



OCHRE: Five years on

Making OCHRE stronger: The NSW Government's interim response to Stage 1 of the independent evaluation of OCHRE



Aboriginal Affairs



OCHRE

stands for:



Ochre is culturally significant to Aboriginal people within NSW and is used in ceremonies to bind people to each other and their Country. Ochre is recognised for its special healing powers which promote physical, emotional and spiritual health.



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ARTIST RECOGNITION

Kim Healey is a descendant of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr nations, and also a descendant of the Djunbun (Platypus) Clan, original custodians of the Washpool at Lionsville in Northern NSW. She currently lives within Country in South Grafton NSW, creating and telling her stories along the mighty Clarence River. Kim strives to capture Country and utilise her voice through her work, to interpret the world around her.

This work captures Kim Healey's connection to Country. It speaks of the Bundjalung and Gumbaynggirr nations which were created by the Yuladarah, the creator of rivers, boundaries and tribal land. This is the Clarence River boundary with Susan Island in the middle of these two tribes which is a birthing place. Using a sgraffito technique, scribing in the sandy medium is a mapping system of Country.

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MINISTER'S FOREWORD



Earlier this year, I had the privilege of formally receiving feedback from Aboriginal leaders and community members on the NSW Government's *OCHRE* plan at a ceremonial event held in Parliament on 15 August.

My predecessors were also in attendance – the Hon. Victor Dominello MP and the Hon. Leslie Williams MP. Together, we represented the Government's collective custodianship of *OCHRE* since it was released in April 2013. But more importantly, we represented nearly seven years of policy discipline that commits to transforming the relationship between the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities.

OCHRE is a unique initiative in that it has been developed together with Aboriginal communities across the state. This policy is about changing the relationship and conversations with Aboriginal communities, to ultimately change our policy responses. This is about forming relationships based on deep engagement and negotiation.

Minister Dominello started the conversation in 2011 and in 2013 successfully shepherded *OCHRE* through Cabinet and into the public domain where it became

government policy. Leslie Williams demonstrated great respect for this approach by publicly assuring Aboriginal communities that an independent and ethical evaluation would be pursued with the intention of growing and nurturing *OCHRE*, not diminishing it.

My responsibility has been to support and resource the decision of Aboriginal communities' to publically release this important evaluation and to continue the journey of policy refresh and renewal as we consider the evidence made available to us.

It is an absolute honour for me to be able to work alongside so many passionate advocates for our First Peoples every day. The progress we have made since the implementation of *OCHRE* would not have been achievable without the hard work undertaken by Aboriginal communities across NSW.

In 2019, the NSW Government will release its final response to the findings and recommendations

of the evaluation, the report of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) and the NSW Ombudsman's Special Report to Parliament.

Like every aspect of *OCHRE* since its creation, this will be done through a continuing conversation with Aboriginal people.

The Hon. Sarah Mitchell, MLC
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD OF ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS NSW



Aboriginal Affairs NSW has been engaged in a continuing conversation with Aboriginal communities since 2011.

When the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal affairs was undertaking the community consultations that delivered *OCHRE*, Aboriginal people across NSW made it very clear that, while the various plans and policies that had come before had raised great expectations, none had delivered the tangible and promised improvements to peoples' lives.

During the consultations, communities called for a new approach to policy making based on genuine partnership characterised by: joint decision-making facilitated through the devolution of power; investments in community leadership to develop the capacity to become independent of government; and greater accountability and transparency for local outcomes.

OCHRE's commitment was to reset the relationship between Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government through its genuine commitment to co-design policy, implementation and evaluation.

Five years on, we have delivered a plan, implemented a plan and evaluated a plan with Aboriginal people at the centre of decision making. The transformation I have seen through this experience has been nothing short of extraordinary – in public servants who wasted no time in taking advantage of the permission that *OCHRE* has given them to do business differently with Aboriginal communities and in the Aboriginal leadership that has grown and flourished when provided the opportunity to sit at the table with the most senior levels of government to negotiate local and regional solutions for their communities.

I have seen firsthand that changing the conversation from one of deficits and gaps to one of hope and aspirations has helped to change our approach. In changing our approach we are supporting a transformation of the relationships between government and community to support a self-determining future for Aboriginal people.

Our efforts have been rewarded with strong community buy-in and belief that we are serious. Five years on, community participation in *OCHRE* is still increasing, demand for the further roll-out of initiatives is high, and unlike previous policies, general community perceptions of *OCHRE* remain positive. The way we have gone about delivering *OCHRE* with Aboriginal communities is starting to be recognised nationally as good practice. And we are really proud of that. Even so, the promise of *OCHRE* was that it would reset the relationship between Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government, not just Aboriginal Affairs NSW. This means we need to embed this way of working across all government agencies – in policy design, and the implementation and evaluation of services and initiatives that target Aboriginal people and communities.

That is the challenge we have set for ourselves here at Aboriginal Affairs NSW,

and it is my challenge to my colleagues across government. The past five years have taught us that co-design is not rocket science but doing things differently does require time, resources, dedication and discipline. It can be uncomfortable. If there is one principle that must underpin our ongoing work with Aboriginal communities, it is start as you mean to finish, and finish what you start. And now we need to continue what we have started.

I once again thank the Aboriginal leaders who have all contributed to this effort, our government partners for continuing to take *OCHRE* seriously and for their leadership in refusing to support a “tick-a-box” approach to the evaluation, and choosing instead to commit publicly to pursuing a negotiated response, and finally, my team at Aboriginal Affairs NSW for their uncompromising support for co-designed solutions to support a self-determining future in NSW for all of our First Nations.

Jason Ardler
Head of Aboriginal Affairs

OUR COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES



Overall *OCHRE* has been remarkably successful. It has a relatively low level of resourcing compared to many government programs in Aboriginal policy, and yet it has strong positive recognition in the Aboriginal communities of NSW. Implementation of the *OCHRE* plan has begun to help in the process of improving trust in the NSW Government's commitment to Aboriginal communities' economic advancement and self-determination.

Katz I, Bates S, Idle J, Jopson W, Barnes M. (2018). *OCHRE Evaluation Stage 1: Implementation and early outcomes. Synthesis Report (SPRC Report /18)*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW Sydney

Five years since it was released in April 2013, *OCHRE* has become a powerful symbol of the NSW Government's unwavering commitment to embedding the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal people into policy making, implementation and evaluation. Recognised across Australia for its approach which focuses not on gaps and deficits, but on hopes and aspirations, *OCHRE* has been embraced as a forward looking plan that is enabling the NSW Government to transform its relationship with Aboriginal communities – from a relationship of transaction to one of deep respect and negotiated solutions.

In Parliament House on 15 August 2018, Aboriginal leaders from across NSW presented to the NSW Government the evidence from the first independent evaluation of *OCHRE* that look at issues of implementation and early outcomes. The NSW Coalition for Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) also presented to the NSW Government its response to the evaluation.

This special edition of *OCHRE: Five years on* represents the NSW Government's interim response to both reports. The NSW Government broadly accepts all of the findings and the recommendations from the evaluation of *OCHRE* that the Aboriginal leaders presented. The NSW Government acknowledges the formal response it has received from the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) and thanks the Coalition for its leadership role under *OCHRE*.

Information about the comprehensive suite of evidence that has been developed to inform the implementation of *OCHRE* can be found in [The Continuing Conversation](#) section of this report.

The following is the NSW Government's interim response to both reports. In responding to the evidence about *OCHRE*, the NSW Government commits to:

1. Negotiating with Aboriginal leaders, community members, peak bodies, regional alliances and



OUR COMMITMENT TO ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES CONTINUED

community organisations involved with the implementation of *OCHRE* to develop local, regional and state-wide responses to the findings and recommendations from the evaluation.

2. Releasing a comprehensive response to the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation of *OCHRE* in 2019 that reflects a negotiated position with Aboriginal leaders, community members, peak bodies, regional alliances and community organisations involved with the implementation of *OCHRE*.
3. Refreshing *OCHRE* as NSW Government policy in 2019 to:
 - a. maintain its policy relevance
 - b. further embed the practice of co-designing policy solutions with Aboriginal communities
 - c. strengthen accountability by resourcing Aboriginal people to be at the centre of decision making
 - d. continue to transform its relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW.

In recognition of the introduction of the *NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*, which acknowledges the significance of Aboriginal languages in NSW, the NSW Government:

4. Reaffirms its commitment that Aboriginal peoples of NSW are the knowledge holders and custodians of Aboriginal languages.

5. Reaffirms its commitment to supporting the Aboriginal Languages Trust, once established, to coordinate efforts in relation to Aboriginal language activities at local, regional and state levels and this includes efforts undertaken as part of *OCHRE*'s Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest initiative. This also includes seeking advice and direction from, and collaborating with the Trust about the NSW Government's final response to the findings and recommendations from the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.

6. Reaffirms that the role of the NSW Government is to support, facilitate and enable the teaching of Aboriginal languages in public schools but at the direction and instruction of Aboriginal communities, Elders and language speakers in recognition of, and out of respect to, Aboriginal people being the custodians of Aboriginal languages and having the right to determine their growth and nurturing.

In response to the recommendations from the NCARA report, the NSW Government commits to:

7. Negotiating in good faith with NCARA on all aspects of its response to the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.
8. Incorporating the recommendations from NCARA into the NSW Government's final response to the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.

The NSW Ombudsman's office plans to table a comprehensive report to Parliament about the implementation of *OCHRE* in the first half of 2019. A government response to the evaluation, the NCARA report in 2019 after the Ombudsman's report has been received.

OUR OCHRE JOURNEY

The Hon. Victor Dominello MP, former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

Minister Dominello was the Chair of the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal affairs and in April 2013 released *OCHRE* as NSW Government policy with Aboriginal leaders in Parliament House.



Between 2011 and 2015, I had the privilege of working with Aboriginal communities and senior public servants on the development and implementation of *OCHRE*, the NSW Government's community-focused plan for Aboriginal affairs. The plan puts the Aboriginal community front and centre of policymaking with respect to Aboriginal language and culture, employment and education.

OCHRE is testament to the Government's commitment to working with Aboriginal communities to achieve positive outcomes. The plan doesn't seek to make bold statements that aim to achieve unrealistic objectives in a short timeframe. The plan is pragmatic and acknowledges that meaningful progress takes time. The plan emphasises collaboration and an evidence-based approach to policymaking. It's pleasing to see that ground breaking initiatives like the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests have been so warmly embraced by Aboriginal communities across the state.

This special report is an opportunity to reflect on the plan's achievements and milestones over the past five years. It is also an opportunity to identify the policy areas that require greater focus and attention. Addressing those challenges won't be simple. It will require thoughtful and robust collaboration between the Government and community. We have a shared responsibility to ensure the good progress being made continues in the future.

We are blessed to live in a country in which the First Peoples of our beautiful land are from one of the oldest cultures in the world. We must continue to work together to ensure *OCHRE*'s objectives are realised for the betterment of all Australians.

OUR OCHRE JOURNEY CONTINUED

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP, former Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

The Hon. Leslie Williams MP was the second Minister for Aboriginal Affairs to have custodianship of *OCHRE*. She instituted a 10 year independent evaluation whose findings would be used to grow *OCHRE*.



The release of the fifth annual report of the *OCHRE* plan shows just how much we can achieve when we work together towards agreed goals and outcomes. It is a plan that Aboriginal communities and the NSW Government have created together and one that focusses on embedding partnerships and ensuring successful initiatives.

As Minister for Aboriginal Affairs I found it such a privilege to visit communities across the state hearing more Aboriginal language being spoken by children and young adults and experiencing the enthusiasm of young adults as they planned for their future with the support of Opportunity Hubs. I saw first-hand the commitment of parents in Connected Community schools like Walgett Community College and Hillvue Public School in Tamworth, where a strengthened focus on educational success has contributed to the improved health and well-being of the students and the broader community.

Five years after the ground-breaking *OCHRE* plan was first introduced, this annual report shows more Aboriginal school leavers are transitioning to further study or employment, more students are studying an Aboriginal language, more Aboriginal people are participating in government decision making and more Aboriginal businesses are supplying products and services to government.

The enthusiasm of each of the Aboriginal Regional Alliances participating in Local Decision Making has been unwavering, and I acknowledge each of the Chairs – both past and present – for their commitment to working with the Government in driving sustainable change. This will ensure we continue to understand the priorities for each community, so that together we can design service delivery that will make a real difference in overcoming Aboriginal disadvantage.

While I know that so much has been achieved since the inception of *OCHRE*, I also know there is still more to do and learn, and I look forward to continuing to watch closely the next steps in our journey with Aboriginal people.

OUR OCHRE JOURNEY CONTINUED

Mark Scott, OAM, Secretary of Education

The Head of Aboriginal Affairs is a member of the Department of Education's Executive Team which is led by Mark Scott. The decisions of this Executive Team impact the direction and success of *OCHRE*.

One of the most important aspects of leadership is to get the right people doing the right work. For the NSW Government, this has meant enabling the experts in Aboriginal Affairs NSW to get on with the job of implementing *OCHRE* in close partnership with Aboriginal communities. Working out of the Education cluster, Aboriginal Affairs NSW is leading this important work on behalf of all government departments in NSW. The work on *OCHRE* is widely respected and having an impact far beyond the initiatives in the plan.

I have been pleased to support *OCHRE* and the Aboriginal affairs reform agenda and have been delighted to see the leadership of Aboriginal Affairs NSW driving this important work. In 2018 the office of Aboriginal Affairs NSW moved to its own premises in Mascot and the Head of Agency role was recognised as a Deputy Secretary position – changes that recognise and better reflect the role and impact of Aboriginal Affairs NSW and *OCHRE* across the state.

Within the broader Department of Education we have also set up a process for a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). I have seen the tangible benefits the development of a RAP has brought to other agencies and corporations. The RAP will allow us to build cultural safety and insight, and work together to ensure the department is a great place to work for Aboriginal people and that we are working together to develop strong learning outcomes for every Aboriginal student in our schools. I am confident we will also be able to build a practical plan focused on relationships and respect that is meaningful, mutually beneficial and sustainable. This work will help ensure we are all empowered to deeply respect and value Aboriginal people as Australia's First Nation Peoples.



OUR OCHRE JOURNEY CONTINUED

Professor Ilan Katz, Chief Investigator, OCHRE evaluation

Professor Katz is responsible for continuing the conversation with Aboriginal communities participating in OCHRE and leading the evaluation team at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales



Leading the OCHRE evaluation has been a unique experience for my team, and the evaluation itself is different from any other government funded research in Australia. The evaluation has been funded for 10 years, which is unprecedented in NSW and allows us to develop long-term relationships with communities throughout the state.

More importantly the evaluation has been designed to be community controlled. That has meant that we have asked permission to be on Country, that the methods and approaches have been co-designed with communities, that we check with participants that we have reported what they have told us properly, and that Aboriginal communities have had the final say in what happens to the reports. Another difference has been that the evaluation has required very close working relationships between the evaluation team and Aboriginal Affairs NSW colleagues, who have been closely involved in liaising with communities and supporting the evaluation.

For me personally it has been a real privilege – as well as transformative and challenging – to work with communities on the OCHRE evaluation. Most rewarding has been working with communities and designing ways with them to ensure that they are in control of the evaluation. There is no ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach, we have developed the process for this with each community along the way. It was a proud moment for the evaluation team to see the communities’ reports being handed over to the Minister, and to be assured that the Government will respond to findings and recommendations which reflect the voice of the communities.

I have learned so much from this evaluation thanks to the work of community members, Aboriginal Affairs NSW staff and my evaluation team. I hope that this evaluation will help to raise the bar for research with ‘the most researched people in the world’.

OUR *OCHRE* JOURNEY CONTINUED

Dr Lynette Riley, member of the *OCHRE* Evaluation Steering Committee

The steering committee oversees and supports the work of the independent team at the Social Policy Research Centre, University of New South Wales by providing specialist advice on evaluation plans and reports, and helping to solve issues as they arise so that the best possible approach is taken.

To ensure Aboriginal communities engage and participate, so that they can see their voices are heard on the issues which affect their daily lives, a community-led approach is vital.

I was extremely excited when invited to sit on the *OCHRE* Evaluation Steering Committee to discover that the *OCHRE* evaluation, led by the NSW Government, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and Professor Katz (UNSW), was using a community-led approach. This research process is still considered unusual in academia, though it is often used in crisis-driven situations. It is reassuring that this approach is being used here to engage Aboriginal communities in co-design so that they can create changes dynamically and devise sustainable practices which address community needs.

The community reports, created by the community-led approach, are a testament to the inclusive nature of the *OCHRE* program. Because Aboriginal communities have a real voice in and control over the way business is conducted between themselves and government agencies, the provision of public sector services can be improved. And those services, improved in keeping with each Aboriginal community's ways of doing business, will ensure in turn that their cultures and languages are supported and maintained.



OUR OCHRE JOURNEY CONTINUED

Dr Tony Dreise, member of the OCHRE Evaluation Steering Committee and the Aboriginal Affairs NSW Researcher-in-Residence.

Ochre has been central to the cultural practices of First Nations people across Australia for tens of thousands of years. Its cultural applications extend beyond painting to include use as a protective and healing agent, an expression of story, dance and ceremony, and a preserver of animal skin. It is entirely fitting that the *OCHRE* (Opportunity, Choice, Healing,

Responsibility, Empowerment) plan in NSW borrows its name from this renowned cultural practice forged within the oldest continuing cultures on Earth.

Like its namesake, *OCHRE* is grounded. It is now into its fifth year of implementation. Reviews and evaluations to date indicate that the strategy has far exceeded expectations. It is an ambitious plan, as it seeks to fundamentally recalibrate the relationship between Aboriginal people and the state of NSW. For too long, policy, research and service delivery have been done *to* and not *with* and by Aboriginal people. *OCHRE* seeks to shed old public service cultures and practices and renew them in ways that make them fit for purpose, just, responsive, and appropriate.

The *OCHRE* research and evaluation journey will provide key stepping stones to this desired future relationship between First Nations and government. Research provides the opportunity to listen, reflect, monitor, and learn. *OCHRE* provides an opportunity for policy makers, researchers and Aboriginal communities to co-design and co-produce desired futures. Such collaborative approaches will ideally embrace both western and Aboriginal ways of knowing, doing and being. Working from the inspiration of ochre, the plan ahead hopefully will allow the painting of fresh policy murals that future generations can look back at and feel proud. We should remember that while *OCHRE* is relatively new, ochre is far from new. So let's embrace culture and history in order to move ahead.



OUR OCHRE JOURNEY CONTINUED

Des Jones, Chairperson of the NSW Coalition for Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) and Chairperson of the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA).

Des has played a strong leadership role in the evaluation of *OCHRE* at both the regional and state level – MPRA was one of the sites chosen for the evaluation of Local Decision Making and NCARA provided the authority to release the evaluation's synthesis report.

OCHRE, the NSW Government's community-focused plan for Aboriginal affairs, contains two components that have been critical to its success. The first is that the plan invests directly in Aboriginal governance and Aboriginal leadership. The second is that the voices, hopes and aspiration of Aboriginal people have been the driving force behind its design and implementation.

And it has been pleasing to see that this has continued in the evaluation. In the past, governments have subjected Aboriginal people routinely to endless rounds of intrusive research and evaluation. The usual approach has been that researchers come into our communities uninvited, take information from us, and the next thing we know, a service that has been operating in our area disappears.

This evaluation has been different. We have had greater control – including over the release of the reports that we presented to the NSW Parliament in August this year. Because we have been involved along the way we have information that we can use to benefit us, growing *OCHRE* in ways that support our aspirations and objectives. This is such a welcome change from the past where we were largely alienated from the collection, analysis, interpretation and use of data about us. This time, the knowledge gained was gained through our eyes.

Trust has been a very important part of the success of this evaluation. Trust takes time to build. Over the past three years members of NCARA have got to know the evaluation's Chief Investigator, Ilan Katz, and we have had many conversations and have developed a trusting relationship. NCARA intends to take an active role in how the evaluation is conducted in the future, so that our communities lead the work undertaken.

In our response to the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*, NCARA recommended to the NSW Government that it continue without wavering along the path that it set out on when *OCHRE* was first created, which empowers Aboriginal communities at both local and regional levels. We look forward to being part of developing the NSW Government's comprehensive response to the evaluation in 2019 and to working with government to ensure community-led local and regional solutions can be found.



THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING



NSW is the first state in Australia to incorporate healing as a commitment in its Aboriginal affairs policy. Throughout all the conversations that have been held, during the days of the Ministerial Taskforce and since the release of *OCHRE*, Aboriginal communities have continued to identify healing as a priority. The NSW Government is listening to communities' concerns about the impacts that inter-generational trauma is having on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal people and families.

Trauma is complex and conversations about healing are sensitive and challenging. The readiness of communities and government agencies to have open, honest and strengths-based conversations around healing varies across NSW.

OCHRE Healing Forums

Between September 2017 and May 2018 six *OCHRE* Healing Forums took place across regional NSW through a partnership between Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation and interested communities.

The aims of the forums were to increase understanding of inter-generational trauma and healing; identify local and regional opportunities to improve the way government and non-government organisations work with communities; and build local partnerships and support healing.

The forums were developed through a co-design process with these local planning committees:

- **Mount Druitt** – hosted by the Baabyan Aboriginal Corporation
- **Riverina Murray** – hosted by Riverina-Murray Regional Alliance
- **Central Coast** – hosted by Barang Regional Alliance
- **Clarence Valley** – hosted by Gurehlgam Aboriginal Corporation
- **Three Rivers** – hosted by the Three Rivers Regional Assembly
- **Kempsey** – hosted by Kempsey Healing Together Local Planning Committee.

Across the six forums more than 600 community members and stakeholders were engaged directly in discussions about trauma in their communities and healing.

Participants have committed to extend the discussion more widely and to raise awareness in their own families and organisations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING CONTINUED

WHAT WE HEARD

In all the *OCHRE* Healing Forums, conversations repeatedly expressed the need for an approach to be developed and understood throughout government which would support Aboriginal perspectives on revitalising culture and healing.

Recognising, valuing and sharing cultural renewal and expression

What we heard is that cultural renewal comes from within communities, led by Aboriginal people. Communities have said there is a need for cultural healing spaces to support recovery from trauma, where community and families can come together. These need to be safe spaces where Aboriginal people can reconnect to self, community and culture and where leaders, Elders and young people can rejuvenate and inspire each other as role models and through cultural practices. Healing spaces should also offer opportunities for integrated services and programs to support healing – for example, through men’s and women’s groups, family case management, trauma counselling, narrative therapy and healing through culture, art, music and play.

Recognising and valuing Aboriginal voices and self-determination

What we heard is that Aboriginal leadership is critical for healing. Communities are concerned about a lack of trust and a lack of inclusion and acknowledgment of Aboriginal people in government decision-making, particularly in relation to policies and services that affect trauma or could support healing. Communities and Elders must lead approaches to healing because their cultural perspectives are central to the process.



Truth telling – not just telling the truth, but accepting it and seeing change as a result

What we heard is that no formal mechanism (like a Parliamentary Inquiry or a Royal Commission or a settlement agreement) or relationship currently exists in Australia which would allow broad-scale truth telling and acceptance of the colonial past. Truth telling is an important part of healing. It strengthens relationships by creating understanding of community trauma and healing needs. The ability to share and talk truthfully about the past strengthens identity and addresses historical lies. That can create opportunities to heal relationships. Allowing a shared truth to be understood between communities and the service system can build more trust in relationships. In the absence of this, the Healing Forums provided an important opportunity for truth-telling, and the sharing of knowledge and insights they allowed was valued by communities and agencies.

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING CONTINUED

Trauma-informed, culturally safe service delivery

What we heard is that for healing to progress services must be delivered in ways which understand past trauma and are adapted to local community cultures.

Communities involved in the healing forums were distressed by the lack of cultural awareness, capability and responsiveness in government and non-government services. Disempowering policies and practices harm Aboriginal communities. Culturally unresponsive service systems compound existing trauma and produce new trauma in younger generations. Aboriginal families remain over-represented among those affected by child removal and incarceration. This unacceptable fact makes clear the continuing effect of trauma within communities and across generations.

Community members and representatives from government and non-government agencies agree that a business-as-usual approach will not meet Aboriginal communities' need for healing. A sustained and strategic effort is required to strengthen cultural competency and the understanding of trauma.

Services and their delivery must be co-designed with each community and delivered in a way that recognises that community's current realities, sensitivities and needs. Changes in practice must be driven by mutual respect through relationships based on understanding and awareness.



Combating racism by building cultural understanding and competency

What we heard is that all service providers and their workforce need to understand and address institutional racism and discrimination.

These legacies of colonisation may take many forms, including unconscious racial bias and the effects of guilt and paternalism.

Colonisation has also disrupted cultural strengths and leadership within Aboriginal communities in NSW, which has affected relationships throughout communities, including within Aboriginal organisations.

To counter these effects, healing will require communities to create their own culturally safe space for truth telling, to understand historical disharmony and imbalance and to overcome concerns about lateral violence.



THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING CONTINUED

Investing in the leadership of all young people, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

What we heard is that this involves making space for young people to step up, allowing space also for honest conversations about the past, and debates about the future.

Trauma is cumulative and is felt collectively, passing from one generation to the next. Community members identified high levels of community distress and trauma burden affecting individuals and families. All communities recognised the effects of this burden on young people and families, especially young parents raising their children.

Communities aspire to have young people take their place as emerging leaders and to have opportunities to connect strongly with their cultural, physical and spiritual wellbeing. The healing forums were an opportunity for young people to engage in open conversations about seeing the future, for themselves and their communities.

The future

Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the Healing Foundation will continue our partnership, working on the conversations with communities in NSW to better understand how government agencies can support healing for Aboriginal people. What we have learned from the *OCHRE* Healing Forums will help us to develop the principles of a healing-centred approach for government agencies working with Aboriginal people and communities. Aboriginal Affairs NSW will continue to work with Aboriginal communities and stakeholders on the ways government can adopt healing as a core value and commitment in its relationships, decision making and service response.

At this early stage, community concerns have focused on trauma, its effects, and how to break its intergenerational



cycle. The forum discussions have highlighted how difficult it will be for Aboriginal people to progress healing within communities while complex trauma continues to affect whole families and communities. Participants agreed that improvements in practice will endure best if they occur alongside healing within communities. For government to support healing, the way government itself works must change: workforce development throughout the public sector network should from now on include cultural competency. Here, the Public Service Commission is leading the development of minimum standards for trauma-informed and cultural-capability training.

The dialogue on healing has allowed difficult issues between communities and government to be discussed. The conversations have enabled Aboriginal people and trauma survivors, including survivors of the Stolen

THE IMPORTANCE OF HEALING CONTINUED

Generations, to voice their experience and insights and, by sharing their knowledge, to create a contemporary perspective on the effects of policies over many generations.

One example of the way dialogue on healing can open new policy approaches is *Unfinished business*, the NSW Parliament General Purpose Standing Committee's report on its inquiry into Stolen Generations reparations, tabled in Parliament on 23 June 2016. Conversations on healing in that report allowed a clearer focus on the related issue of reparations for the Stolen Generations. The NSW Government's response to *Unfinished business* includes commitments to healing in the form of improved policies and services for aged and health care for Stolen Generations survivors, and improvements to cultural competency within the public sector.

The Commonwealth Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse is another example where Aboriginal participants were able to draw strength from their conversations on healing to inform and influence that report and response.

These examples suggest clearly that healing holds the key to progress for Aboriginal people as they seek to determine their own future through *OCHRE*.

Further information about healing, including the reports from the *OCHRE* Healing Forums can be found [here](#).



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION TO HEAR, TO LISTEN, TO KNOW, TO REMEMBER

WINANGALI, a Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/
Yuawaalayaay word that means *to hear,*
to listen, to know, to remember

In 2011, the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs was formed. Its members included seven Cabinet Ministers, Aboriginal community and business leaders and senior officers from the NSW public service. The taskforce had the job of starting a new conversation with Aboriginal communities in order to produce a different policy response and create a support the creation of a different relationship between Aboriginal people and the NSW Government.

While the Ministerial Taskforce was active, a conversation began with thousands of Aboriginal people in NSW.



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION TO HEAR, TO LISTEN, TO KNOW, TO REMEMBER CONTINUED

When *OCHRE* was released in April 2013 the NSW Government made a commitment that this would not be end of the conversation with Aboriginal communities. Since then, the conversation has continued with some 6,500 people.

- On **healing**, some 200 people participated in the 2014 state-wide healing forum and some 600 more in *OCHRE* healing forums in six locations in 2017 and 2018.
- On **Aboriginal language revitalisation**, 377 people participated in 32 conversations in 16 locations in 2017.
- On **self-determination**, some 130 people participated in the 2016 Local Decision Making Conference, and 110 in the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA) gathering in 2018. There have been 12 conversations about the good governance guidelines and seven conversations about cross-cultural partnerships and collaboration in 2016. NCARA has held 25 meetings since 2014.
- On **economic prosperity**, conversations have been held with Aboriginal regional alliances about regional industry-based agreements, social-impact investment for Aboriginal economic development and the implementation of the NSW Government's Aboriginal procurement policy.
- On **building the evidence**, 30 communities and some 330 people have participated in the *OCHRE* evaluation and 11 communities and 4,386 people have participated in two evaluations of Connected Communities. Some 500 people came to four research seminars to hear about our six-year research agenda.



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

Stage 1 Evaluation (Implementation and Early Outcomes)

At a ceremony in Parliament House on 15 August 2018, the NSW Government was presented with the findings and recommendations from the Stage 1 evaluation of *OCHRE* that looked at implementation and early outcomes. Stage 1 is part of a 10-year plan for evaluating *OCHRE* that will look at implementation, outcomes and impacts.

The following sites were evaluated in Stage 1:

- The Gumbaynggirr Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest at Coffs Harbour
- The North West Wiradjuri Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest at Dubbo
- The Opportunity Hub at Campbelltown
- The Opportunity Hub at Tamworth
- Local Decision Making in the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly in Far Western NSW
- Local Decision Making in the Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation in South East NSW.

The more mature sites were chosen for evaluation as insufficient resources were available to evaluate every *OCHRE* project.

The evaluation was undertaken independently by the University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre. What made this evaluation different was that Aboriginal people were given the resources to take a central role in its decision making – from setting criteria for success to determining whether the report was published. The cover page of every evaluation report publicly attributes ownership to Aboriginal communities.

The evaluation reports are all available [here](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS

The University also produced a synthesis report about *OCHRE* as a complete program, which brought together the findings of all the individual reports. Specific recommendations from each site evaluated have also been provided through individual evaluation reports.

The synthesis report recommended that the NSW Government should:

- Work towards transferring ownership of programs to Aboriginal communities, where not already Aboriginal community owned or controlled.
- Coordinate programs to minimise overlap and gaps.
- Collect better data, ensure local Aboriginal communities have the data, to enable them to act.
- Use data to inform future resourcing model for each program.
- Ensure capacity building is embedded in all programs as well as the evaluation.
- Resource programs appropriately and reduce reliance on good will (including attendance of meetings with government).
- Clarify the role of government in each program to manage expectations of both community and government staff.
- Honour commitment to continuing conversations and include community in future developments.



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

CONTINUED

FINDINGS

Overall, the three *OCHRE* programs are working as intended in the sites evaluated.

Key strengths:

- There is broad support for *OCHRE* programs within Aboriginal communities, as Aboriginal Affairs NSW works with and listens to Aboriginal communities.
- *OCHRE* program staff are a key and critical part of the successful implementation.
- *OCHRE* is addressing important outcomes for Aboriginal communities.

Challenges and limitations:

- *OCHRE* programs need better data to be collected, including more comprehensive data that focusses on community priorities – such as wellbeing, volunteer participation, and young Aboriginal people's self-esteem.
- *OCHRE* programs need increased resources, including staffing, and more support for capacity building to properly fulfil the aims and objectives.
- It is important to improve coordination between *OCHRE* programs and between *OCHRE* and other Aboriginal programs and governance structures.

Improvements:

- *OCHRE* programs contribute to the wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples, but do not directly address wellbeing as a key aim or objective. Communities recommended that wellbeing should be integrated into the aims of *OCHRE* programs.

Community engagement and community-control:

- All *OCHRE* programs require more support and resources to maintain engagement with the diverse views and needs of Aboriginal communities in each area.
- Capacity building for Aboriginal communities to take control of services in their area should be built into all aspects of *OCHRE* programs.
- Access to *OCHRE* programs should be available to all relevant Aboriginal community members.



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

CONTINUED

Governance:

- Currently there are overly complex governance arrangements, especially for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests.
- There need to be clearer lines of responsibility between the responsible government department, community governance structures and the *OCHRE* programs, including accountability, and the role of Aboriginal Affairs NSW.
- Communities should have more input into the design and management of *OCHRE* programs. Governance structures and lines of accountability, including mechanisms for ensuring community ownership, should be clearly set out in program guidelines and policies.

Strategic planning (data, reporting and resourcing):

- Information about programs needs to focus on both the priorities of Aboriginal communities and those of government.
- Data should be provided to Aboriginal communities for use.

Coordination between *OCHRE* programs and with other organisations and services:

- *OCHRE* programs could be better coordinated; for example, there is potential for the three programs evaluated to work together to improve community access and involvement.
- *OCHRE* programs should be coordinated with other programs in communities to reduce overlap and gaps.

OCHRE policies and other government policies:

- *Local Schools, Local Decisions* policy impacts on whether Aboriginal students can access *OCHRE* programs in government schools.
- Government procuring processes could further develop capacity with Aboriginal organisations to ensure Aboriginal communities and organisations participate in tenders.



THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

CONTINUED

Connected Communities

An evaluation of Connected Communities has also been completed. This was undertaken by the Department of Education's Centre for Education Statistics and Evaluation (CESE) and will soon be made available [here](#).

The report's key findings are that:

- the strategy has had a positive impact in schools, particularly at the primary level with younger school children who were exposed to the strategy for their whole period at school
- the effect of disadvantage in these extremely disadvantaged communities has a particularly strong impact on student attendance and engagement
- there is moderate evidence to suggest that the strategy had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes, but little evidence for positive effects on NAPLAN outcomes in older years
- the focus on the early years of schooling appears to have a positive impact on students' developmental readiness
- there is strong evidence that student attendance increased for primary school students, following the introduction of strategy
- overall, school staff reported more linkages with services, particularly health services
- most school staff and communities support the strategy and feel that it is benefitting their schools overall
- the focus on culture is having positive effects on the school environment
- there is significant variation in outcomes between schools where the strategy is being implemented, which may be due to contextual factors such as location and availability of services.

NSW Ombudsman's Special Report to Parliament

In July 2014, the NSW Ombudsman was given an important new role to monitor and assess the delivery of designated Aboriginal programs in NSW under Part 3B of the Ombudsman Act, starting with *OCHRE*. This function is led by the Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs), a newly created position and the first of its kind in Australia.

The Ombudsman's Aboriginal programs role aims to provide greater transparency and accountability for the delivery of services to Aboriginal communities in NSW and for the resulting outcomes. It complements and builds on work the NSW Ombudsman's office has undertaken over the past 20 years. This role was created after the Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal affairs heard from thousands of Aboriginal people across NSW about their desire for government to be held more accountable for the money it spends on delivering Aboriginal programs, and genuinely involving community leaders in determining what programs and services are actually needed.

The Ombudsman's independent monitoring and assessment role has allowed ongoing reports on progress to be made each year as *OCHRE* initiatives have been rolled out, which have been published in the Ombudsman's annual reports, as well as regular discussions taking place between the Ombudsman's office and agencies and Aboriginal communities/leaders involved in delivering *OCHRE* initiatives, so that adjustments can be made and initiatives are strengthened along the way.

A feature of the Ombudsman's role is that it promotes an action research and strengths-based approach, rather than the oversight body simply delivering a critical 'after-the-fact' report, released after a program has been operating for an extended period of time and with significant funds having already been expended.

THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

CONTINUED

By way of illustration, in May 2016 the Ombudsman tabled a special report to Parliament, *Fostering economic development for Aboriginal people in NSW*, in order to inform the Growing NSW's First Economy – OCHRE's Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework. This report is available [here](#).

Since commencing the oversight of OCHRE, the Deputy Ombudsman (Aboriginal Programs) and his team have conducted 66 visits to 35 different communities where OCHRE initiatives are being rolled out. In this regard, valuable advice has been provided directly to the Deputy Ombudsman by local people, as well as frontline agency staff operating in OCHRE communities, so that he can take account of the different, as well as the common, challenges and opportunities that exist in each location, with a view to showcasing what's been working well and facilitating practical solutions before problems escalate.

The Ombudsman's progress reports on the implementation of OCHRE are detailed in the 'Working with Aboriginal Communities' chapter of the annual reports (2014-15 to 2017-18) – the reports are all available [here](#).

The NSW Ombudsman's office plans to table a comprehensive report to Parliament about the implementation of OCHRE in the first half of 2019, to inform the Government's proposed review and refresh of the strategy. This report will take account of key performance and outcome data provided by relevant agencies about the delivery of OCHRE initiatives, and will also have regard to the findings of evaluations commissioned during the roll-out of OCHRE.

Without pre-empting the report findings, the Ombudsman's office has indicated that it sees merit in the various OCHRE initiatives continuing, but will make recommendations aimed at strengthening their ongoing delivery and impact, as well as improving processes for tracking and reporting on outcomes achieved. The

Ombudsman's report will also explore how successful elements of the various OCHRE initiatives can be adopted more widely across the state. Critically, the Ombudsman's report will explore the type of governance arrangements needed to drive better outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW across key areas such as economic development, education and child well-being, but to also ensure that significant issues impacting on Aboriginal people in particular locations are given greater visibility and attention.

Deepening our Understanding

CO-DESIGN

OCHRE has become a powerful and highly recognisable symbol of the NSW Government's commitment to co-designing policy solutions with Aboriginal communities.

In 2017, the McKell Institute published a literature review on the approaches to Aboriginal affairs policies in NSW and a case study of OCHRE's development and implementation. The study points to the importance and complexity of genuine co-design with Aboriginal people in both the development and implementation of OCHRE. The report concludes that while other jurisdictions have attempted co-design 'OCHRE stands alone in its scale and ambition'. The McKell Institute's report can be found [here](#).

The McKell Institute literature review distils the message of other published studies: the complexities of co-design demand deeper understanding of community consent, power sharing and the authority to make decisions. Here, Aboriginal public servants play an important role in overcoming barriers which hinder the rigorous collection of evidence on which policy and practice must be based.

THE CONTINUING CONVERSATION

BUILDING THE EVIDENCE

CONTINUED

AGREEMENT MAKING

Agreement making with communities is fundamental to *OCHRE*. This includes Local Decision Making (LDM) and the negotiation of Accords with Aboriginal communities. Also fundamental is the commitment to evaluating the Accord negotiations, and publishing what is learned from that evaluation. To date, Accords have been negotiated with the Three Rivers Regional Assembly (TRRA), Illawarra Wingecarribee Alliance Aboriginal Corporation (IWAAC), the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly (MPRA) including an agreement specifically addressing social housing, and the Accord negotiation process evaluated.

The evaluations have found that the negotiation process has increased the knowledge and understanding of each party about the work and aspirations of the other. Further there is evidence of positive relationship change. As with any evaluation, areas needing improvement have been identified, notably in governance structures and the negotiation process. While the Premier's Memorandum on LDM is clear about the roles, responsibilities and practices of government representatives, the resources devoted to preparing those representatives, including developing their capability to negotiate in culturally appropriate ways, remain inadequate.

On the other side, the current process obliges Alliance members to devote many hours, unpaid, to the negotiations. Formal meetings alone take the equivalent of more than two weeks' full-time work – and to that should be added the considerable extra time required to master the detail of government policies and practices across the range of portfolios. Additional resources are clearly needed if both parties are to come to the negotiating table fully informed and fully briefed. Without this, opportunities for innovative, creative and holistic solutions will be missed. The NSW Government will consider how to address this issue in the comprehensive response to the evaluation of *OCHRE* in 2019.



MAKING *OCHRE* EVEN STRONGER

Responding to the evidence with communities

The NSW Government broadly accepts all of the findings and the recommendations from the evaluation of *OCHRE*.

In responding to the evidence about *OCHRE*, the NSW Government commits to:

1. Negotiating with Aboriginal leaders, community members, peak bodies, regional alliances and community organisations involved with the implementation of *OCHRE* to develop local, regional and state-wide responses to the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.
2. Releasing a comprehensive response to the findings and recommendations of the independent evaluation of *OCHRE* in 2019 that reflects a negotiated position with Aboriginal leaders, community members, peak bodies, regional alliances and community organisations involved with the implementation of *OCHRE*.
3. Refreshing *OCHRE* as NSW Government policy in 2019 to:
 - a. maintain its policy relevance
 - b. further embed the practice of co-designing policy solutions with Aboriginal communities
 - c. strengthen accountability by resourcing Aboriginal people to be at the centre of decision making
 - d. continue to transform its relationship with Aboriginal communities in NSW.

In recognition of the introduction of the *NSW Aboriginal Languages Act 2017*, which acknowledges the significance of Aboriginal languages in NSW, the NSW Government:

5. Reaffirms its commitment to supporting the Aboriginal Languages Trust, once established, to coordinate efforts in relation to Aboriginal language activities at local, regional and state levels and this includes efforts undertaken as part of *OCHRE*'s Aboriginal

Language and Culture Nest initiative. This also includes seeking advice and direction from, and collaborating with, the Trust about the NSW Government's final response to the findings and recommendations from the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.

6. Reaffirms that the role of the NSW Government is to support, facilitate and enable the teaching of Aboriginal languages in public schools but at the direction and instruction of Aboriginal communities, Elders and language speakers in recognition of, and out of respect to, Aboriginal people being the custodians of Aboriginal languages and having the right to determine their growth and nurturing.

In response to the recommendations from the NCARA report, the NSW Government commits to:

7. Negotiating in good faith with NCARA on all aspects of its response to the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.
8. Incorporating the recommendations from NCARA into the NSW Government's final response to the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*.

The NCARA response is available [here](#).

A comprehensive government response to the evaluation and the NCARA report will be published in 2019. The NSW Government will also respond to the findings and recommendations from the NSW Ombudsman's report once this has been received.

MAKING OCHRE EVEN STRONGER CONTINUED

Shaping the future

WORK ALREADY UNDERWAY

The evaluation of *OCHRE* has been part of its implementation from the start. As a result, steps have already been taken to respond to some of the concerns raised by Aboriginal communities.

ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE AND CULTURE NESTS

During the evaluation, community members raised the need for increased employment security for Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest tutors. The NSW Department of Education is continuing to work in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG NSW) who have been proactive, committed and actively involved in supporting Aboriginal student identity and belonging through informing, strengthening and connecting students to language and culture through sharing of knowledge and resources.

The evaluation also recommended improved data collection and that data be shared with local Aboriginal communities to support program design and decision making. While data was already being collected on the number of children learning an Aboriginal language in schools and the stages of learning, an online collection system has now been developed, with a minimum data set, to enhance data quality.

OPPORTUNITY HUBS

Findings from the evaluation of *OCHRE* are also being used to inform the procurement practices of Training Services NSW, which is responsible for the Opportunity Hubs initiative. Specifically, Training Services NSW is considering how capacity building can be included within procurement to help Aboriginal-owned or controlled organisations or consortia secure long-term funding. In this, Training Services NSW is also aligned with the objectives of the Aboriginal Procurement Strategy.

The approach being undertaken by Training Services NSW is to use the knowledge that its gains from its continuing conversation with Aboriginal communities about their local program needs to inform the design of the Department's tender requirements. A multi-stepped approach to procurement is also being undertaken for some of the Training Services Aboriginal programs to support increased opportunities for Aboriginal organisations to be competitive during the procurement

process. This involves a market briefing information session, an Expression of Interest process followed by a targeted tendering process. This is not only being adopted for the existing Opportunity Hubs but also the new Liverpool Opportunity Hub, the Way Ahead for Aboriginal People Mentoring Program, the Aboriginal Enterprise Development Officer Program and the New Careers for Aboriginal People Program.

LOCAL DECISION MAKING

A major challenge identified by the evaluation was that resources do not match the goals of the Local Decision Making (LDM) model. In response, an additional \$3 million was allocated to LDM in 2018–19.

Other issues identified by the evaluation include:

- Increasing the commitment to the Local Decision Making process of all tiers of government and the NGO sector to ensure the priorities of Aboriginal communities are identified and addressed regionally and locally. The success of Local Decision Making depends on the engagement and timely participation of government.
- Improving the cultural capability of the government representatives and service providers (including NGOs) who work with NSW Aboriginal people – in particular, their culturally safe and culturally acceptable policies and practices.

The strength of the partnership between government and Aboriginal regional alliances participating in LDM is fundamental to an effective agreement-making process and the negotiation of meaningful commitments and outcomes.

In 2017, stakeholders from across the NSW Government came together to respond to the outcomes of the Local Decision Making Partnership and Collaboration Conference (2016) and to refresh the Implementation Plan for Local Decision Making (2017–2020).

As a part of this work, stakeholders from Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the Department of Premier and Cabinet, NSW Treasury and other agencies agreed to establish a Strategic Implementation Group to respond to feedback received from regional alliances on government engagement and to strengthen the participation of NSW Government agencies and representatives in Accord negotiation and implementation.

MAKING *OCHRE* EVEN STRONGER CONTINUED

The main task of the Strategic Implementation Group is to establish standard practices within government which increase the capability and cultural competency of public servants and strengthen the policies and structures needed for whole-of-government collaboration and joint decision making. The Strategic Implementation Group has worked to define and clarify negotiators' roles and capabilities, to identify and authorise champions across government, and to promote the benefits of co-design within government and with Aboriginal communities.

In 2018 the NSW Government endorsed an Executive Sponsor initiative to strengthen the Government's commitment to LDM. Under the initiative, nominated senior executives in each department will champion LDM within their cluster, facilitate regional and central office connections and broker solutions to problems. This approach will give greater authority to LDM processes within government and make it easier for local and state-wide policy innovation to improve service delivery to Aboriginal communities.

Aboriginal Affairs NSW is also continuing to work with government negotiators on building relationships with regional alliance representatives, so as to enhance respect for differences and knowledge of the historical experience of First Peoples in NSW. As part of this work Aboriginal Affairs NSW is helping regional alliances run cultural immersion sessions with government negotiators before talks on an Agreement start, in order to build respect for regional and local culture, protocols and histories.

The evaluation recommended that data collection be improved so that it can be more useful for program design and decision making. While some monitoring data was already being collected as part of LDM, Aboriginal Affairs NSW has recognised that the quality of the data needs to be improved. Accordingly a minimum data set for LDM has been developed and is being populated.

Planning ahead

STAGE 2 EVALUATION, THE NEXT THREE YEARS

The NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Regional Alliances (NCARA), the *OCHRE* Evaluation Steering Committee and Aboriginal Affairs NSW and other government partners are working together with the independent evaluation team at the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, to plan the next three years of the evaluation. Once the plan exists in outline, local communities will design local processes and a strategy to meet their requirements. Planning the evaluation step by step like this should cut the time and resources that communities need to localise the evaluation.

To support local communities in their leadership of the evaluation, Aboriginal Affairs NSW is working with each one to develop locally appropriate designs and governance mechanisms for the process. In accordance with its commitment to ethical research principles, Aboriginal Affairs NSW will ensure that whatever mechanism is adopted includes training and mentoring for the Aboriginal people and communities involved.

In preparing for Stage 2, Aboriginal Affairs NSW is developing a strategy that will provide Aboriginal communities with the data they need to support local decision making – in particular data collected on health and education.

MAKING *OCHRE* EVEN STRONGER CONTINUED

CLOSING THE GAP

In June 2017, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to undertake a refresh of the Closing the Gap agenda ahead of the tenth anniversary of the agreement in 2018, and with four of the seven targets expiring in 2018. A new set of draft targets, focusing on priority areas for action identified by Aboriginal leaders and community members, was agreed by COAG at its 12 December 2018 meeting. These draft targets will be the subject of further consultation and negotiation through a partnership, announced by the Prime Minister, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This partnership will also establish implementation plans for States and Territories under Closing the Gap.

The agreement of these target areas establishes a forward agenda for Commonwealth Indigenous affairs policy. The Australian Government's commitment to a strengths-based approach to Closing the Gap is highly consistent with *OCHRE*. In 2011 and 2012, the Ministerial Taskforce heard a clear message from Aboriginal communities that rejected traditional deficit approaches to policy and this was instrumental to *OCHRE*'s design and approach.

Our experiences under *OCHRE* – particularly with regard to our deep commitment to co-designing policy solutions with Aboriginal communities – places NSW in a leadership position to continue to influence the direction of national Indigenous affairs policy and its implementation in NSW.

Information about Closing the Gap can be found [here](#).

For more information

Further information about how Aboriginal communities can be part of this continuing conversation will be made available early in 2019. If you would like to know more about the independent evaluation of *OCHRE*, you can contact the team at the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW:

Tel: (02) 9385 7810

Email: ilan.Katz@unsw.edu.au

If you would like to know more about the how the NSW Government's response to the independent evaluation of contact, you can contact the Aboriginal Affairs NSW team at:

Tel: 1800 019 998

Email:

OchreConversations@aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au

Or you can visit our Website at:

<https://www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au/conversations/ochre>

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

Extending the reach of OCHRE

OCHRE's influence has extended beyond the individual initiatives described in the plan. Policy practitioners from many different portfolios have recognised the benefits of embedding the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal people into the design of policies and programs. Below are some examples.

Aboriginal children and families

Aboriginal children and families are disproportionately represented in the out-of-home care system, yet the outcomes for those children and young people in care are poorer than their non-Aboriginal counterparts. Their futures matter is a systemic reform of the out-of-home care system which focuses on reducing its impact on Aboriginal families. Aboriginal co-design of services and programs, a central feature of Their futures matter, was informed by the approach outlined in OCHRE.

Aboriginal health

The Strategic Framework for Suicide Prevention in NSW 2018–2023, launched on 17 October 2018, lists OCHRE and its focus on healing and connection to culture as informing its development. The Mental Health Commission stated in its NSW Mental Health Strategic Plan (Living Well): the Commission believes the OCHRE initiatives – which emphasise education, opportunity, self-determination and strong governance – **can** have a positive impact on the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people in NSW, and are essential in adopting a whole-of-life, whole-of-community, and whole-of-government approach to individual and community well-being.¹

Aboriginal economic prosperity

On 13 June 2018, the NSW Treasurer and the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs announced funding of \$10 million over four years for a social impact investment initiative in Aboriginal economic development. Aboriginal Affairs NSW is working closely with the Office of Social Impact Investment and other stakeholders on a different approach to this round of proposals under the initiative, based on what has been learnt from OCHRE.

To help the initiative become established, and to encourage a broader range of proposals:

- the normal 30-page requirement for proposals has been reduced to up to five pages
- cultural capability has been included as a criterion
- successful proposals will enter a co-development phase to ensure the social impact investment incorporates the voice of Aboriginal communities, is culturally respectful and appropriate, and is successful in delivering outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Regional service delivery in the Illawarra South East

Regional initiatives such as the Service Delivery Reform (SDR) led by the Department of Premier and Cabinet have adopted the OCHRE approach of listening to and negotiating with Aboriginal communities to co-design local and regional solutions. The recently-opened Well-Being Hub at East Nowra Public School which is delivering support for up to 30 families a week in an integrated and culturally appropriate way is one example.

1. NSW Mental Health Commission (2014). Living Well: Putting people at the centre of mental health reform in NSW, p.43

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS CONTINUED

Land-related reforms

OCHRE's commitment to support greater decision-making authority for Aboriginal communities is reflected in Aboriginal land agreements as well as the draft Bill on Aboriginal cultural heritage. Negotiations between the NSW Government and Local Aboriginal Land Councils participating in the land agreement process reflect the aims of *OCHRE* in that they support communities' capacity to drive solutions. The draft Bill on Aboriginal Cultural Heritage, which aims to create governance structures that give Aboriginal people both responsibility and authority over Aboriginal cultural heritage, conforms closely to *OCHRE's* reform agenda.

Commonwealth policy reform

The NSW Government has participated actively in the Commonwealth-led update of its Closing the gap initiative and has used evidence from *OCHRE's* success in co-design to influence the direction of this reform. Aboriginal leaders at a special gathering in Canberra in February 2018 raised many issues – the importance of healing, economic prosperity, language and culture revitalisation and Aboriginal governance among them – which are well aligned with *OCHRE* reforms.



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS REPORTING BY INITIATIVE



Building the evidence

- With the approval of Aboriginal communities, published six reports from the evaluation of the implementation and early outcomes of *OCHRE*
- Published the findings of a literature review and case study examining Aboriginal community consent for research and evaluation
- Published a guide providing practical support to public servants undertaking or managing research and evaluation activities in Aboriginal affairs in NSW
- Undertook a literature review and case study examining the process of co-designing the *OCHRE* evaluation with Aboriginal communities
- Published [Transforming the relationship between Aboriginal people and the NSW Government](#) the Aboriginal Affairs research agenda 2018-2023



Strengthening Aboriginal languages and culture

- 57 preschools, primary and secondary schools engaged in the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests, down from 67*
- 6,759 students learning an Aboriginal language, up from 6,379*
- 44 tutors and teachers working to teach Aboriginal language to students*
- From 2017 onwards, secondary schools, including schools engaged in the Nest, have been able to implement the Aboriginal languages content-endorsed course syllabus for students in Years 11 and 12
- \$199,975 granted to 123 organisations to support NAIDOC Week cultural events and activities



Engaging Aboriginal students, schools and employers via Opportunity Hubs

- 109 schools engaged with a Hub, down from 178*
- 2,317 students connected to a Hub, up from 2,291*
- 722 Personal Learning Plans developed and linked to Career Plans, up from 650*
- 401 job opportunities banked with the Hubs, consistent with previous report*
- 130 school leavers transitioned to further study or employment, up from 126*



Promoting Aboriginal Economic Prosperity

- The Illawarra Wingecarribee Aboriginal Alliance Corporation and the Three Rivers Regional Assembly have agreed to work with the NSW Government to pursue Regional Industry-Based Agreements
- More than 15 Aboriginal owned and operated businesses have come together to shape Western Sydney's Aboriginal Centre for Excellence at the former Whalan High School in Western Sydney
- The Western Sydney City Deal is expected to deliver significant benefits to the Aboriginal population of the far west of Sydney



Boosting NSW Government spending with Aboriginal businesses

- The Aboriginal Procurement Policy came into effect on July 1 2018, and will seek to deliver three per cent of all NSW Government domestic general goods and services contracts to Aboriginal suppliers by 2021. This compliments the Aboriginal Participation in Construction (APIC) policy which applies to NSW Government infrastructure investment. A revised APIC policy became effective on 1 July 2018.
- Since *OCHRE* was released in April 2013, the NSW Government has spent an estimated \$123 million with Aboriginal businesses.¹



Supporting Aboriginal students to succeed at school

- The strategy has had a positive impact in schools, particularly at the primary level with younger school children who were exposed to the strategy for their whole period at school
- There is moderate evidence to suggest that the strategy had a positive effect on Year 3 NAPLAN outcomes, but little evidence for positive effects on NAPLAN outcomes in older years
- The focus on culture is having positive effects on the school environment



Talking about healing

- Six *OCHRE* healing forums held with some 600 people attending



Building opportunities for Aboriginal people in the public sector

- 3.3 per cent of employees identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in 2018 compared to 2.9 per cent in 2014.



Empowering Aboriginal communities to make decisions locally

- Seven regional alliances operating to represent the interests of their communities.
- One existing Aboriginal Regional Governance Structure supported
- Three Accords signed directing NSW Government and community actions on agreed priorities for the Murdi Paaki, Illawarra-Wingecarribee and Three Rivers regions
- The NSW Government and the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly have signed an Agreement to work together to improve Aboriginal social housing outcomes in the Murdi Paaki region

* Information reported in *OCHRE*: Four years on

** data is provided for the period January to June 2018 only, due to current efforts to improve data quality.

1. Not all agencies provide spend data to NSW Procurement, however it is estimated that approximately 85% of NSW Government spend is captured in the figures reported above. NSW Procurement regularly improves and refreshes how agency payment data is coded and mapped, as such numbers may vary from previously reported figures.

ABOUT OCHRE



History

The Ministerial Taskforce on Aboriginal Affairs was established by the NSW Government in late 2011 to inform a new plan – *OCHRE* – to improve education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people in NSW and to enhance service delivery to support these goals.

Extensive consultations with Aboriginal communities, stakeholders and industry gave some 2,700 people the opportunity to contribute to the Taskforce's work.

OCHRE was released by the NSW Government in Parliament on 5 April 2013 enabling implementation to begin. *OCHRE: Five years on* is the fifth annual report that takes stock of progress to date.

The full text of the *OCHRE* plan and previous annual reports can be found at www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au.

Aims

OCHRE aims to support strong Aboriginal communities in which Aboriginal people actively influence and fully participate in social, economic and cultural life. To achieve this, *OCHRE* identifies the need to:

- focus on creating opportunities for economic empowerment
- support more Aboriginal young people to get fulfilling and sustainable jobs
- support more Aboriginal students to stay at school
- grow local Aboriginal leaders' and communities' capacity to drive their own solutions
- make both NSW Government and communities more accountable for the money they spend.
- teach more Aboriginal languages and culture to build people's pride and identity.

Key initiatives

Staying accountable

- A robust accountability framework includes independent monitoring and assessment, program evaluation and a commitment to working with Aboriginal communities to determine how to assess success – as well as regular public reporting on progress and lessons learnt.
- Solution brokerage supports a creative approach to resolving issues that “fall between the cracks”.

Local languages, local cultures

- Five Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests provide communities with opportunities to revitalise, reclaim and maintain their traditional languages through the teaching of languages in public schools. An Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest is a local network of communities bound together by their connection to an Aboriginal language.

ABOUT OCHRE CONTINUED

- The NSW *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* became law on 24 October 2017 and is the first legislation in Australia to acknowledge the significance of First Languages. The *Aboriginal Languages Act 2017* seeks to promote, reawaken, nurture and grow Aboriginal languages across NSW. Aboriginal languages strengthen connections with culture and identity and improves the wellbeing of First Peoples. Further information about the Act can be found [here](#).

Supporting Aboriginal students to succeed

- Four Opportunity Hubs provide personalised support for Aboriginal young people in their local area, particularly those at risk of leaving school. By working with the community, businesses and other stakeholders, Opportunity Hubs match the needs of individuals to the local services, agencies or mentors best placed to help them. The Hubs are run by experienced organisations with strong links to Aboriginal community organisations, local businesses, regional industries and services for young people at risk, which hold a deep knowledge of local conditions and issues.
- Fifteen Connected Communities schools put local schools at the heart of rural and remote communities. By using Schools as Community Hubs to provide support from birth into early childhood, across the school years and on into further training and employment, the Connected Communities strategy works in partnership with local Aboriginal leaders and communities to improve educational outcomes and opportunities for young Aboriginal people.

Growing jobs and economic opportunities

- The NSW Aboriginal Economic Prosperity Framework (AEPF) is a suite of integrated commitments to support participation by Aboriginal people in the NSW economy. The AEPF brings together actions in the areas of education, training, employment, housing, business development and land rights.

- As part of the AEPF, the NSW Government and industry partners are working together through Industry-Based Agreements (IBAs) to identify and develop more jobs and business opportunities for Aboriginal people and are supporting Aboriginal people to stay engaged in private sector jobs over the long term.
- Changes to land rights legislation, through the *Aboriginal Land Rights Amendments Act (2014)*, make the land claims process faster, more flexible and more efficient and helps deliver social, economic and cultural benefits.

Local communities, local initiatives

- Local Decision Making is leading the way in supporting the NSW Government and Aboriginal communities to work together to ensure communities have a genuine voice in determining what services are delivered in their communities, and how they are delivered. This requires the NSW Government to do business differently with Aboriginal communities including “opening the books” to Aboriginal people to show what we are doing and what we are spending.
- Seven regional alliances have been established to represent their communities and negotiate with the NSW Government to sign an Accord which commits both to work on issues of mutual interest and priority.

Healing

- By acknowledging the intergenerational trauma and loss suffered by Aboriginal people, *OCHRE* initiatives advance the dialogue across NSW to promote healing.

