participating students are engaging more effectively in school and getting better results</p> <p>B. consider opportunities to support targeted research, similar to the Seeding success for Aboriginal primary students collaborative research project between the University of Western Sydney, the Department of Education and the NSW AECG, to identify strategies that promote improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal secondary students.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>60. The NSW Department of Education should continue to closely monitor NAPLAN literacy and numeracy outcomes for students at Connected Communities schools using the methods adopted by the Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation as part of its overall evaluation of Connected Communities.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>61. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. continue to strengthen Connected Communities’ focus on facilitating school-based apprenticeships and traineeships, and vocational training aligned with local opportunities</p> <p>B. liaise with Training Services NSW about the potential for expanding the Opportunity Hubs model to build the capacity of other Connected Communities schools to support students’ post-school transition.</p>	<p>⊙</p>
<p>62. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. continue to closely monitor attendance data for Connected Communities schools, including trends and variations within and between participating schools</p> <p>B. provide advice about whether it has undertaken work to review the factors contributing to improved Aboriginal student attendance rates achieved by some Connected Communities schools, and other schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments, with a view to identifying effective strategies that could be trialled elsewhere</p>	<p>⊙</p>

Recommendation	Response
<p>63. The NSW Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. review the key deliverables for the Connected Communities strategy, in consultation with the NSW AECG, having regard to the CESE’s final evaluation report and the observations in this chapter</p> <p>B. require each Connected Communities school to identify specific, measurable indicators against each deliverable, and report their progress against these indicators via existing performance monitoring processes</p> <p>C. consider extending the key deliverables to other public schools with significant numbers of Aboriginal students given how beneficial they have reportedly been for the Connected Communities Executive Principals.</p>	
<p>64. The NSW Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. identify the factors influencing the successful retention of Executive Principals at three schools and whether and how these factors might be replicated to encourage leader retention at other schools</p> <p>B. consider further options for attracting and retaining Executive Principals to Connected Communities schools, having regard to the findings and recommendations of the Independent Review of Regional, Rural and Remote Education (2018)</p> <p>C. review its capacity to recognise and reward principals of schools who are not participating in Connected Communities, but who are leading schools with substantial numbers of Aboriginal students or students who are living in low socio-economic locations, and with reference to measurable outcomes, are making a strong and sustained contribution to improving educational outcomes for these cohorts</p>	
<p>65. The Department of Education should resume publication of an annual report about Aboriginal students in NSW public schools, including data (disaggregated by grade, region and school) which shows:</p> <p>A. literacy and numeracy attainment</p> <p>B. retention rates</p> <p>C. enrolment numbers and rates</p> <p>D. attendance rates and levels</p> <p>E. suspension rates</p> <p>F. the number of students who have been suspended and the number of suspensions for each student during each year</p> <p>G. the number of students who missed 30 or more days of school each year, together with a breakdown of the reasons for their absence.</p>	
<p>66. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. consider amending the key deliverables for Connected Communities to include a specific reference to the objective of reducing exclusionary suspensions</p> <p>B. review the strategies that have been used at the Connected Communities (and comparable non-Connected Communities) schools which have achieved success in reducing suspension rates, with a view to identifying opportunities to replicate good practice in other schools</p> <p>C. as part of its current suspensions review, consider how to support schools, particularly in high-need Aboriginal communities, to provide ‘in-school’ suspension alternatives tailored to local needs</p> <p>D. actively monitor data about the suspension of students with disability at Connected Communities schools and take steps to identify and address the reasons for rate variations between schools.</p>	

<p>67. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. prioritise completing data migration work with FACS to facilitate accurate identification by Education of children and young people in out-of-home care (OOHC)</p> <p>B. having regard to models in other jurisdictions, including Victoria, consider how existing resources, including OOHC Teachers, school counsellors/psychologists and Networked Service Centres, can be better utilised to address the underlying causes of poor attendance by individual children in OOHC, in collaboration with FACS and OOHC service providers</p> <p>C. provide advice about how it will ensure the educational outcomes (including attendance and suspensions) of children and young people in OOHC are closely tracked, both locally by schools and centrally by Education.</p>	<p>•</p>
<p>68. The Department of Education should:</p> <p>A. ensure the implementation of its new Disability Strategy includes an appropriate focus on Connected Communities schools. In particular, Education should:</p> <p>i. audit the professional learning needs of teachers at Connected Communities schools in relation to trauma-informed practice and effective behaviour management, and prioritise the roll-out of appropriate training accordingly</p> <p>ii. review the adequacy of specialist support classes at Connected Communities schools.</p> <p>B. provide advice about how it will ensure the educational outcomes (including attendance and suspensions) of children and young people with disability are closely tracked, both locally by schools and centrally by Education.</p>	<p>●</p>
<p>69. The Department of Education should work closely with the Stronger Communities Investment Unit in relation to:</p> <p>A. defining a clear role for Connected Communities schools as part of the Stronger Communities Investment Unit system transformation work</p> <p>B. developing a student wellbeing data template for systemically capturing the attendance and suspension patterns for individual students, combined with data about their disability and/or OOHC status</p> <p>C. establishing governance processes at a local community level to ensure that student wellbeing information of the type described in recommendation 69(b) is systematically tracked and shared with local government agencies and NGOs in Connected Communities school locations; and analysed alongside key child protection, health, and policing data, to develop a collective picture of those vulnerable students (and their families) most in need of support</p>	<p>•</p>



Appendix D — OCHRE Community Survey

NSW Ombudsman OCHRE Survey

The NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs Branch (APB) monitors and assesses NSW Aboriginal Programs under part 3 (b) of the NSW Ombudsman Act 1974.

The NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs Branch invites all interested stakeholders to complete our survey. The views and information provided in these surveys will assist the APB in recommending improvements to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty and the NSW Parliament.

The closing date for the survey is 5 pm Tuesday 8 October 2024.

The survey may be completed anonymously or with personal identification. Only deidentified data will be used in reporting.

Demographics

This section has four quick demographic questions.

***Do you identify as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person?**

- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- Yes, both
- No
- Prefer not to say

***What age group are you?**

- 18-30
- 31-50
- 51-70
- 71-80
- 81+

***What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say

***I am employed to work directly on an OCHRE Initiative:**

- Yes
- No



OCHRE Initiatives

This section has six quick questions about the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives.

Are you aware of the NSW Government’s ‘OCHRE Plan’? *OCHRE stands for Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, and Empowerment*

- Yes
- No

Has the OCHRE Plan achieved its aims?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

From your perspective, has the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives been coordinated effectively across all NSW Government Departments?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have you been involved in, or been affected by, any OCHRE Initiatives in NSW? (please tick all that apply)?

- No, I have not been involved or affected
- Local Decision Making
- Solutions Brokerage
- Connected Communities
- Opportunity Hubs
- Language and Culture Nests

If you have been involved in initiatives, in which communities were you involved? (please list locations and initiatives in the text box below)

If you have been involved in or affected by one or more initiatives, were the initiatives successful enough in achieving positive outcomes for Aboriginal People in NSW?

Only answer for the initiatives you were involved in or affected by. Leave the others blank.

A. Local Decision Making

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

B. Solution Brokerage

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

C. Connected Communities

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

D. Opportunity Hubs

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

E. Language and Culture Nests

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Perspectives on OCHRE Outcomes in NSW

This is the second-last section. It has 15 quick multiple-choice questions.

The last section has 3 quick questions with space to provide written feedback.

Have the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives done enough to increase wellbeing and the standard of living for Aboriginal Peoples in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have the OCHRE Language and Culture Nests done enough to revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Have the OCHRE Opportunity Hubs done enough to connect young Aboriginal people to fulfilling and sustainable jobs in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Opportunity Hubs done enough to improve Aboriginal employment outcomes in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Connected Communities Initiative done enough to support Aboriginal young people to stay in school?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Connected Communities Initiative done enough to improve Aboriginal education outcomes?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal Peoples in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to empower Aboriginal Communities to make decisions around service delivery?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to support Aboriginal leaders and community capacity?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to make people delivering Aboriginal Programs more accountable for the money they spend and the outcomes they achieve?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to make people delivering Aboriginal Programs more accountable for the money they spend and the outcomes they achieve?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative done enough to deliver Aboriginal Programs in a transparent and accountable way?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Economic Prosperity Framework done enough to engage the business community in broadening opportunities for Aboriginal Peoples?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Economic Prosperity Framework done enough to create opportunities for economic empowerment for Aboriginal Peoples?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives done enough to support healing for Aboriginal Peoples in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Has the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives done enough to support cultural competency and anti-racism in NSW?

Not applicable	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

OCHRE Reflections

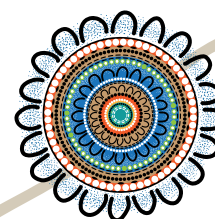
This is the final section. It contains three open questions with space for written responses.

The next page is the final page. It provides an opportunity to leave your details or further comments if you wish. Don't forget to click 'Finish'.

What aspects of the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives have worked well in supporting Aboriginal social, cultural, and economic outcomes in NSW?

What aspects of the OCHRE Plan and Initiatives have not worked in supporting Aboriginal social, cultural, and economic outcomes in NSW?

What would you suggest the NSW Government and its various departments do to improve outcomes with and for Aboriginal Peoples in NSW?



Optional Personal Identification and Further Engagement

This is the final page which allows you to leave your details for follow up if you'd like.

Either way, please click 'Finish' to complete and submit the form.

I would like to participate in further research by attending a virtual phone interview or undertake a further survey

- Yes
- No

If yes, please provide your contact details below:

First Name: _____

Last Name: _____

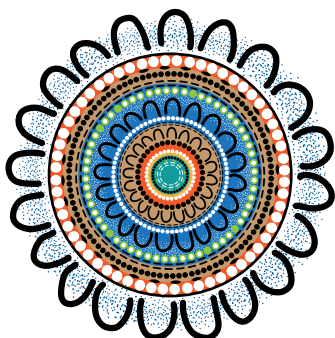
Organisation: _____

Postal Code: _____

Email: _____

Phone: _____

Please take this opportunity to leave any other comments you think might be helpful to the NSW Ombudsman - Aboriginal Programs Branch - in monitoring and assessing Aboriginal Programs in NSW and in making recommendations for improvements.



Appendix E — OCHRE Government Survey

Government Survey NSW Ombudsman OCHRE Survey

The NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs Branch (APB) monitors and assesses NSW Aboriginal Programs under Part 3B of the Ombudsman Act 1974 (NSW).

The NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs Branch invites government employees working on OCHRE to complete our survey. The views and information provided in these surveys will assist the APB in recommending improvements to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and Treaty and the NSW Parliament.

The closing date for the survey is midnight **Sunday 17th November 2024**.

The survey may be completed anonymously or with personal identification. Only deidentified data will be used in reporting.

1. My background and experience

This first section has 10 questions. There are 5 survey sections in total.

1. *Which OCHRE initiative(s) are you employed to support?

Tick all you are involved in:

- Local Decision Making
- Solutions Brokerage (including Roads to Home)
- Connected Communities
- Opportunity Hubs
- Language and Culture Nests
- Healing
- Aboriginal Economic Development Framework (including the Aboriginal Procurement Policy)
- I am not involved in OCHRE
- Other:

2. *I work for:

- Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- NSW Department of Education
- Training Services NSW
- NSW Treasury
- Other:

3. Do you identify as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person?

- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- No
- Prefer not to say

4. What age group are you?

- 18-30
- 31-50
- 51-64
- 65 and above
- Prefer not to say

What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Non-binary
- Prefer not to say
- Other:

6. What town, area, or region of NSW do you primarily work?

7. How many years have you been employed to support OCHRE?

- Less than 12 months
- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5+ years

8. Please rate your overall satisfaction with your job (1 being not at all and 10 being very satisfied).

8. Please rate your overall satisfaction with your job (1 being not at all and 10 being very satisfied).

9. Please rate your overall satisfaction with your agency/department (1 being not at all and 10 being very satisfied).

10. What specific actions have you taken to deliver OCHRE in NSW?

2. My overall reflections

This first section has 10 questions.

1. Do you believe OCHRE is working in the best interests of First Nations people?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Undecided
- Other:

2. Is your agency responsive to First Nations people's concerns and needs specific to OCHRE?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Other:

3. Are you satisfied with the NSW government's efforts to ensure accountability and integrity in its decision-making processes under OCHRE?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Other:

4. Is your agency/department open to new ideas and fresh perspectives from First Nations people?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Other:

5. Does OCHRE adequately address the needs of First Nations people regardless of their location in NSW?

- Yes
- No
- Sometimes
- Other:

6. Overall, OCHRE achieves its goals and aims.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. OCHRE is coordinated effectively across all NSW Government Departments.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. I am aware of the goals and objectives of the OCHRE Initiative I work on.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. The OCHRE initiative I support is appropriately resourced to achieve its goals.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. I have the appropriate resources to do my job.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. My perspective on OCHRE outcomes

This section has 15 questions.

1. Has OCHRE increased the wellbeing and standard of living for First Nations people in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Has the OCHRE Language and Culture Nests helped to revitalise Aboriginal languages and cultures in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Has the OCHRE Opportunity Hub connected First Nations young people to fulfilling and sustainable jobs in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Has the OCHRE Opportunity Hubs improved employment outcomes for First Nations people in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Has the OCHRE Connected Communities Initiative supported First Nations young people to stay in school?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Has the OCHRE Connected Communities Initiative improved education outcomes for First Nations young people?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

12. Has the OCHRE Economic Prosperity Framework engaged the business community in broadening opportunities for First Nations people?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative built genuine partnerships with First Nations people in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

13. Has the OCHRE Economic Prosperity Framework created opportunities for economic empowerment for First Nations people?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative empowered First Nations communities to make decisions around service delivery?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

14. Has OCHRE supported healing for First Nations people in NSW?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative empowered First Nations communities to make decisions around service delivery?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

15. Has OCHRE helped improve cultural competency and antiracism in NSW and the NSW Government?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Has the OCHRE Local Decision Making Initiative improved accountability for the money the NSW Government spends and the outcomes achieved?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

11. Has the OCHRE Local Decision-Making Initiative delivered Aboriginal Programs in a transparent and accountable way?

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Unsure
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. My cultural understanding and level of engagement

This section contains 4 questions.

1. I have completed Aboriginal Cultural awareness/ competency training.

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

2. Was the training provided in relation to your role with OCHRE?

- Yes
- No
- Unsure

3. Was the training provided in relation to your role with OCHRE?

Never	Rarely	Often	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. Rate your level of cultural competence related to First Nations people.

Never	Rarely	Often	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. My workplace cultural understanding and support

Never	Rarely	Often	Frequently
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

This section contains 4 questions.

1. I have completed Aboriginal Cultural awareness/ competency training.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. My workplace fosters a culture of learning from and with First Nations people, and views cross cultural learning as a dynamic and continuous process.

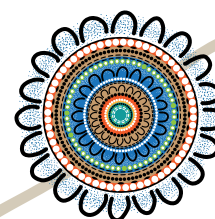
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

3. Staff members are encouraged to attend training and professional development opportunities to improve their understanding and provide effective services to First Nations people.

Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

4. How successful has the OCHRE Initiative, you have been working on, been at achieving its intended outcomes?

Very unsuccessful	Unsuccessful	Successful	Very successful
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



5. What are the main barriers to the success for the OCHRE Initiative you work on?

6. What suggestions do you have for improving the effectiveness of OCHRE?

1. I would like to provide further feedback by receiving a follow up phone call.

- Yes
- No

2. If you'd like to receive a follow-up phone call to discuss this survey further, please leave your details and we'll contact you later.

First Name:

Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

3. If you'd like to participate in any further surveys or subscribe to news and updates from the NSW

Ombudsman's Aboriginal Programs Branch, please leave your details and we'll add you to our mailing list.

(Alternatively, if you wish to remain anonymous for this survey, you can subscribe to our news using the link provided on our webpage).

First Name:

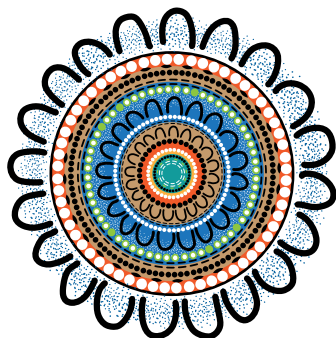
Last Name:

Email:

Phone:

Would you like to unsubscribe from any surveys being conducted by the NSW Ombudsman Aboriginal Programs Branch?

- Unsubscribe



Appendix F — OCHRE Practice Principles 2023

Aboriginal leadership

Decades of research show that respecting Aboriginal self-determination, cultural leadership and community-led design lead to the best outcomes for Aboriginal communities. Government can support this by building long-term, respectful partnerships, where Aboriginal people are resourced to share decision-making and co-design strategies and approaches right from the start. • Respecting self-determination (government takes a supportive role) • Cultural leadership • Community-led design • Shared decision-making and co-design • Respectful, long-term partnerships

Aboriginal diversity

It is important to combat the unconscious racism that Aboriginal people are all the same. There is great diversity within and between Aboriginal communities, including languages and Countries, Eldership, gender, those from the Stolen Generations, people living with disability, and Traditional Owners and historical residents. Traditionally Aboriginal accountability does not follow centralised, hierarchical structures, so government should make room for diverse Aboriginal viewpoints, not assume that one person or group represents all Aboriginal views. • Languages and Countries • Disability • Stolen Generations • Gender • Elders • Traditional Owners and historical residents

Aboriginal healing

Australia is the only Commonwealth country without a treaty with First Peoples, and we have a long way to go to acknowledge the truth about colonisation and its ongoing traumatic impacts. Government can make a start towards this by learning about and addressing systemic racism. Promoting cultural safety and a social model of care will enable caring for Country in its broadest sense (including people) and holistic community well-being. • Trauma-informed engagement • Truth-telling regarding ongoing impacts of colonisation • Social model of care, holistic wellbeing, and caring for Country • Cultural safety • Government addressing systemic racism through actions

Aboriginal excellence

At the outset of any project, presume that Aboriginal people would already have thought about and worked on similar issues. There may be particular Aboriginal groups working on these issues, and local regional groups with particular expertise. So, rather than starting from scratch, it is good to speak with these Aboriginal experts to see what government can do to support their work. Government may be able to support capacity building in various technical areas, while at the same time building its own capacity to listen and learn. • Strengths-based discourse • Supporting local leadership development • Supporting Aboriginal thriving and creativity • Learning from Aboriginal solutions and successes • Government listening and learning

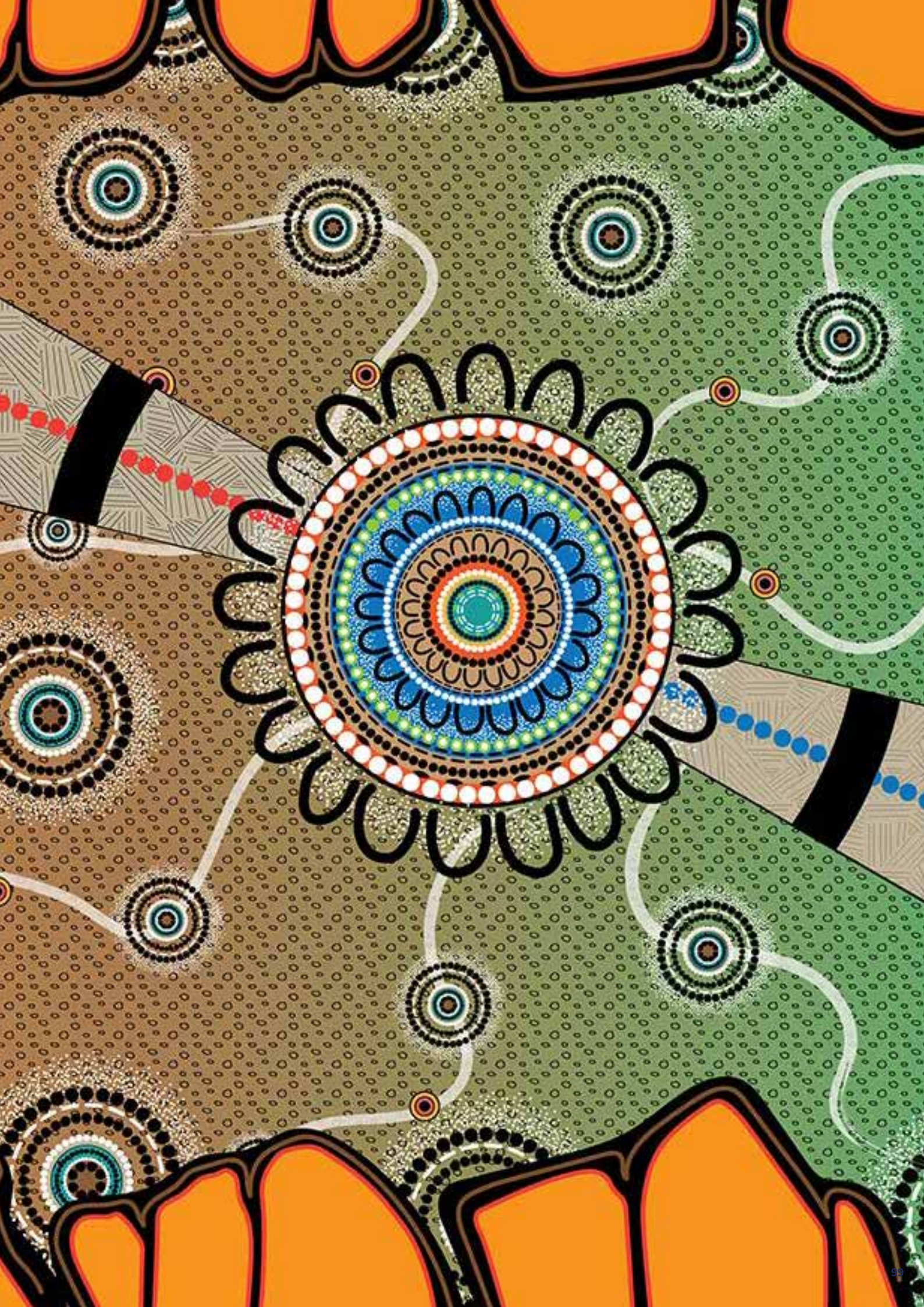
Aboriginal knowledge, experience, and expertise

While Aboriginal people have important and unique knowledge, this knowledge is not necessarily freely available to all. Aboriginal knowledge and data need to be respected and protected. Government needs to support agreement-making around how Aboriginal knowledge and data will be used and managed, so that Aboriginal cultural and intellectual property and data sovereignty are respected in practice. In particular, government needs to listen to Aboriginal people about unintended consequences of sharing data and using Aboriginal knowledge without Aboriginal oversight. • Protecting Aboriginal cultural and intellectual knowledge • Respecting unique local knowledge and lived experience • Respecting Aboriginal data sovereignty and data governance • Respecting Aboriginal place-based and sector-based knowledges • Recognising Aboriginal knowledge of 'what works'

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