



**ncoss**  
NSW Council of Social Service

# Non Government Organisations Roundtable Ngarala Duba\*

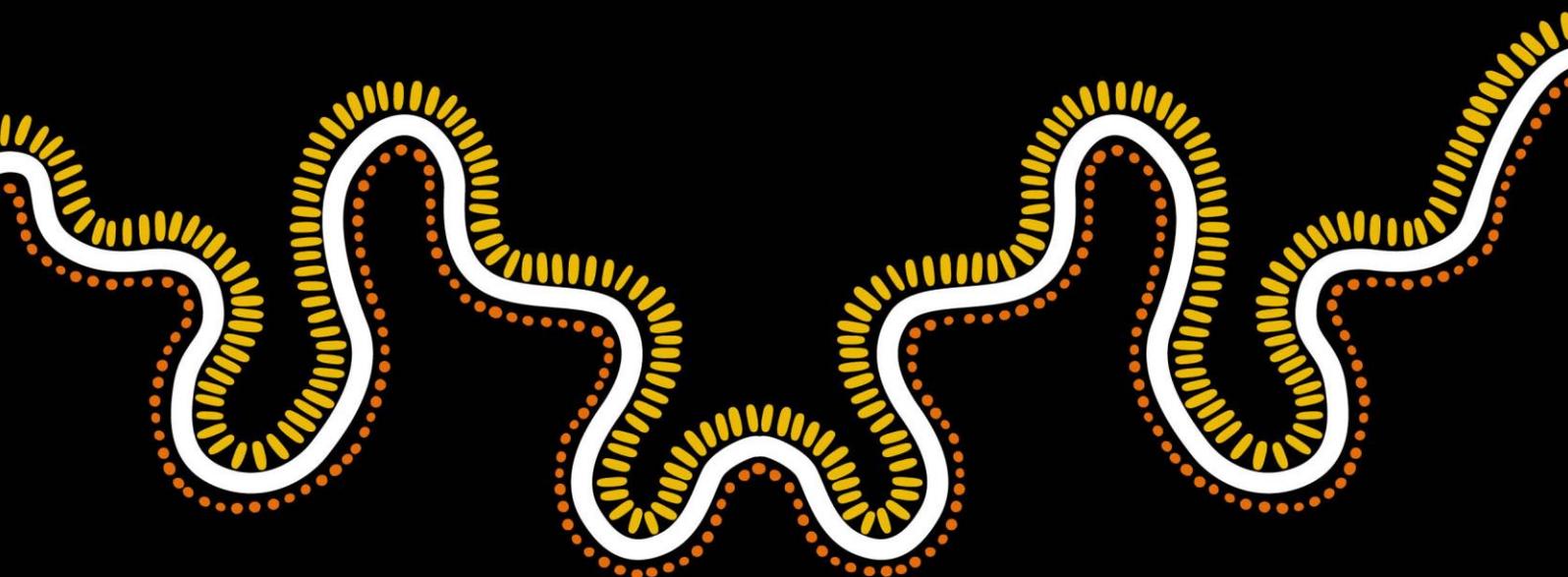
## Closing the Gap: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership and Employment in the Social Service Sector

Tuesday 16 August 2022



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**\*Ngarala Duba** – Ngarala Duba is a Gadigal phrase for thinking about or listening to the ground or country – we use it in reference to the key characteristic of successful change making for Aboriginal communities – from the ground up.

# Executive Summary

## Purpose of the Roundtable

The Roundtable was produced as part of a series of events delivered by Aboriginal Affairs NSW to interrogate Closing the Gap priorities in NSW and develop recommendations for change for government and partners.

With a growing awareness of the importance of self-determination leading to better outcomes for Aboriginal communities, the NSW Government is a signatory to the National Agreement and is committed to “new ways of doing business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, with shared decision making at its core.”<sup>1</sup>

With a vital role in employment and providing services for Aboriginal communities the social service sector is key to creating progress across a number of Closing the Gap priorities including Priority Three – Transformation – transforming services and agencies to enable better outcomes for Aboriginal people and reducing their experience of racism. This Roundtable brought those key elements together with a focus on Aboriginal employment in the social service sector. As the peak body for the sector NCOSS was engaged by Aboriginal Affairs NSW to partner with it in delivering the Roundtable.

This report outlines the background to the development of key focus areas for the Roundtable; provides information regarding the Roundtable partners and their role in addressing Closing the Gap Priorities and delivering the Roundtable. It sets out the headline issues raised by speakers and panellists and key themes arising in discussions by participants.

The reports lays out recommendations for action by government, sector peaks and social service organisations informed by knowledge and experiences shared, issues raised, and robust discussion.

## Key Outcomes – Recommendations for Action

Recommendations are outlined in full from page 36. In summary they address:

- Priority Two – Building the Community Controlled Sector
  - Getting Out of the Way: Aboriginal communities supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).
  - Honouring the value of ACCOs as senior sector partners.
- Priority Three - Transformation
  - Transforming commissioning processes.
  - Building a supported sector accountable to Aboriginal communities.
  - Transforming the child protection system.
  - Providing Leadership, Direction Setting and Advocacy.
  - Building relationships and collaborating with ACCOs.
  - Addressing Racism in the sector: Stand Up Show Up
  - Enabling best practice in communities.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/closingthegap/nsw-partnership/>



- Priority Four – Data
  - Reconsidering outcomes measurement.
- Priority Five – Aboriginal Employment
  - Building cultural safety and employment pathways.

## A Call to Action

The Roundtable was a call to action for the social service sector to improve how Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing inform sector practices; and to consider how the sector and government can more fully support Aboriginal organisations, leadership and employment.

We invited participants to be prepared for some uncomfortable conversations - to challenge and be challenged in a respectful and safe space. To listen, learn, reflect, and share in considering and addressing the long-term impacts of invasion and ongoing racist practices in the sector; and to better understand and acknowledge the strengths of a 75,000 year old culture in sector practices.

The overall theme of the Roundtable was to interrogate Closing the Gap Priority Three – Transformation. In addressing this theme through support for Aboriginal employment and leadership in the social service sector, the Roundtable also addressed Closing the Gap Priority Five – an additional priority for NSW to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through education, training and employment. From these themes, two key focus areas of the Roundtable developed, also strongly aligned with Priority Two – Building the Community Controlled Sector:

- Growing ACCOs as key leaders in social service practice.
- Supporting Aboriginal employment and leadership in the social service sector.

A growing body of work developed by Aboriginal leaders in the social service sector, Aboriginal researchers, and ACCOs informed the approach in discussion with Roundtable partners and set the focus for the two Roundtable panels and participant discussion. The **panellists** helped to shape the event through briefings and discussions prior to the event. A number of key reports were drawn on - access to these is provided in Appendix Three.



## Closing the Gap Priorities

The Priority Reforms set out in the National Closing the Gap Agreement are each accompanied by an overarching narrative outlining elements of the priority and what governments will do, as well as national **targets**. They are also accompanied by 19 **socio-economic targets** across all priorities. The NSW Government is responsible for the **NSW state implementation plan**.

### **Priority Reform One – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sharing decision-making with governments through formal partnership arrangements.

### **Priority Reform Two – Building the Community Controlled Sector**

Strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector to deliver more of the services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people - in recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services usually achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services.

### **Priority Reform Three – Transforming Government Organisations**

Changing the way governments work, and the organisations they fund, in order to be culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It includes eliminating racism, embedding cultural safety, delivering services in partnership, increasing the transparency and accountability of funding, and supporting the cultures of, and increasing engagement with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### **Priority Reform Four - Shared access to data and information at a regional level**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having access to locally-relevant data and information to drive their own priorities.

### **Priority Reform Five – Employment, Business Growth, and Economic Prosperity (NSW specific)**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW are empowered to access pathways through education, training and employment that align with their aspirations, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses grow and flourish.



## About the Roundtable Partners

The Roundtable was delivered by the NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), under contract to and in partnership with Aboriginal Affairs NSW, and with the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO).

### NSW Government

**Aboriginal Affairs NSW** leads and coordinates the work needed to meet the NSW Government's commitments under the National Closing the Gap Agreement. The agreement is based on the knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination over the design and delivery of services that affect them, is key to achieving better life outcomes.

As a signatory to this agreement, it marks a new way of doing business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW, with shared decision making at its core. The NSW Government is working in partnership with the NSW CAPO and other partners to achieve better outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations

**The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO)** represents the interests of Aboriginal Peoples of NSW. NSW CAPO has signed the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and works in partnership with the NSW Government to implement this Agreement in NSW. It is a member of the national Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations. It is made up of member organisations including:

- **NSW Aboriginal Land Council**
- **NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group**
- **Link-Up (NSW)**
- **Aboriginal Legal Services (NSW/ACT)**
- **AbSec - NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation**
- **First Peoples Disability Network**
- **Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW**
- **BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation**



## NCOSS

**The NSW Council of Social Service** (NCOSS) is the peak body for the social service sector in NSW. With over 400 members and a wider network of approximately 4,000 non-government organisations, government and other entities and individuals who share our values, we advocate to alleviate poverty and disadvantage in NSW.

Consistent with the principle of self-determination, NCOSS is committed to listening to, learning from, and walking alongside First Nations peoples, working collaboratively with their leaders, key bodies and communities to help put a spotlight on the issues they have identified as impeding the advancement of better life outcomes for First Nations peoples in NSW.

More information about our commitment to First Nations peoples can be found in our **Reflect Reconciliation Plan 2022**.



## Explanation of terms used

**Aboriginal** – we are using this term in alignment with Aboriginal Affairs NSW to denote all First Nations people.

**ACCOs** – for the purposes of brevity we use this term to refer to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs)

**Clients** – we have used this to denote people who use and participate in social services: while we prefer a more active term such as participants or service users we have chosen clients for the sake of brevity and clarity.

**Cultural load** - Cultural load is the (often invisible) additional load borne by Aboriginal people at work, where they are often the only Aboriginal person or one of a small number, and where they are called upon to provide an Aboriginal “perspective”.<sup>2</sup>

**Cultural safety** - Cultural safety means being able to practise your culture free of ridicule or condemnation. It occurs when a workplace acknowledges, respects and accommodates difference.<sup>3</sup>

**Identity Strain** – ‘Identity strain’ refers to the strain employees feel when they themselves, or others, view their identity as not meeting the norms or expectations of the dominant culture in the workplace. The concept draws on literature demonstrating members of minority groups expend effort and energy managing their identity in the workplace to avoid the negative consequences of discrimination, harassment, bias and marginalisation.<sup>4</sup>

**Ngarala Duba** – Ngarala Duba is a Gadigal phrase for thinking about or listening to the ground or country – we use it as the title for this report, in reference to the key characteristic of successful change making for Aboriginal communities – from the ground up.

**We** - We is used from the perspective of ACCOs and Aboriginal leaders/people and also from the perspective of non-Aboriginal organisations and the social service sector as a whole. The context will let you know who is speaking. Where that is unclear we have indicated who is speaking.

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<sup>2</sup> p19 Diversity Council Australia/Jumbunna Institute 2020 (Brown, C., D’Almada-Remedios, R., Gilbert, J. O’Leary, J. and Young, N.) *Gari Yala (Speak the Truth): Centering the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians*, 2020 viewed 7 October 2022

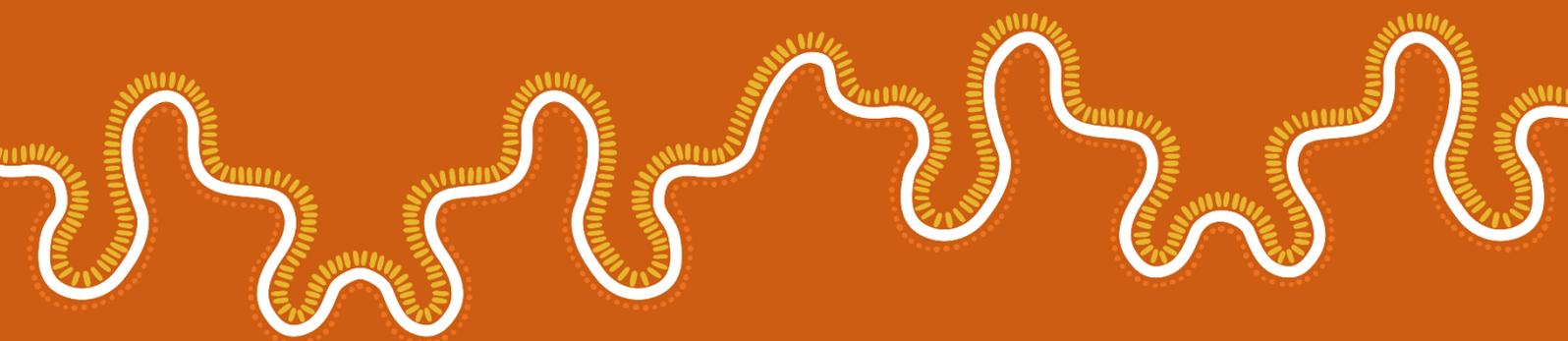
[https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca\\_synopsisreport\\_web\\_0.pdf](https://www.dca.org.au/sites/default/files/dca_synopsisreport_web_0.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> p11, *ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> P12, *ibid.*



# Ngarala Duba The Roundtable



## Welcome to Country

**Yvonne Weldon**  
**Deputy Chair**  
**Metropolitan Local Aboriginal**  
**Land Council**

“Good morning, Ministers, ladies, gentlemen, sisters, brothers, gender neutral and gender fluid.

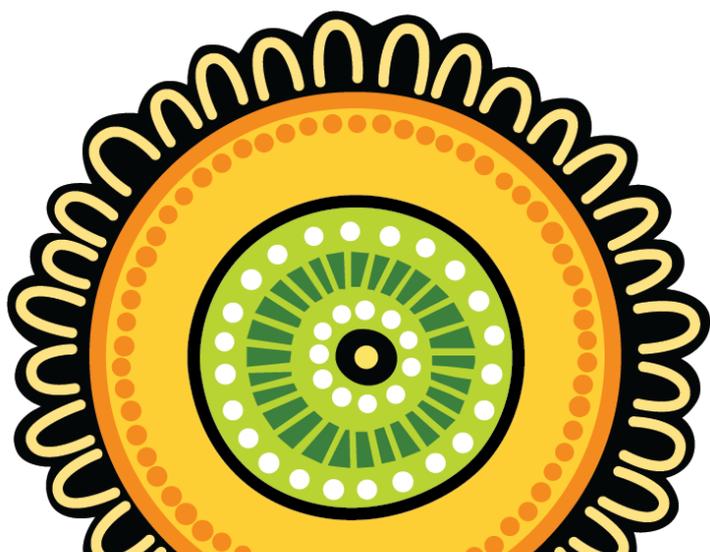
As was said, my name is Yvonne Weldon and I’m a Wiradjuri woman from Cowra in New South Wales from the waters of the Claire also known as the Lachlan and the Murrumbidgee Rivers. I am the elected deputy chairperson of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council who are the cultural authority under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act for the land that we are on.

I would like to pay my respects to all elders past and present, to all First Nations, to you and the many nations of lands, that you have travelled from, or are on line from. My people have practiced their traditions, for thousands of years and endless generations - one tradition we share in various forms, across Australia, is the welcome to country.

It is more than just words, it is a spiritual process, giving honor to our ancestors, in whose footsteps we are all walking - continuing the practice of the many generations before us, to the many generations to come.

Sharing and trading of our resources and knowledge and traditions, has been my people's way of life, since time began. Trading amongst the nations, tribes, and clans that existed here for over 65,000 years - we traded for necessity and not for empires. The boundaries of our traditional owners, the Gadigal, are defined by the natural landscape, the Hawkesbury to the North, the Nepean to the West and the Georges River to the South.

On behalf of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council the Elders and the Members, I welcome everyone to the land of the Gadigal, I acknowledge the Gadigal people whose spirits and ancestors will always remain with this land and Mother Earth.



As we're all gathered here today, let us acknowledge the many warriors that created pathways for all of us, the ones we recognize and the ones we have never heard of. Our songlines and our customs have sustained us - they're embedded into the core of this nation whose people are the oldest living culture in the world. The challenges that we're all faced with today are not the same as it was only a few years ago, yet it has become an accepted norm. It brings a disadvantage that flows on from one generation to the next. The cycle does not change because of policy and legislation, it is the battles through the endurance of adversity that are the greatest evidence for what needs to be included - in all that we do...

...So let us all draw upon my people's spirits, as we continue on our journey, that my people's spirits walk. Again on behalf the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council Welcome to Country and it always was always will be Aboriginal land, thank you."

*This is an abridged version. The full transcript can be found [here](#).*





## Introduction

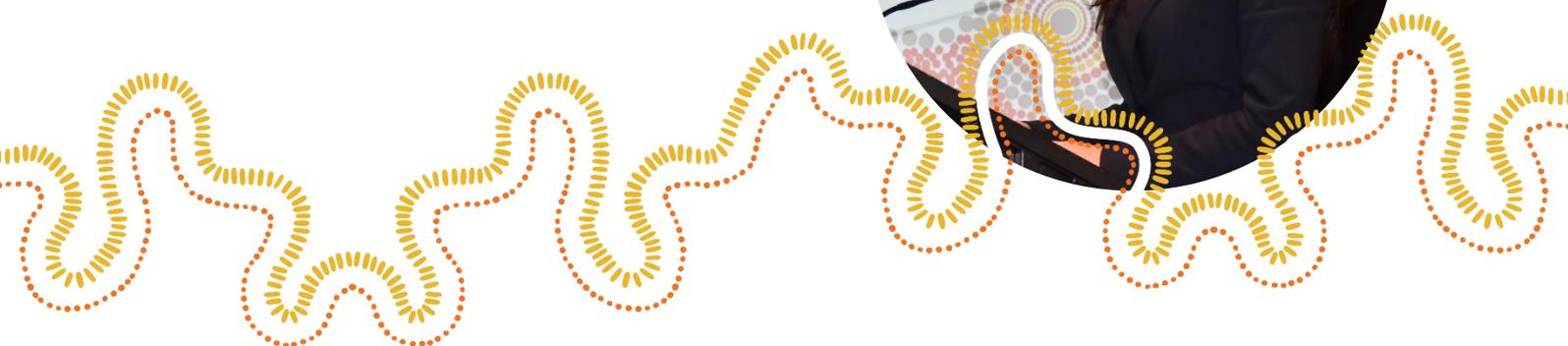
As the third in a series of Roundtables interrogating Closing the Gap priorities this Roundtable has a focus on Priority Three – Transforming Government Organisations, with a special focus in this instance, on Non-Government organisations delivering essential social services.

The Roundtable was hosted by Aboriginal journalist and presenter Nakari Thorpe, a proud Gonnai, Gunditjmarra and Gooreng Gooreng woman from Victoria and Queensland, and

opened by the NSW Minister for Aboriginal Affairs - The Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Arts, Regional Youth and Tourism.

In a call to action the Roundtable invited the audience to think about transforming the social service sector by positioning ACCOs as senior leaders in social service practice; and to consider how employment practices in non-Aboriginal services can enable Aboriginal employment and leadership. In NSW, the best outcomes for Aboriginal people are obtained by ACCOs working with communities to deliver community led, place-based services. Growing Aboriginal employment is key to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities, and embedding the strengths and values of a 75,000 year-old culture into social services benefits us all.

In his opening comments Minister Franklin highlighted how a strong social service sector plays a key role in closing the gap and how he was looking forward to working together to design and implement new measures in the sector. The Minister acknowledged that the sector is at the forefront of social innovation, and transformative change; and that the sector had the potential to drive that change across Priority Three and also Priority Five - Employment, Business Growth, and Economic Prosperity.



## Round Table Participants

The hybrid event had over 65 participants with 6 of those attending online. Participants represented 35 non-Aboriginal organisations, and 14 ACCOs or Aboriginal peak organisations, as well as staff and management from Aboriginal Affairs NSW.

Participants were drawn from medium to large social services and peak organisations across a range of sectors including housing, homelessness, health, family support, mental health, drug and alcohol, human rights, disability, community legal centres, young people, children's services, and several large generalist organisations. Many attended from regional areas including the Northern Rivers, West and Far West NSW, the Central Coast, the South Coast and the Hunter.

Also in attendance were the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Arts, Regional Youth and Tourism and the Hon Natasha Maclaren-Jones, Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Services.

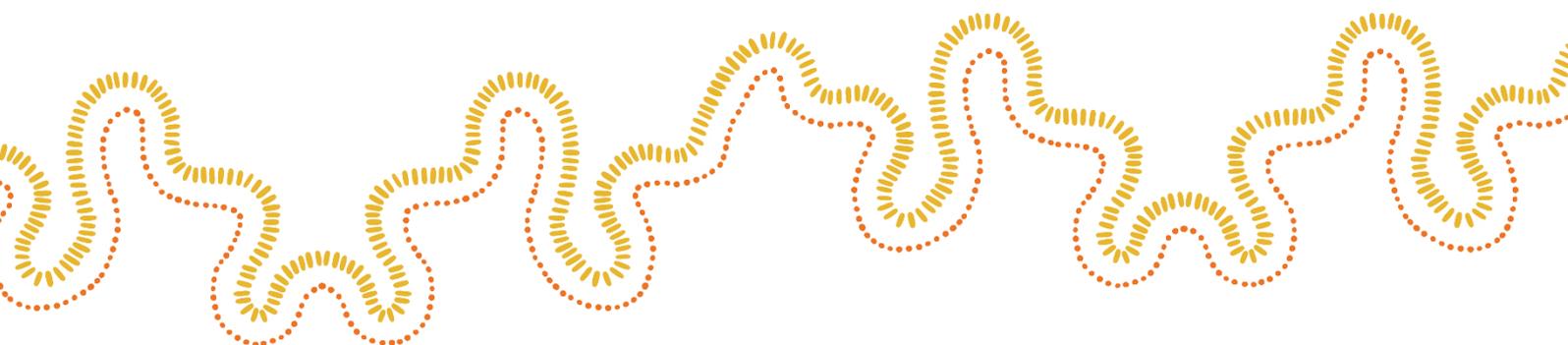
Participants were given an opportunity to have their say via roving microphones or via the chat online. They also had the option to respond anonymously to an online poll. In addition there was opportunity to discuss the key themes in robust discussions to identify practical actions for government, organisations, and the sector as a whole.



## Participants

Alice Lans, Noah's Inclusion Services  
 Andrew Hegedus Perkins, Gurehlgam Corp  
 Anne Dennis, NSW CAPO  
 Belinda Field, Yerin Eleanor Duncan Aboriginal Health Services  
 Hon. Ben Franklin MLC, Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, the Arts, Regional Youth and Tourism  
 Bethany McGrath, Community Legal Centres NSW  
 Bill Farrand, Anglicare  
 Bronwyn Hutchings, Local Community Services Association  
 Caleb Rose, YP Space MNC  
 Can Yasmut, Local Community Services Association  
 Carmel Tebbutt, Mental Health Coordinating Council  
 Catherine Liddle, SNAICC  
 Chiara Fulnari, SDN Children's Services  
 Claire Robbs, Life Without Barriers  
 Dale Towns, Mission Australia  
 Daniel Daylight, Weave  
 Deidre Cheers, Barnardos Australia (NSW)  
 Dr Paul Gray, Jumbunna Institute  
 Elizabeth Dunstone, Uniting (NSW)  
 Gary Field, Barang Regional Alliance  
 Gavin Mate, Uniting (NSW)  
 Geraldine Menere, Justice Connect  
 Graham Bargwanna, The Burdekin Association  
 Hayley Foster, Full Stop  
 Jack de Groot, St Vincent De Paul Society NSW  
 Jemima Mowbray, Tenants' Union of NSW  
 Jenny Howard, Aboriginal Affairs NSW  
 Joanna Quilty, NCOSS  
 John Skinner, Macquarie Uni/AHMRC  
 Jonathon Hunyor, Public Interest Advocacy Centre  
 Kate Munro, Youth Action  
 Katherine McKernan, Redfern Legal Centre Ltd  
 Katrina Ironside, Community Legal Centres NSW  
 Kristine Falzon, South Coast Women's Health & Welfare Aboriginal Corporation - Waminda  
 Kristy Masella Aboriginal Employment Strategy  
 Larissa Daniels, Australian Community Support Organisation

Lyn McKenzie, Odyssey House NSW  
 Margaret Maljkovich, Link Wentworth  
 Matthew Clarke, Yilabara  
 Maureen Randall, Redfern Legal Centre  
 Melanie Andrews, Woodville Alliance  
 Michael Currie, The Benevolent Society  
 Michele Carnegie, Community Early Learning Australia  
 Michelle Laurie, Social Futures  
 Michelle Rogers, Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network  
 Mitchell Evans, The Salvation Army  
 Monique Wiseman, Homelessness NSW  
 Nada Nasser, Mission Australia  
 Naomi Burke, McKillop Family Services  
 Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, Minister for Families and Communities, and Minister for Disability Services, MLC  
 Nola Whyman, Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation  
 Rebecca Pinkstone, Bridge Housing  
 Renee Wirth, St George Community Housing  
 Renee Thomson, Policy Director Aboriginal Affairs and Regional Youth, Office of the Hon. Ben Franklin MLC.  
 Robert Cohen, St Vincent De Paul Society NSW  
 Robert Skeen, NSW CAPO and Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council AH&MRC  
 Shane Hamilton, Aboriginal Affairs NSW  
 Sharif Deen, NSW CAPO  
 Siobhan Bryson, Weave Youth and Community Services  
 Staff – Aboriginal Affairs NSW  
 Staff – NCOSS  
 Susan Watson, FAMS  
 Tabatha Feher, Life Without Barriers  
 Tegan Hinchey Gerard, Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation  
 Tina Reynolds Orana Support Service Inc  
 Tina West Barnardos, Australia (NSW)  
 Tracey King, Bundjalung Tribal Society  
 Vickie Parry, Barang Regional Alliance  
 Wendy Knight, Ngunya Jarjum Aboriginal Child and Family Network  
 Yasmyn Molina, Community Legal Centres



# Transformation

Robert Skeen

Co Chair, NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations



*“I’ve seen the impact that NGOs have in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and how this impact can be maximized when they work in partnership with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations”*

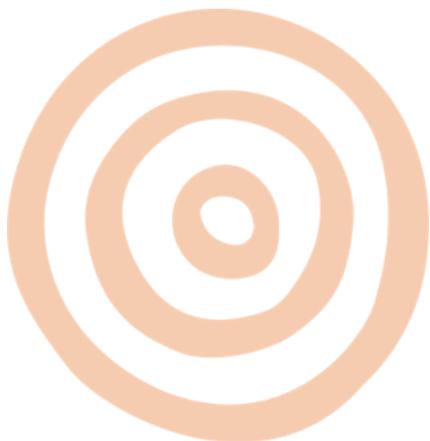
## Key Points

- The NGO sector plays a critical role in implementing Priority Reform Three.
- Priority Three seeks to ensure that government agencies and institutions that deliver services and programs to Aboriginal communities undertake systemic and structural transformation.
- Targets and indicators include:
  - A decrease in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism.
  - An increase in the number of Aboriginal people employed in NGO sector and peaks
  - An increase in the number of organisations that have RAPS and are taking concrete action to identify and eliminate racism.
  - Embedded cultural safety.
  - Improved accountability and services delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Priority Three and the action of *transformation* is probably one of the most important pillars of the National Agreement and the key enabler for all of the work needed to be done under Closing the Gap.
- Peaks and ACCOs welcome non-Aboriginal organisations reaching out to partner with them. This can lead to new ways of working when non-indigenous organisations recognise the value and knowledge ACCOs bring.
- The work done by ACCOs in NSW in time of crisis over COVID, floods, and fires needs to be acknowledged.



- Wherever change is needed Minister Franklin shows great courage and leadership by:
  - Breaking down barriers
  - Making changes needed to implement new closing the gap strategies and ensuring they are effective
  - Making sure our voices are being heard and have an influence over programs and policies on the ground
- We acknowledge the leaders in the community whose shoulders we stand on – their courage, their passion – so we want to see some courageous discussions and decisions being made today.

*“I was up in Moree and we had to do a few things so I ordered a pizza for my wife - it was a young Aboriginal man who delivered it... (then) I went to McDonald's and got coffee, it was two young Aboriginal boys who served us ... and I went to get some diesel and there was a young Aboriginal man behind the counter - I said to my wife, this is like the twilight zone... It's a credit to our people and partners out there striving to give our young people the opportunity”*



## Panel One - Growing ACCOs as key leaders in social service practice

### Panelists

Tegan Hinchey-Gerard , Executive Manager Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing - Maari Ma Health Aboriginal Corporation

Catherine Liddle, CEO – SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and Claire Robbs, CEO – Life without Barriers

Wendy Knight, CEO and Michelle Rogers, Partnerships and Engagement Manager – Ngunya Jarjum



From left to right: Tegan Hinchey-Gerard, Wendy Knight, Michelle Rogers, Clare Robbs (Catherine Liddle attended online)

Further information about panellists from both panels can be found in the event program available [here](#).

### Key Points

#### *Recognising and Valuing Strengths*

- Poor outcomes are more likely to result when ACCOs are not valued and included in service provision for Aboriginal communities.
- ACCOs have the skills and foresight to plan for disasters effectively within their communities.





*“Our connection to community is unmatched and we continue to do whatever we can - often unfunded and under-resourced.”*

*Tegan Hinchey-Gerard  
Maari Ma*

- Maari Ma outlined their experience of what happens when ACCOs are sidelined:
  - Prior to the Covid 19 outbreak in 2020 recommendations about planning for an outbreak before it happened were ignored.
  - Commonwealth Government ignored their own plans which required partnerships with Aboriginal Health Providers.
  - A provider with no knowledge of, or connections in the local community was contracted to provide vaccinations – after the first round only 7% of people were vaccinated – in the end the provider had to rely on unfunded work by Maari Ma to get people vaccinated.
  - Maari Ma stepped up to enable local mob to cook for the community; provided tents and sleeping bags so that people could isolate on country; and assisted with transport, food supply and vaccinations.
  - Promises of further funding have not eventuated.
- Local Aboriginal staff continue to be essential in all aspects of the COVID response in NSW.
- The strength of ACCOs throughout the pandemic is that they can remove red tape for mob.
- ACCOs readily provide tangible, practical support and clinical care that governments cannot.
- Difficult conversations need to be had about the way funding is invested. For example, funding bodies look to international programs for best practice and try and implement them in Aboriginal communities.

- Aboriginal organisations lead with culture:
  - Staff and employment practices are built through culture.
  - We have group learning, group supervision, and mentoring for all staff because that is culture.
  - We live in community on country. We work beyond 9 to 5 because that is culture.
  - We provide unfunded services because that is culture.
  - We support jarjums (children) through working with them and their gumagoy (family) because that is culture.
  - We support our communities through floods and fire because that is culture.
  - We provide housing that we are not funded for because that is culture.

*"We lead with culture. Every one of my staff, every black person in the room, my dyindas, my brothers, we are culture. It's embedded in every piece of work that we do - we have developed our own model for family preservation because realistically, the non-Aboriginal model isn't appropriate."*

*Wendy Knight  
Ngunya Jarjum*



*"We've got it, we know it, we do it all the time - we're doing it in the name of culture we're doing it in the name of community. We're doing it in the name of being who we are and keeping alive the oldest living culture in the world."*

*Michelle Rogers  
Ngunya Jarjum*

- The lived experience of ACCOs - staff, board and volunteers – must be acknowledged and valued.
- ACCOs think long term, not in short term funding cycles.
- So our way of behaviour and our knowledge looks different. We don't deliver in the same way against a KPI.
- Aboriginal organisations are not just answerable to KPIs and contracts – they are answerable to their communities.
- Aboriginal organisations should measure their own success.

### *A Key Priority - Family Support*

- Aboriginal people know what keeps children safe, know how to care for children and young people, and know how to keep them strong and connected to culture.
- Grandmothers' law told us that if all children had food in their belly, and if all children knew where to go to be loved, children would grow up strong and safe and thriving.



*“One of the strangest things about this is why we have to advocate for that (Aboriginal care for Aboriginal children) in the first place, given that Aboriginal people have been producing strong viable families and wonderful resilient children for 75,000 years, yet we live in a system where everything is “systematised” and those incredible skills and strengths have been taken off us.”*

*Catherine Liddle  
SNAICC*

- Statistics are horrific and Aboriginal communities get blamed for not looking after their children, but all the statistics are from a white perspective, using white assessment tools, and collected by white agencies.
- During the floods when people had lost their houses our communities had DCJ knocking on their door telling them there were concerns for the welfare of their children.
- Aboriginal organisations get a fraction of child protection funding; yet the evidence shows that when they are supported to do the work the outcomes for Aboriginal children and families have been fantastic.

### *Building Relationships*

- It shouldn't be up to us (Aboriginal organisations) to reach out – it should be non-Aboriginal organisations reaching out to us.
- Successful partnerships can be built where non-Aboriginal organisations recognise that Aboriginal organisations know what is best for Aboriginal people.
- SNAICC put a challenge out to the sector about Aboriginal out of home care, the child protection system; and NGOs making way for ACCOs – they didn't expect anyone to respond.

- Life Without Barriers responded, met with SNAICC’s board, and agreed to make an immediate public statement – acknowledging that non-Aboriginal organisations should not be in the business of caring for Aboriginal children and that Life Without Barriers would transition its care of Aboriginal children to ACCOs; and that it would be done in a publicly accountable and transparent way.
- We can change the system by working with our allies.

*“We know that the only way that we can actually turn all of that good intention, and all of those words to action is if we get more and more people to want to be a part of this and be brave enough to take steps. What we hope to do today is encourage all of you... we really want to be creating more energy and talk and action and sharing.”*

*Claire Robbs  
Life Without Barriers*



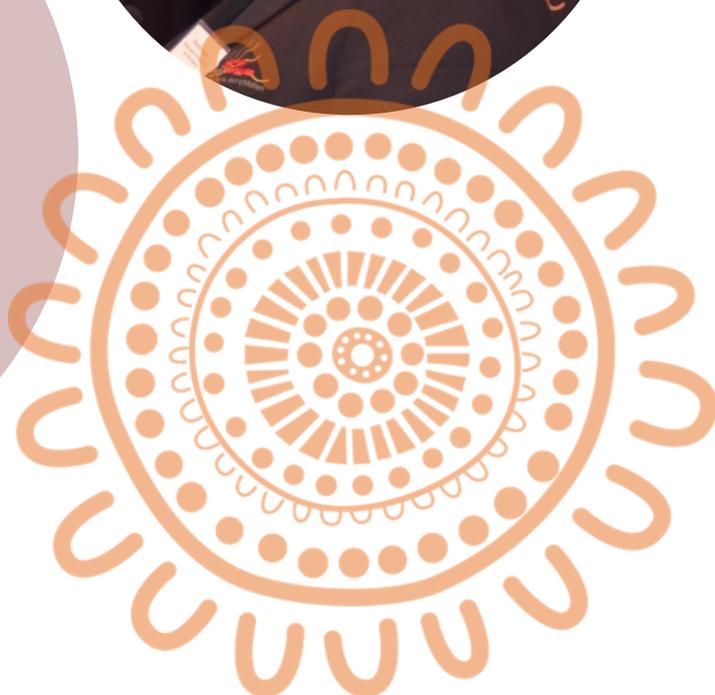
### *End to Complicity in Inappropriate Systems*

- We need to recognise when we (the sector) are complicit in the problem.
- Government systems respond systemically, they deliver in bulk and they deliver without person or people. Especially in response to crises. They are not set up to align with Aboriginal culture and ways of knowing, being, doing.
- These systems are oppressive and create cycles of dependency as they take away our decision making power. It's disempowering.
- We are a small population so we need the support from the NGO sector – not just to be allies but to change the rhetoric; have the difficult conversations; and to stop being complicit in the system.
- We can all push back against racist policies and practices through contract negotiations and funding agreements. The sector is not powerless.
- When Aboriginal organisations reach out, as a sector we need to listen and respond.
- We need to turn good intentions into concrete actions with brave and bold steps to change.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations need to put their fear of not getting things right behind them and participate in change-making.
- We (the sector) need to share resources and create energy for change; and take responsibility for building trust.
- All the information is easy to find – we just need to look for it.



*“Success should not be about the next election cycle - it’s about the investment 40 years, 50 years, 200 years further down the track and what Aboriginal culture looks like as a result of what we put into it today.”*

*Michelle Rogers  
Ngunya Jarjum*



## Responses from the Audience

*“Strong centralised decision-making (including commissioning & funding) is lazy, safe, risk-adverse. Government acknowledges that place-based/community led responses are optimal so it’s not acceptable to continue to deliver top-down responses.”*

*Audience Member*



*“I think what we actually need to do is have a total review of money around Closing the Gap. Every man and his dog is jumping on board on it - it needs to be audited to actually get it back to grassroots level where Aboriginal people and community organisations can deliver services for our communities...I think that’s the missing link”*

*Audience Member*

*“When we talk about Community Controlled, we are still linked to funding contracts and KPIs and all those sorts of things. And when we do come up with local decisions and we design community led markers and data repositories and things like that it's fraught with barriers where they (the government) hide behind ritualistic decision making - so in the true sense of self determination, in my humble opinion, the whole system needs to be dismantled.”*

*Audience Member*

*“It’s a credit to all our community organisations - what they are actually achieving and working through in community, because really you know what I've signed up to, what our organisations have signed up to, is place based, community driven. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations - we have the solutions, we have the processes and we need Government to meet us halfway...”*

*Audience Member*



## Panel Two – Aboriginal Employment and Leadership in the Social Service Sector

### Panelists

Kristy Masella, Managing Director – Aboriginal Employment Strategy and Rebecca Pinkstone, CEO – Bridge Housing

Michele Laurie, Senior Manager - Aboriginal Leadership and Engagement – Social Futures

Matthew Clarke, CEO – Yilabara Solutions; Nada Nasser, State Director (NSW, Vic, ACT) and Dale Towns, Area Manager, Central and Far West NSW – Mission Australia



From left to right: Matthew Clarke, Kristy Masella, Rebecca Pinkstone, Michele Laurie, Dale Towns, Nada Nasser

### Key Points

#### *Aboriginal staff an asset for the sector*

- Aboriginal communities have survived for 85,000 years on resilience and genuine care for others with an ingrained sense of community.
- Aboriginal cultural values including service and compassion, based on shared lived experience are values that are key in the social service sector.
- To have a sustainable, responsive and capable social service sector which supports the most vulnerable in our communities we need Aboriginal leadership and employment.
- Some positive ground has been made but not enough.
- Over the next 8 years 27,000 new employees will be needed in the care and welfare sectors in regional NSW alone.
- Mission Australia has an Aboriginal workforce of 17% in Western NSW (8% overall) but “we need to do more”.

*“We have been working in partnership with Yilabara... to help us towards our goals, where we have a clear commitment around our business development and we don't compete with ACCOs - where we've got a robust decision making process every time there's an opportunity”*

*Nada Nasser  
Mission Australia*



*Significance of Aboriginal Employment and Leadership*



*“Employment and leadership are really important in terms of significant change for Aboriginal communities – they are a key enabler of home ownership and significant transgenerational change.”* Michele Laurie  
Social Futures

*“A lot of times, researchers, people, talk about intergenerational unemployment. We grew up with that, we grew up in those homes. We grew up in those communities. We grew up with overcrowding. We grew up going to school with no lunch, with no uniforms. Yilabara is working with 1000 Aboriginal jobseekers on the South Coast – the community is rapt – they’re really happy to actually have an organisation that they can walk into where we know their struggles.”*

Matthew Clarke  
Yilabara Solutions



### *Successful Employment Practices*

- Need to create evidence bases that come from Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing.
- The focus for Aboriginal people is empowerment - valuing and respecting Aboriginal knowledge is more important than “cultural awareness”.
- Successful employment and retention for Aboriginal people can be built through:
  - An interrogation of your approaches and employment practices noting that approaches need to be designed by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.
  - Employment of a critical mass of Aboriginal staff to embed Aboriginal influence across the organisation and build cultural safety.
  - Focus on local relationships, local solutions, and local people.
  - Creating culturally safe workplaces.
  - Peer support for Aboriginal team members.
  - Acknowledging the strengths of an 85,000 year old culture in your organisation.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations and funding bodies such as DCJ need to reflect on our practices; business models; and service user base.
- We need to put structures, systems and processes in place internally that support culturally safe workplaces and enable Aboriginal employment.
- We need to develop robust decision-making processes, and suitable tools and training about partnering respectfully, and working with Aboriginal staff and communities.
- We need to reach out and partner with Aboriginal service users and organisations to learn from them in terms of transforming our organisations.
- Our partnership (Bridge Housing and Aboriginal Employment Strategy) has been really supportive - enabling difficult conversations internally.



*“Embedding those practices in the way that you're training and onboarding staff is really important. Because it creates an environment where Aboriginal people have visibility in the organisation, and they stay employed, and there's not the churn in the workforce that you can see in some non-Aboriginal organisations.”*

Rebecca Pinkstone  
Bridge Housing

- Key strategies include:
  - Changing recruitment practices.
  - Designating positions.
  - Setting targets with expectations that they will be achieved.
  - Enabling conversations around cultural safety.
  - A critical mass of Aboriginal staff.
  - Creating connections with Aboriginal staff in other organisations to build an industry-wide perspective.
- We need to develop diverse governance structures to engage the entire workforce.
- Developing targets across the entire organisation for staff, management, leadership, and board is critical.
- Positive support for Aboriginal staff needs to be embedded across the organisation not just in management/leadership.
- Consideration should be given to knowing who your staff are, what their needs are, and monitoring and reporting on current strategies.

#### *Attracting and Supporting Aboriginal Staff in a Large Non-Aboriginal Organisation*

- Jobs need to be advertised through networks, flyers, community notice boards, as well as traditional online avenues.
- We avoid asks for lengthy written applications – we allow people to come in, in person, to drop their resume off and have a chat.
- If they don't have a resume we help them develop one.
- We generally interview all local people that apply.
- Interview panels include community members and are flexible in their approach.
- Access to training, mentoring, coaching, and supervision with people who understand the communities they work in and cultural and family connections of staff members.
- We connect our staff with local community events to build trust and connections.
- Those activities that are around building trust and making connections are mostly unfunded.

*“We are looking for skills not qualifications – especially localised knowledge and good communication skills – if applicants have that we can train and upskill them.”*

Dale Towns  
Mission Australia



- Connect staff with a broad range of interagencies, reference groups, peaks etc to build connections, skills, and knowledge.
- Provide opportunities and support for staff to step up – acting up, secondments, interagency chairs etc.
- Peak organisations are a great source of training. Peaks need to get out to the regions so they can connect and network with members.
- Digital skills are essential for regional staff to access those networks and training – over COVID people got used to being in the virtual world but face to face is always best where possible.

### *The Place of RAPs*

- RAP processes don't need to be led by Aboriginal people – we have nothing to reconcile.
- RAPs are useful but are only part of the strategy for non-Aboriginal organisations.

### *It's a Journey*

- For non-Aboriginal organisations the commitment to a journey is essential.
- Key is Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people working together. Allies need to know when to walk alongside us and when to get out of the way.
- In the context of non-Aboriginal organisations what is important is opportunity, access, and having our (Aboriginal) voices heard. Listening and learning is key. Cultural humility is key.
- It's a tough gig being a Senior Aboriginal staff member in a non-Aboriginal organisation – the cultural load can be immense.
- Our practices (in a non-Aboriginal organisation) are informed by co-design with a network of mob, Aboriginal scholars and workers.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations have a responsibility to ensure they are not competing inappropriately with Aboriginal organisations for staff or resources.
- It's not a short-term strategy – true transformation takes time, hard work, and commitment to having difficult conversations, and being challenged. We won't always get it right.

*“How much do I invest is always the tricky thing...It's tough for me to show up in all of my cultural being and experience the brick walls constantly - so a part of (our) employment strategy is leadership development. But also it needs to be beyond cultural awareness, it needs to be cultural humility as a lifelong learning ...”*

Michele Laurie  
Social Futures



### *Sticking Points*

- “Best Practice” approaches are often not best practice for Aboriginal people.
- A survey with 40 top employers found that 50% of their Aboriginal staff had experienced racism in the workplace.
- Job creation needs to be done in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, clients and partners.
- It is not appropriate to only designate junior roles as Aboriginal positions.
- Aboriginal organisations working with communities have to report against inappropriate KPIs that do not align with Aboriginal ways of working.
- Work environments have to have pathways to specialist roles or leadership for Aboriginal people, recognising but not relying on formal qualifications.
- While access to formal qualifications are out of reach for some Aboriginal people, due to a lack of access to appropriate and safe schooling, assumptions should not be made about the qualification levels of Aboriginal workers.
- Non-Aboriginal organisations should utilise the knowledge held by their Aboriginal staff without treating them like ‘Black Siri’ (Cultural Load).
- Aboriginal people need Aboriginal employment agencies but there just aren’t enough being funded.

### *Exploitation in the Care Economy*

- Aboriginal organisations should not be expected to provide advice, support, or services for free.
- Aboriginal staff are often expected to carry a huge cultural load in addition to normal work duties.

*“Aboriginal people, in particular Aboriginal women, are the most vulnerable of all groups in NSW and we have a current system here in NSW where women make up four out of five workers. The vulnerable are supporting the vulnerable. The vulnerable are supporting the vulnerable in an environment of insecure work, of low wages, of staff shortages, of limited career paths and of high stress - this is a frightening reality.”*

Kristy Masella  
Aboriginal Employment Strategy



## Responses from the Audience

*"You make a really important point around commissioning and often it's the left hand not talking to the right hand. And, in particular Community and Justice in our region isn't understanding what's happening on the local level - so centralised commissioning will make a decision and then it reverberates through community and we are the ones that struggle, as a result of that."*

*Audience Member*

*"(It's) not really an even playing field - so until we start to invest in the Aboriginal sector we're not going to change that... I had three people, which NSWLC helped me with, to write a tender - I know other mainstream organisations will work on that same tender for 18 months with teams of 20. I look at the infrastructure and governance of these organisations - they've got 10 people in a compliance team, I'm lucky to have one"*

*Matthew Clarke, Yilabara Solutions (Panelist)*

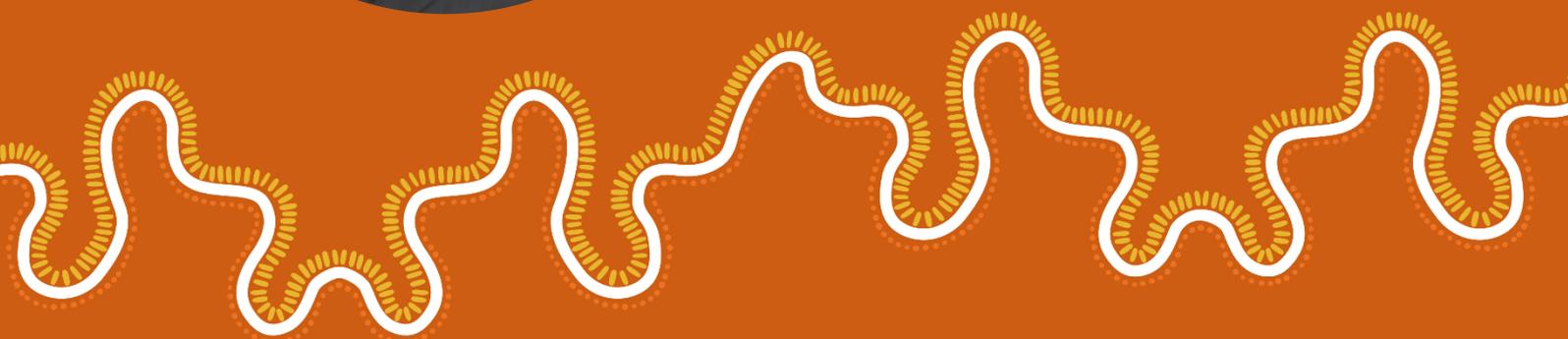
*"You talked about revisiting your employment policies as part of the processes and the need to be able to pull those apart and de-systemize them - I'm going to use that word to interpret what you've said...I'm just wondering how much unconscious bias, do you think that you identified through that process and how did you then engage with cultural integrity to inform your new newly developed policies - and how were you able to resource these. Because often time we're bringing cultural intelligence in for free"*

*Audience Member*



*"We are so reliant on government funding (for employment)... as an Aboriginal kid you want to go into government or you go into a (NGO) because they're the only ones that will give you a go...they got nowhere else to go in these regional areas... So every time a government changes a policy every three years, or brings in a new model, you're playing with people's lives - they got mortgages to pay, they got kids in school, they got a whole range of things"*

*Audience Member*



## Roundtable Discussion

Participants at the Roundtable were given some time to discuss the issues brought up by the panelists and identify practical recommendations for change. Participants were provided with the questions below to focus their discussions on the key issues.

### Questions

1. Thinking about what you have heard today what do you think you, your organisation, the sector, or the government need to do to better support the growth of ACCOs?
2. How do you think you, your organisation, the sector or the government can better understand Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing and provide culturally appropriate services?
3. How can you, your organisation, the sector, or the government provide opportunities for Aboriginal employment, career development and leadership in the sector?



## Developing Recommendations

The Roundtable brought leading Aboriginal change makers in the sector together with non-Aboriginal organisations that are responding to Aboriginal calls for change. Key themes and priorities for action emerged from the knowledge and experience shared, issues raised, and robust discussion.

There were many comments on the day that most people know what needs to be done and we need to start doing it. There was strong agreement that place-based, community-led, localised solutions were imperative for Aboriginal communities to thrive. That non-Aboriginal organisations needed to take responsibility for and make change; and that sometimes these organisations just needed to get out of the way. There was also strong agreement that governments needed to stop tinkering and creating new mechanisms, and start valuing, supporting and enabling approaches from the ground up.

Some key discussions included:

**Issues with commissioning processes** – Competitive tendering and other commissioning processes create false “efficiencies” and waste millions of dollars across the sector, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach. It has most impact on ACCOs who are unable to compete with larger or better resourced organisations, and who have skill sets and strengths not recognized by current practices. Creating commissioning processes that replicate existing ones but with Aboriginal leads is not addressing these inefficiencies. In addition, reliance on short-term contracts, and program-based piecemeal funding and grants have significant impacts across the whole sector but particularly for ACCOs.

**Support and long-term resourcing for ACCOs** – This is imperative to address the new stolen generation and a growing number of issues including lack of affordable and healthy housing, exploitation of Aboriginal workers in the “care” economy, and little progress across a range of Closing the Gap indicators.

It is clear that governments need to provide resources to address the ongoing impacts of dispossession, exploitation, and colonisation on Aboriginal communities. Currently one per cent of the state’s resources are going to Aboriginal infrastructure, services and programs, when Aboriginal people make up 3.4% of the population.<sup>5</sup> A quarter of that one per cent goes to Aboriginal organisations. Transformation requires financial resources and a consistent long-term approach by governments, developed by Aboriginal communities for Aboriginal communities.

**Valuing the strengths of ACCOs and Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing** – there was lots of discussion around the “cognitive dissonance” of governments saying they value and listen to Aboriginal people and the community controlled sector - while imposing white ways of doing things on Aboriginal services – including commissioning processes outlined above; inappropriate reporting mechanisms, including racist approaches to indicators and

<sup>5</sup> p6. NSW Treasury *Interim Indigenous Expenditure Report 2021 -2022* viewed 29 September 2022 at [https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/20220323\\_indigenous\\_expenditure\\_report\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/20220323_indigenous_expenditure_report_accessible.pdf)



outcomes measurement; and of course racist child protection tools that punish families for being poor - and that lead to very high rates of Aboriginal children being taken from their families. Supporting and enabling the strengths of Aboriginal parenting, communal approaches to problem solving, and groundbreaking work by ACCOs, are critical to dealing with the devastating impacts of removal on Aboriginal children and their communities.



Nakari Thorpe introducing Catherine Liddle appearing onscreen from Alice Springs.





## Summary

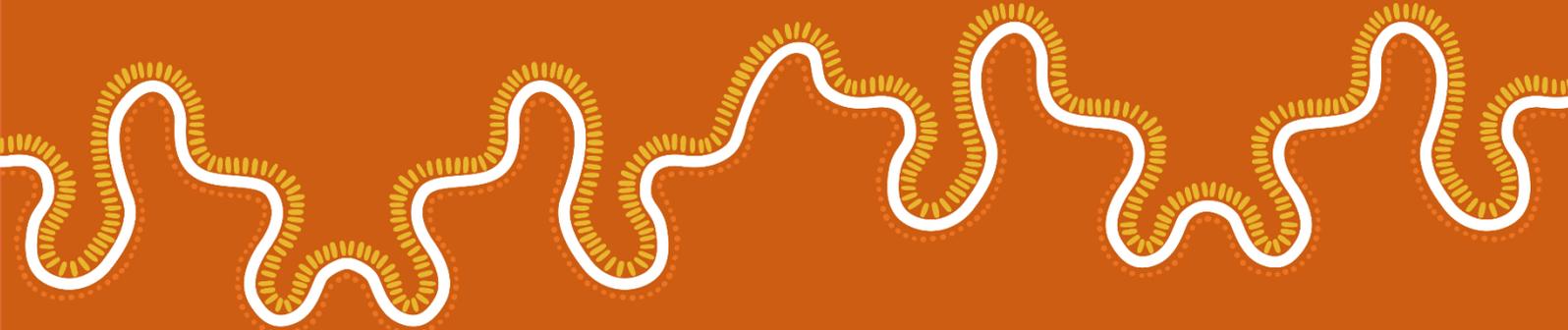
The event concluded with closing remarks from Minister Franklin and host Nakari Thorpe. The Minister thanked everyone for participating and acknowledged the importance of making Aboriginal people and organisations central in the process of making change. He noted that governments were not good at admitting endemic failures or the need for systemic change but acknowledged that he had heard how important this was.

*"I keep meeting with organisations and you can just see the desperation on their face, it's like we've been through all of this, but you know, you seem like an okay guy, so we'll go through it all again - but it's frustrating, and of course it's frustrating in terms of government too – we need to find a line and stick to it, I heard it, I get it."*

Minister for Aboriginal Affairs  
The Hon. Ben Franklin, MLC



**Ngarala Duba**  
**Recommendations**



## Recommendations For Government Action

The following recommendations are critical to providing effective services for Aboriginal people, and working with Aboriginal communities to address poverty and disadvantage in NSW. They require a whole-of-government approach with commitments across a number of departments.

### Priority Three - Transformation

#### *Transforming commissioning processes*

- Develop effective approaches to commissioning across the sector, co-designed with ACCOs, communities, and Aboriginal peaks playing a lead role in the development process. These approaches need to take into account:
  - Support for a range of organisations – small and large, specialist and generalist.
  - Priority focus on place-based organisations and localised solutions with a diverse range of approaches.
  - Assessment processes that involve local expertise and engagement with Aboriginal decision makers.
  - Funding that recognises the true cost of service delivery and that is flexible, evidence based and sustainable.
  - Funding that takes into account the cultural work that ACCOs and their staff undertake, noting that this work is vital.
  - Effective planning and long-term embedded funding to address climate change – so that place-based services including ACCOs are able to plan for and respond to disasters when needed – with flexible resources on hand to back them up; and recognition for their vital role.
  - Outcomes measurement that is community led with targets, indicators and mechanisms developed with community input.

***“If we properly address the commissioning issue that everyone has flagged, arguably a number of those other challenges shift. If we implement genuine Aboriginal-led commissioning, not just for service delivery but the elements that sit alongside (such as workforce development), communities become empowered to drive service system design, and will exercise greater control of those levers that government’s currently do with respect to sector development. Rather than trying to make the current (Settler) systems work, change the systems so they centre our communities.”***

***Audience Member***



*Building a supported sector accountable to Aboriginal communities.*

- Recognise the educative role and senior leadership that ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks provide for governments and the sector.
- Introduce a requirement for all organisations to show progress towards reflecting their client base in their board, management, and staff.
- Investigate and report on pay parity across the sector - including government, non-Aboriginal organisations, and ACCOs, and taking into account the gender pay gap.
- For the Department of Communities and Justice to work in partnership with the sector to develop a plan to address inequalities and exploitation across the sector<sup>6</sup> taking into consideration:
  - Pay parity.
  - Extension of funding contracts to at least 5 years to build skills, career pathways and enable long term planning to maximise resources.
  - Ending short term contracts across multiple grant programs by embedding responsive funding<sup>7</sup> (or access to) into contracts.
  - Recognition and funding for cultural work and additional hours undertaken by Aboriginal employees.
  - Regular reporting on hours worked and an approach developed to identify and address exploitation, burn out, and overwork in the sector.
- Introduce requirements for all funded social service organisations to implement regular anti-racism and localised cultural awareness training across board, management, and staff. Providing additional funding for appropriate organisations (Aboriginal peaks or Aboriginal owned consultancies) to offer this for free across the sector for small to medium organisations, with appropriate payment scales for larger organisations.
- Support the growth and development of Aboriginal peak organisations in collaboration with communities.
- Support change making in the social service sector by considering the role of regional peaks and explore opportunities in partnership with the sector, to support better access to networking and collaboration regionally.
- Provide genuine investment in Aboriginal workforce development by partnering across the sector with peaks, ACCOs and communities to develop an industry wide Aboriginal workforce strategy and plan.<sup>8</sup>
- Create an Aboriginal work force strategy and plan for the Department of Communities and Justice.

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<sup>6</sup> Noting that exploitation is a sector wide problem particularly for Aboriginal people, and women (80% of the social service sector workforce).

<sup>7</sup> For example responding to health crises, natural disasters, or new research and innovations.

<sup>8</sup> Noting that more Aboriginal people work in health and welfare 14% than any other industry, apart from construction (also 14%).



### *Transforming the child protection system*

- Continue to work together with the Department of Communities and Justice collaborating with Aboriginal peaks, ACCOs, and the social service sector to genuinely transform the child protection system by:
  - Implementing the **Family is Culture** report in full.
  - Increasing investment in Aboriginal-led services and supporting and planning for the transfer of services to ACCOs.
  - Eliminating unsuitable assessment tools that cannot distinguish between poverty and neglect.
  - Investing in community-led family preservation as the first priority. Supporting real family connection work, building capacity, with an emphasis on “family funding” to keep kids in community.
  - Identifying leading Aboriginal organisations and replicating their work including holistic and transdisciplinary models.

## **Priority Reform Four - Shared access to data**

### *Reconsidering outcomes measurement*

- Establish community-led, community-owned processes around data collection and evaluation. Current approaches to outcomes measurement, evaluation and data collection need to be reconsidered with support from communities, Aboriginal peaks, leaders, researchers and academics to:
  - Eliminate culturally-unsafe or racist data and evaluation methodologies.
  - Establish protocols around Aboriginal data sovereignty.
  - Identify gaps in service delivery for Aboriginal communities.



## Recommendations for Action by the Social Service Sector

These actions are targeted to sector peaks, including NCOSS, and larger organisations with sufficient internal resources to take on some of the work of leadership. It is vital that the sector provides the leadership, direction, and accountability in partnership with the ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks so that non-Aboriginal organisations are able to better support the work of ACCOs and improve service delivery for Aboriginal people.

### Priority Two – Building the Community Controlled Sector

*Honouring the value of ACCOs as senior sector partners*

- Collaborate with ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks to ensure effective advocacy to governments and the sector in supporting self-determination and the growth of ACCOs.
- Promote and profile the work of ACCOs, Aboriginal peaks, and academics as senior and leading partners in the sector offering ground-breaking approaches to community-led work, and pay respect to the successes and strengths of a 75,000 year old culture.

### Priority Three - Transformation

*Leadership*

- Provide capacity building for the sector, in partnership with ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks, to:
  - Improve understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing.
  - Address racism and de-colonising policy and practice across the sector.
  - Create space for collaborations in the sector and ensuring honest and open discussion around effective ways of supporting the growth of ACCOs and Aboriginal employment and leadership.
  - Enable effective and best practice co-design.
- Keep the focus on the growth of ACCOs and self-determination for Aboriginal communities while highlighting challenges for Aboriginal communities accessing services provided by non-Aboriginal organisations.
- Promote best practice approaches to supporting Aboriginal employment and leadership in the social service sector in collaboration with ACCOs, Aboriginal peaks, staff and peers.
- Harness the sector to affect change through our power as essential service providers and supporting service providers that are pushing back across a range of issues.

*Direction*

- Advocate for better commissioning processes across the sector, and highlighting the impacts of inappropriate practices on ACCOs.
- Continue to advocate for an end to the exploitation of women and Aboriginal people in the “care” economy.
- Continue to advocate for funding that reflects the true cost of doing business, highlighting the cost of cultural work for Aboriginal workers and ACCOs.



- Start a wider conversation about reporting, data and outcomes measurement in the sector.

#### *Accountability*

- Develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans that hold peaks/organisations to account in a publicly accessible and transparent way.



## For Action by Organisations

These actions are provided for consideration by organisations, staff, management, and boards in the social service sector: recognising that organisations are at different points in their journey, and that they are diverse in size, type, location and access to resources.

### Priority Two – Building the Community Controlled Sector

*Getting Out of the Way: Aboriginal Communities Supported by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations*

- Support local ACCOs and Aboriginal businesses through procurement practices.
- Ensure that referral pathways to ACCOs are appropriate and culturally safe.
- Review tenders to ensure that you are not competing with ACCOs who are able to deliver those services. Consider reciprocal collaborations in that process.
- Interrogate your engagement with Aboriginal communities – are you duplicating services already offered by local ACCOs? If local ACCOs are not yet at scale is a collaborative partnership appropriate?
- Build succession plans and partner with ACCOs to transfer services you currently deliver to Aboriginal communities.
- Keep services local by hiring local people for local solutions.

### Priority Three - Transformation

*Groundwork: Building relationships and collaborating with ACCOs.*

- Embed the principles of self-determination into all that you do as a staff member, a leader, an organisation.
- Ensure you are an organisation whose board, management and staff value the knowledge and strengths of ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks as senior leaders in the sector bringing 75,000 years of best practice to the table.
- Ensure that you practice cultural humility, continuing to educate yourselves, and striving to understand Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing; and valuing different ways of doing things by ACCOs, peaks and Aboriginal peers in the sector.
- Check that in this process you are:
  - paying for Aboriginal cultural knowledge or advice.
  - not appropriating Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing.
- RAPs can be very useful for focusing an organisation on how to provide better outcomes for Aboriginal communities, and keeping ourselves accountable, but they are only part of the journey. For smaller organisations with limited resources just having the conversations, participating in opportunities to learn, and building reciprocal relationships is a great starting point.
- Reach out to ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks in your area/field and build reciprocal, long term, and responsive relationships – if you are a larger organisation share your resources and administrative supports in this process.





- Develop robust decision-making processes, and suitable tools and training about partnering respectfully, and working with Aboriginal staff and communities.
- Listen and learn in all your dealings with ACCOs, peaks, and Aboriginal peers. Be ready to get things wrong and be challenged – be open and accountable.

#### *Addressing Racism in the sector: Stand Up Show Up*

- Advocate for ACCOs, peaks and Aboriginal peers in your communities, with sector partners, and with governments (including local government).
- Collaborate with ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks to push back against government directives and practices that are clearly racist, exploitative or culturally inappropriate.

#### *Enabling Best practice in Communities*

- Co-design service delivery and programs for Aboriginal communities with Aboriginal communities and ensure commitment to best practice co-design processes. Pay for people's lived experiences and cultural knowledge. Ensure that outcomes measurement is appropriate, developed through that process, and that data and outcomes are shared with communities (Priority Four - Data).
- Build an Aboriginal workforce, board, and management that reflects the communities you work with.
- Designate roles within the organisation. Work with communities to identify where those roles are best placed.
- Understand the issues surrounding Aboriginality and being "on country" - implement guidelines, and be accountable for Aboriginal staff to local communities.



## Priority Five – Aboriginal Employment

### *Building Cultural Safety and Employment Pathways*

- Put structures, systems and processes in place internally that support culturally safe workplaces and enable Aboriginal employment.
- Implement regular anti-racism and cultural awareness training across the board, management, and staff.
- Connect staff with local communities and Aboriginal events to build trust and connections. Consider opportunities for cultural immersion and learning especially in a local context.
- Interrogate your workforce structure – for example, are all your senior Aboriginal staff working solely in a specialist Aboriginal service delivery arm or unit?
- Ensure you are not competing inappropriately with Aboriginal organisations for staff or resources.
- Work closely with Aboriginal staff to identify their goals and aspirations.
- Ensure that Aboriginal staff are given opportunities across the workplace, commensurate with those aspirations eg acting up, training, secondments, attending or leading interagencies and peak forums, conferences etc.
- Develop an approach to cultural load and ‘identity strain’ that recognises and rewards the strengths of your Aboriginal staff; and mitigates the stresses that they bear working in a non-Aboriginal organisation. For example if you are a large organisation consider employing a cultural supervisor.
- Acknowledge cultural responsibilities for Aboriginal staff in the workplace in position descriptions and pay levels.
- Acknowledge and value community connections and cultural obligations of your Aboriginal staff with flexible working arrangements to support time off, stress leave etc.
- Support and encourage Aboriginal innovation and cultural strengths – for example holistic approaches to client support.
- Adapt staff and organisational KPIs to reflect Aboriginal holistic approaches and Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, doing.
- Ensure that Aboriginal staff are not isolated and have opportunities to network with other Aboriginal staff in your workplace, access to Aboriginal mentors, coaching, external supervision and external networking opportunities with Aboriginal peers.
- Value lived experience and cultural strengths over formal qualifications.
- Expand recruitment practices to reflect the lived experience of potential Aboriginal applicants through:
  - Partnering with Aboriginal recruitment agencies if there is one in your area.
  - Advertising through networks, flyers, community notice boards, as well as traditional online avenues.
  - Avoiding asking for lengthy written applications.
  - Interview panels including community members that are flexible in their approach.
  - Looking for skills and knowledge not qualifications.
- Share your experiences and celebrate the achievements of Aboriginal staff and outcomes for communities.



## Appendix 1

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### Recommended Reading

NSW Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021 - 2022

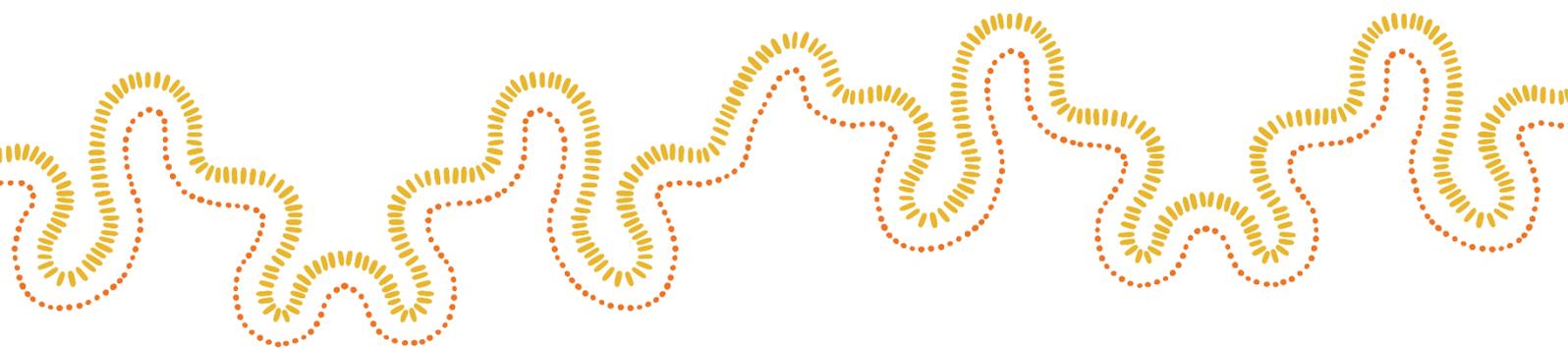
Community Consultation Companion 2021 - 2022

Community Engagement Report 2021

Gari Yala, Speak the Truth: Centering the Work Experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians 2020

A Long Way to the Top: Career opportunities and obstacles for women in the social service sector in NSW 2022

The High Cost of Doing Business - Administrative and Management Overload in Smaller NGO's May 2022



## Appendix 2

### Live Polling Results

The following are the first two slides – full results can be accessed [here](#).

Describe in one word how you are feeling about today's event?

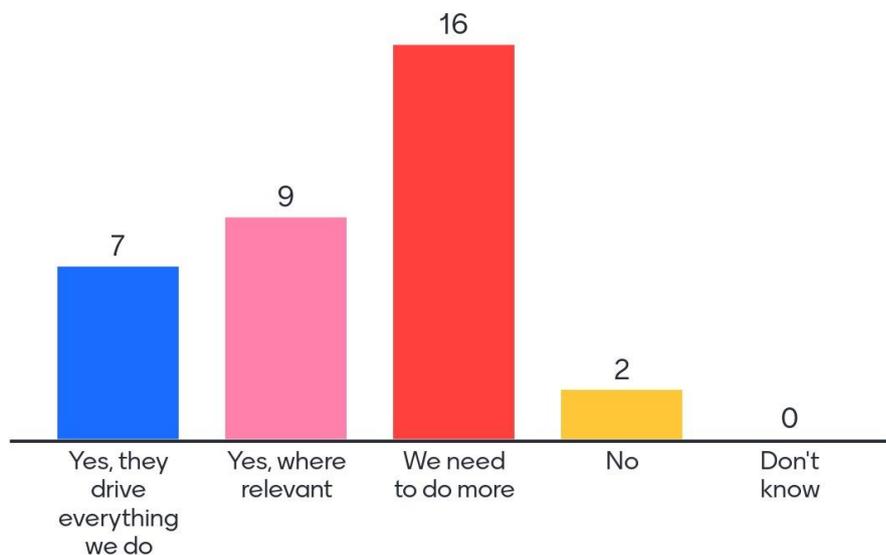
Mentimeter



Is your organisation informed or influenced by closing the gap priorities or targets in any way?

21

Mentimeter



3

## Appendix 3

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### Post Event Survey Results

A short survey was sent to all participating organisations approximately 6 weeks after the Roundtable. From the 35 non-Aboriginal organisations 15 responded – a response rate of 43%; as well as two ACCO's – 13% of ACCO's attending.

The survey asked 3 open ended questions.

#### 1. Have you made any changes at your organisation as a result of attending the roundtable?

- Three respondents said they had. Changes included:
  - Getting more proactive in implementing current plans and building relationships.
  - Establishing an identified Aboriginal HR role in their People and Culture Team
  - Developing an Aboriginal Inclusion Framework.
- 8 organisations replied “not yet” or “not at this stage”. 3 of these were currently in discussion about future changes.
- Three respondents said they hadn't but that it had confirmed that they were on the right track with current measures re supporting ACCO's and Aboriginal employment.
- One had presented to their Executive Team and Board on the Roundtable.
- One did not respond.
- One responded no.

#### 2. What changes are you intending to make?

- 16 of the 17 respondents outlined changes that they were intending to make.
- 5 of these mentioned partnering or collaborating with ACCO's or improving their partnership practices.
- 4 mentioned Aboriginal employment strategies or initiatives, or improving employment practices to attract and retain Aboriginal staff.
- Two mentioned reviewing and renewing their RAPs. Another said they would commence the RAP process.
- Three specifically mentioned setting targets for Aboriginal employment.
- Two services mentioned conversations with DCJ – one of these to start the process of transferring the care of young Aboriginal people to ACCOs.
- Mention was also made of cultural awareness, looking at procurement in relation to Aboriginal businesses, bringing forward existing projects, and continuing to implement changes as required through Closing the Gap.

### 3. Did attending the roundtable change the way you think about the issues discussed?

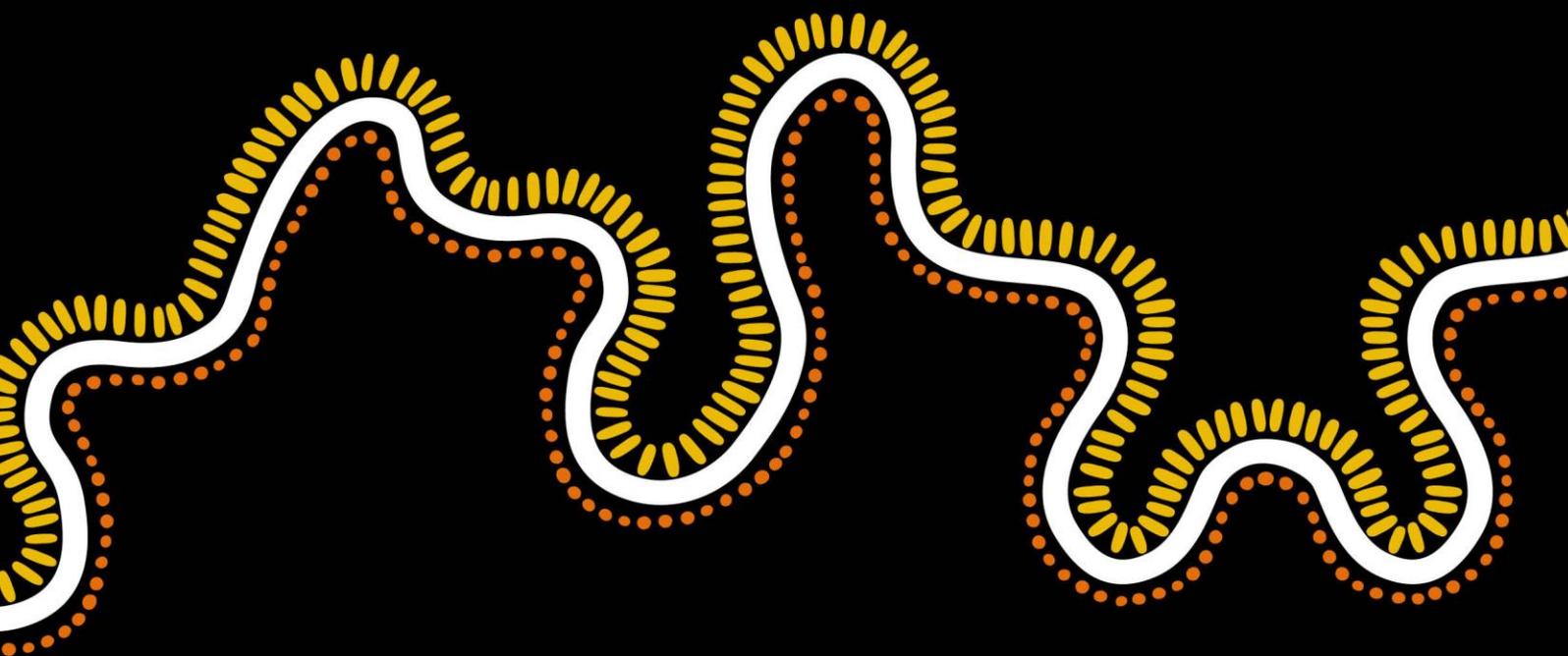
- 9 respondents said that it had. They identified a changed perspective on:
  - The importance of working together.
  - Best practice approaches to partnering and collaborating with Aboriginal organisations including a proactive approach to building relationships.
  - The role of non-Aboriginal organisations in supporting the growth of the community controlled sector.
  - Getting out of the way.
  - Questioning and making changes to policy and process.
  - Providing links and connections to support smaller organisations.
- 6 said it hadn't changed the way they think but reinforced or informed current thinking in this space including:
  - Importance of a consistent long-term approach from governments.
  - Importance of self-determination.
  - Insights into other organisations and the processes of government and the way they distorted Aboriginal led practice.
  - The need for continual improvement.
- Two said no.

***“Absolutely. Very informative, challenging and impactful. The speakers were brilliant, inspirations. I learnt a lot and felt very humble and grateful to be in the room - Grandmothers law - Funds that support Aboriginal people/communities going to non-Aboriginal services just has to stop - Aboriginal people know what is best when supporting Aboriginal people/community - let us design our own services / programs.”***



## Acknowledgements

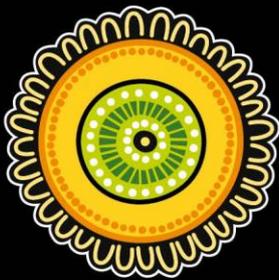
NCOSS has prepared this report for Aboriginal Affairs NSW and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations to provide guidance for government and the sector to drive positive change for Aboriginal communities. We would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of Aboriginal Affairs NSW and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations in the development and delivery of the Roundtable and this report. Also many thanks to all the event participants who attended in person or online; our fantastic host Nakari Thorpe, and speakers and panelists who shared their knowledge and experiences, providing inspiration and information to guide roundtable discussions.



Artwork elements are from “One Step of Many More” commissioned by NCOSS from Wandj Wandian artist Karlie Stewart.



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NSW Council of Social Service



A report prepared by NCOSS for Aboriginal Affairs NSW and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations.

**For more information**

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Aboriginal Affairs



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