



GOVERNMENT OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA



## Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing

A response to the State Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of 13 children and young persons in the Kimberley, and Learnings from the Message Stick: the report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas

**March 2020**



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On the cover:

'13 Spirits' artwork by Darryl Bellotti.  
Honours the story of the 13 young people  
and the challenges they encountered in  
their lives. Originating from a single place,  
their spirits fly outward, pleading to be  
heard. The outer patterns represent the  
families and communities who struggle  
to find the right path for support and  
prevention to change outcomes for other  
young people.

Artwork:  
Zoe Street (pages 2, 3, 10, 28)  
Glenn Stephenson (pages 9, 13, 17)

Photography:  
Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit

The Government of Western Australia  
acknowledges the traditional custodians  
throughout Western Australia and their  
continuing connection to the land, waters  
and community.

We pay our respects to all members of the  
Aboriginal communities and their cultures;  
and to Elders both past and present.

We also thank all those who participated  
in the community workshops in Broome  
and Kununurra.

## Contents

|                                                                             |           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|
| <b>Foreword</b>                                                             | <b>4</b>  |
| <b>Introduction</b>                                                         | <b>5</b>  |
| <b>Overview and review of the Statement of Intent</b>                       | <b>6</b>  |
| Reviewing the Statement of Intent                                           | 6         |
| <b>Key undertakings of the Statement of Intent</b>                          | <b>8</b>  |
| <b>Community engagement - what we heard</b>                                 | <b>9</b>  |
| Community engagement workshops - process                                    | 10        |
| Community engagement workshops - youth leadership                           | 11        |
| Community engagement workshops - key messages                               | 12        |
| Community engagement workshops - focus group feedback and actions           | 14        |
| Community engagement workshops - summary of key actions and recommendations | 17        |
| <b>A commitment to Aboriginal youth wellbeing</b>                           | <b>18</b> |
| Cultural Wellbeing                                                          | 21        |
| Commitment 1: Culturally responsive government                              | 21        |
| Commitment 2: Respect and appreciation for Aboriginal culture               | 22        |
| Commitment 3: Supporting cultural programs                                  | 23        |
| Health                                                                      | 24        |
| Commitment 4: Better prevention, intervention and postvention services      | 24        |
| Commitment 5: Building capacity in health and mental health services        | 24        |
| Commitment 6: Better access to clinical services                            | 25        |
| Community                                                                   | 26        |
| Commitment 7: Support for community wellbeing                               | 26        |
| Commitment 8: Building local capacity                                       | 27        |
| Commitment 9: Better engagement with education                              | 27        |
| Youth                                                                       | 29        |
| Commitment 10: Helping young people connect to culture                      | 29        |
| Commitment 11: Building youth capacity                                      | 29        |
| Commitment 12: A voice for young people                                     | 30        |
| <b>The next steps</b>                                                       | <b>31</b> |
| <b>Accountability</b>                                                       | <b>33</b> |



# ABORIGINAL YOUTH WELLBEING

YOUTH  
VOICE  
FIRST

WE ARE  
HURTING  
TODAY



ON YAWURU COUNTRY



STATE  
GOVERNMENT

'WE WANT TO LISTEN'

COMMONWEALTH

'WE ARE COMMITTED TO  
CO-DESIGN'

STRONG  
COMMUNITY

STRONG  
CULTURE

WE ARE  
TAKING

FIRST  
STEPS

HOW WILL  
OUR VOICES  
BE HEARD?

HOW?

WILL OUR VOICES  
BE PART of ACTION?





## Foreword

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In May 2019, we released the Western Australian Government Statement of Intent on Aboriginal youth suicide. This was a preliminary response to the State Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young persons in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia, and the 2016 Parliamentary Inquiry, *Learnings from the Message Stick: the report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas*. In that document, the State undertook to develop holistic solutions to Aboriginal youth suicide that balance the value of clinical approaches with the intrinsic role of culture in Aboriginal wellbeing.



The following pages outline 12 key commitments by which the Western Australian Government will work to improve lived experiences for young Aboriginal people in this state, and particularly in the Kimberley region. These commitments will be taken up by all State departments and agencies, in partnership with the Aboriginal community.

The views and wishes of the Aboriginal community are, and must continue to be, the most significant input in these endeavours. Community engagement workshops conducted in Broome and Kununurra drew on the lived experiences of the Kimberley community to deliver a clear blueprint of what, in their eyes, successful implementation of the Coroner's recommendations would look like. To significantly reduce Aboriginal youth suicide, we must commit to making clinical and community services more accessible and effective, and at the same time address a broader range of factors. Our goal must be to build young Aboriginal people up to be strong in culture, resilient in mind and body, and confident of a future in which they are valued, supported, and have the capacity to thrive.

The role of young Aboriginal people themselves in envisioning and delivering this future cannot be understated. Last year, I was honoured to meet and hear from some of the Kimberley's Empowered Young Leaders at a meeting of the Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial in Broome. After speaking to these outstanding young men and women, I am confident the next generation will be in the most capable of hands. But they must to be given support, agency, and opportunity for their voices to be heard, respected and acted upon.

This Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing provides a platform for change, and genuine partnership between Aboriginal people and the Western Australian Government. I look forward to taking the first steps together on this important journey.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Roger Cook', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Roger Cook MLA  
Deputy Premier



## Introduction

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This document outlines how the Government of Western Australia proposes to work towards reducing the rate of suicide and enhancing the wellbeing of young Aboriginal people.<sup>1</sup> It is a response to the State Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young persons in the Kimberley Region, Western Australia, and the 2016 Parliamentary Inquiry, *Learnings from the Message Stick: the report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas*.

Addressing the Coroner's and Message Stick recommendations is only one aspect of our approach. During the course of 2019 we reached out to Aboriginal organisations, then spoke directly to people in the Kimberley about the recommendations, and how they saw them being implemented. This Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing draws on both of these inputs—the recommendations and community voices—to provide 12 key commitments to improve the outlook for young Aboriginal people in Western Australia. These commitments will become an essential reference point for all State Government agencies and service providers to work with when making important decisions that affect Aboriginal people.

The Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing is the starting point for a long-term process that will deliver systemic changes. We are not offering quick fixes or re-boxing of old approaches, hoping for better outcomes.

While we hope that this Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing will benefit all young Aboriginal people and families in Western Australia, many of the initial programs and actions developed under it will focus on the Kimberley. There are several reasons for this, including the Kimberley focus of the Coroner's report, and the Kimberley's status as one of the most suicide-affected places in the world. In the Statement of Intent on Aboriginal youth suicide, the Government undertook to deliver a response that was place based and community led, arising from genuine engagement with Aboriginal people.

We have not yet had the opportunity to undertake substantial engagement beyond the Kimberley. However, a state-wide consultation and engagement process has taken place as part of developing the Western Australian Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025, which included five locations in the Kimberley. Findings from these and future engagements will help inform and develop local and regional responses in all parts of Western Australia, building on our initial work in the Kimberley.

All children and young people deserve support, empowerment, and the opportunity to reach their potential. The Kimberley may be the starting point for our commitment, but it will come to fruition in every region of Western Australia.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the phrases 'youth', 'young' or 'children and young people' generally refers to any person under the age of 25.



## Overview and review of the Statement of Intent

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### Reviewing the Statement of Intent



2

Reports



86

Recommendations



11

WA Agencies



0

Not accepted

The Statement of Intent on Aboriginal youth suicide was released in May 2019 as a provisional response to the Coroner's and Message Stick reports. It was developed through collaboration between 11 key State Government agencies, via the Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Working Group.

The main objectives of the Statement of Intent were to:

- Set out the Government's current approach to Aboriginal youth wellbeing and suicide prevention;
- Provide clear responses to all of the recommendations of both reports; and
- Outline a path towards a comprehensive, whole-of-government response on Aboriginal youth wellbeing.

We responded to each recommendation in one of the following ways:

- Accepted
- Accepted in Principle
- Further Discussion Required
- Implemented or Being Implemented
- Superseded



This approach yielded the following responses:

| Status                           | Recommendations                                                                                                                                                  | Total Number |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|
| Accepted                         | Coronial Inquest: 6, 10, 11, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 32, 34, 42.<br><br>Message Stick: 5, 7, 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 26, 34.                                       | <b>22</b>    |
| Accepted in Principle            | Coronial Inquest: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 12, 16, 26, 27, 29, 30, 33, 36, 37, 39, 40.<br><br>Message Stick: 1, 2, 3, 4, 13, 14, 17, 18, 19, 27, 32, 37, 40, 43, 44. | <b>33</b>    |
| Further Discussion Required      | Coronial Inquest: 7, 13, 22, 28, 31, 41.<br><br>Message Stick: 21, 25, 33, 36, 39.                                                                               | <b>11</b>    |
| Implemented or Being Implemented | Coronial Inquest: 14, 23, 24, 35, 38.<br><br>Message Stick: 6, 10, 15, 20, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31, 38.                                                           | <b>16</b>    |
| Superseded                       | Message Stick: 22, 35, 41, 42.                                                                                                                                   | <b>4</b>     |

*Table: WA Government responses to 86 recommendations in the Statement of Intent*

The Government accepted or accepted in principle, or was already implementing, all but 15 of the recommendations. None of the recommendations were rejected, but four had been superseded and were no longer applicable. Eleven required more time and investigation to provide a response.

These responses are a key component of the Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing.

## Key undertakings of the Statement of Intent

The Statement of Intent emphasised the importance of clinical services, but stressed that the approach must go deeper, drawing upon the expertise of Aboriginal leadership and focusing on the vital role of culture in building resilience and hope.

In outlining that approach, the Statement of Intent acknowledged the importance of ensuring that Aboriginal people are at the forefront of the conversation:

A comprehensive response must be led by Aboriginal people and communities. Through proper engagement and meaningful partnerships, we want to build on the many effective initiatives that are already being developed at the community level. This document and the work underway provide a starting point for the conversations we need to have with key Aboriginal stakeholders to inform a more comprehensive response.<sup>2</sup>

Following that undertaking, we set out to speak with Aboriginal people to help determine our long-term response.

<sup>2</sup> WA Government Statement of Intent on Aboriginal youth suicide, May 2019. p. 3.





## Community engagement – what we heard

The experiences and perspectives of Aboriginal people and organisations provide a crucial layer to our understanding of the recommendations of the Coroner's and Message Stick reports, delivering essential guidance in developing a response.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet undertook a number of informal consultations with key organisations and conducted two community engagement workshops in the Kimberley. The first Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing community workshop was held in Broome on Monday 26 August 2019, with just under 100 people attending. Another 45 people attended a second workshop, held in Kununurra on Thursday 17 October 2019. Aboriginal communities, youth and organisations from across the Kimberley were represented at the workshops, along with Commonwealth and State government agencies, and non-government service providers.

Reports from the workshops can be accessed here:

<https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-and-agencies/departments/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/aboriginal-youth-wellbeing>



## Community engagement workshops – process

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The engagement workshops were conducted by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's Aboriginal Policy and Coordination Unit, in collaboration with the Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial and, in Kununurra, Binnarri-binyja yarrawoo Aboriginal Corporation (BBY). Both events were co-facilitated by consultants from Nous Group, and a group of young Aboriginal leaders from each region.

The objectives of the workshops were to:

- develop a shared understanding of the recommendations of the Coroner's and Message Stick reports through the experience and perspective of Kimberley Aboriginal people;
- begin to describe what successful implementation of the recommendations 'looks like' and identify opportunities for future actions; and
- deepen community-government relationships and better understand opportunities for partnership and joint effort.

The workshops provided a platform for government representatives to explain the purpose of the engagements, and for attendees to raise concerns and share their views on the factors that contribute to Aboriginal youth suicide.

During the workshops, attendees broke into smaller groups according to four key focus areas—cultural wellbeing, health, community and youth—to conduct a deeper analysis of the issues. The focus groups addressed whether they agreed with the recommendations, whether the recommendations go far enough, and how they see the broad intent of those recommendations being implemented effectively in their region or community.

The workshops ended with a summation of the day's feedback and actions, and a collective impact statement presented by the young leaders.

The information below is a summary of what people told us in the workshops.



## Community engagement workshops – youth leadership

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The essential role of young leaders in the Kimberley Aboriginal community is one of the most important themes to have emerged from the engagement workshops. It is essential for government, organisations and the community at large to validate and support their role as mentors, role models, friends, kin, colleagues and peers of young Aboriginal people in Western Australia. They are the front line of our collective efforts to address youth suicide and it is important to recognise this cohort of empowered, resilient and culturally equipped young Aboriginal people and the role that they already play in their communities.

At the end of both Kimberley workshops, young leaders presented their feedback and read collective statements prepared during the day. The full text of these statements is provided in the workshop reports, but key excerpts are reproduced below:

### West Kimberley

“We want better opportunities for young people to engage with one another on different programs and projects ...

We want more young people at the table ... We need more opportunities to learn and step up.

We want government and organisations to be accountable to our recommendations at the same level as those recommendations from other inquiries and reports.

Young people are speaking up. We want our voice to be authorised and empowered. If our voice is disregarded you will disempower us and our future.”

### East Kimberley

“We have lost too many loved ones to suicide. Through our own lived experience, we bear witness to the heavy burden our families and communities endure in grappling with the never ending cycle of grief and loss. We no longer accept the normalisation of suicide. We no longer choose to be disempowered by the issues that continue to impact on us as a result of intergenerational trauma.

As Empowered Young Leaders, we commit to lead and action positive change to improve our future and the future of our next generations ...

We stand together in solidarity, to ensure we are included, our voices are heard and that we are supported and given opportunities to lead and take action on behalf of the Kimberley young people.”

## Community engagement workshops – key messages

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Across both workshops, attendees identified the following as being the key conditions for a successfully implemented response:

### Culture at the centre

Culture is one of the key elements of health and wellbeing. Strong connection to culture builds strong identity and self-esteem.

### Self-determination

Aboriginal people need to be part of the decision-making process and be supported to lead and guide the implementation of solutions for issues that are about them. This includes recognising and working with the community's leadership and cultural authority structures.

Kimberley Aboriginal people also want the option and the capacity to make choices and have control over what, where and from whom they receive assistance and support.

### Investment in communities

Governments and other organisations must invest in the needs and capabilities of Aboriginal communities. Importantly, communities want the option to have services procured, resourced and supplied locally, moving away from the drive-in/drive-out or fly-in/fly-out approach, with Aboriginal people—especially young people—benefiting from an increased investment in skills and employment.

### Youth leadership

Young people are an essential part of the discussion and decision-making processes when it comes to youth wellbeing. Government and community must work together to ensure youth voices are recognised and heard, by creating governance structures and investing in capacity building for young people to take the lead.

### Cultural safety

Cultural safety in service provision is essential, so people can access assistance, knowing their cultural needs are understood and respected. This includes a local and regional workforce comprised of Aboriginal people, as well as culturally competent non-Aboriginal employees. Understanding the local social and cultural context of the community is also crucial.

### Partnership

All parties must work together as equals, in partnership towards common goals.



## Integrated or whole-of-system approaches

Agencies must communicate and collaborate with each other, to ensure that services are consistent, sustainable, and address identified gaps.

## Address the social determinants of health

Improving Aboriginal youth wellbeing means addressing issues like safe housing, employment, health and nutrition.

## Action not words

Kimberley Aboriginal people have grown weary of hearing more and more words and want to see action. There have been enough inquiries and reports; it is time for the hard work of implementation, starting with recognising and investing in Aboriginal organisations, and programs that are already working.

## Measuring outcomes

A culturally informed framework for measuring outcomes will support a long-term and effective response. This can be employed to guide shared accountability for outcomes and help prioritise the ongoing approach.



## Community engagement workshops – focus group feedback and actions

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### Youth focus area

What does success look like?

- A governance structure to facilitate youth voice
- Employment, support and capacity-building for young people
- Communities with the power to set their own priorities
- Support for cultural and language education in and out of the classroom
- Connecting young people to their Elders and Country to build skills and resilience for wellbeing
- Long-term, sustainable funding
- Better pathways towards careers, sports, social activities and training

What is needed?

- Recognition of the recommendations of the Empowered Young Leaders Forums, to be read alongside the Coroner's and Message Stick reports
- A funded structure and governance for youth
- Local Aboriginal Youth Action Committees – young people involved in decision-making at community level
- Strengths-based language in all conversations and published materials
- Mapping and assessment of youth services
- A cultural outcomes framework
- Support for young parents – e.g. childcare so that they can participate in employment and training
- Support for Elders and language speakers to deliver language education
- Investing in the local workforce and developing local talent
- Safe accommodation for children, young people and young adults
- Peer-support networks for young people
- Community-led and delivered services, with contracts that hold providers to account

### Community focus area

What does success look like?

- Building self-esteem and pride
- A holistic approach
- Sustained empowerment and self-determination
- Sustainable, integrated, easy to use services
- Accessibility for young people
- Transparency and accountability for all services and funding for communities
- Building the capacity of the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, focusing on Aboriginal training and employment



- 
- No cashless debit card
  - More culturally competent, co-designed services
  - Holistic, therapeutic approach to alcohol and drug issues

What is needed?

- Youth voices in decision making
- Suicide-prevention training broadened to all services and families, delivered by local people
- Breaking down barriers between police and the community (no one-size-fits-all approach)
- Address the underlying causes and issues of alcohol abuse – not just the visible outcomes
- Cashless debit cards, if introduced, should only ever be voluntary
- Sports and recreation opportunities for young people to build self-esteem and pride
- More Aboriginal people employed in providing services to the community
- Pathways to home ownership
- More streamlined and accessible services in the community
- Funding for Aboriginal community connectors

### Health Services focus area

What does success look like?

- Increased local capacity building through support and training, community navigators, connectors and advocacy
- A trauma-informed, multidisciplinary team approach, with both cultural and clinical leads
- Family centred, coordinated services, with a stronger family support model embedded in ACCOs, and services communicating with each other
- Strengths-based service delivery that reflects Aboriginal culture
- 24/7 or after-hours availability of mental health services, especially in remote areas

What is needed?

- More funding towards local capacity building
- Investing directly into communities with strong cultural governance and support training and development
- Mental health training for people in the community, including youth, as a first option
- Address gaps in capacity and capability to reduce waiting times
- Support workers to prevent burnout
- Provide culturally secure services and youth-focused approaches
- Address gaps in the number and availability of qualified mental health experts
- More support for those with FASD

- 
- Focus on a wide range of issues – not just FASD
  - Telehealth is essential, but young people still need the choice of face-to-face services
  - One-stop-shops or service hubs – where multiple services can be accessed in one location
  - Programs that address the dangers of drinking during pregnancy, and reduce the rate of ‘kids having kids’
  - Youth mental health facilities (especially in Halls Creek)

### Cultural Wellbeing focus area

What does success look like?

- Cultural governance is valued and respected – this is the core of cultural wellbeing – Aboriginal people are the authorities on Aboriginal culture
- Cultural wellbeing as the top priority – young people being supported by people with deep cultural knowledge
- Cultural programs (such as Yiriman or similar) are supported with sufficient resources
- Language centres have a central role in teaching Aboriginal languages and training language speakers to teach others

What is needed?

- Support people and programs that are doing well
- Resources to create and support platforms for change
- A ground-up, culturally safe, empowering process
- Resources for on-country learning of language and culture
- Cultural screening of policies and programs that affect Aboriginal people
- Law and cultural frameworks embedded across all systems from policy to community level
- Cultural competency requirements for all non-Aboriginal people working with Aboriginal people in the region
- Accommodation options for young people with wrap-around support
- Ongoing support for young people after they return from on-country programs
- Sharing of cultural practices and life skills
- Development of the evidence base for cultural approaches
- Build on intergenerational teaching of culture (teaching parents as well as their children)
- A formalised recognition of Aboriginal leadership structures in local areas, such as the ‘Circle of Elders’
- Recognition of the importance of spirituality to Aboriginal wellbeing



## Community engagement workshops – summary of key actions and recommendations

Across both East and West Kimberley workshops, some key common themes emerged across the focus group outcomes, as summarised below.

1. Training and resourcing families and community members to recognise risk and help prevent suicide and self-harm
2. Better training, capacity-building and employment opportunities for young people, and the community more broadly
3. Support for cultural and language teaching, both within and outside the formal education system
4. Long-term, sustainable funding for programs that work
5. Safe accommodation with wrap-around services for young people
6. More accessible, streamlined and culturally safe services
7. Youth voices represented in decision-making processes
8. More opportunities for young people to build confidence and self-esteem
9. Respect for and inclusion of cultural governance and Aboriginal authority structures



## A commitment to Aboriginal youth wellbeing

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On the basis of the Coroner's and Message Stick recommendations, and the community workshops, we have identified 12 commitments that will contribute significantly to the wellbeing of young Aboriginal people in Western Australia.

The feedback we received from the community engagements extended beyond the recommendations outlined in the reports. Each of the commitments therefore addresses a number of the 86 recommendations, and is intended to take a more holistic and long-term approach to Aboriginal youth wellbeing, informed by community views.

These commitments fall within four broad focus areas—cultural wellbeing, health, community and youth—arising from the recommendations.

The Coroner's recommendation 42 talks about how governments should work with and for Aboriginal people: embracing Aboriginal self-determination, partnership, and mutually agreed outcomes. Recommendation 12 of the Message Stick report also calls for governments to place greater emphasis on empowering Aboriginal communities. The principles of empowerment and partnership are the basis for everything we hope to achieve in this Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing, and will align closely with the State's forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy.<sup>3</sup>

The State's commitments to Aboriginal youth wellbeing are:

1. Culturally responsive government
2. Respect and appreciation for Aboriginal culture
3. Supporting cultural programs
4. Better prevention, intervention and postvention services
5. Building capacity in health and mental health services
6. Better access to clinical services
7. Support for community wellbeing
8. Building local capacity
9. Better engagement with education
10. Helping young people connect to culture
11. Building youth capacity
12. A voice for young people

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments/premier-and-cabinet/developing-aboriginal-empowerment-strategy>



Diagram: the State’s commitments to Aboriginal youth wellbeing



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Implementing the State's Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing will not happen in isolation, but will connect with and complement a range of other key strategies and initiatives that are in place or in development. These include:

- Work towards a new [Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025](#),<sup>4</sup> which identifies Aboriginal people as a priority as one of its four streams, and through which the Mental Health Commission will work towards developing an appropriately co-designed Aboriginal-specific suicide-prevention strategy;
- The forthcoming [Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#), which will lay the foundations for the State Government to work better with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations;
- The Closing the Gap refresh process, in which the State will commit to addressing key agreed reform priorities, and develop and build on the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation sector;
- The Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy, through which a range of Aboriginal-led wellbeing and diversionary initiatives will be implemented;
- The [Our Priorities: Aboriginal Wellbeing](#)<sup>5</sup> initiative, which will focus on reducing Aboriginal incarceration rates by 23% by 2028-2029;
- The Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council, a regionally diverse body that advises the Government on matters relating to the interests and wellbeing of Aboriginal people;
- Initial actions for FASD being undertaken to address a number of the Coroner's recommendations;
- The [implementation of recommendations](#)<sup>6</sup> from the Royal Commission into institutional responses to child sexual abuse;
- A draft Strategy for Reducing Family and Domestic Violence in Western Australia (including dedicated approach to Aboriginal family safety);
- Development of a new youth strategy for Western Australia;
- All Paths Lead to a Home – Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030;
- The Department of Communities' prospective Action Plan for At Risk Youth 2020-2025;
- District Leadership Groups, which provide a cooperative, regional approach to implementation; and
- The Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial, a Commonwealth-funded initiative which supports suicide-prevention activities across the Kimberley, focusing on nine community-led project sites.

Importantly, State agencies will work together, and alongside the Commonwealth, local governments, the non-government sector and the Aboriginal community, to make sure these commitments become a core part of how we get things done.

Through these commitments, considering the wellbeing of young Aboriginal people will be an essential step in the development of any new strategies, initiatives and actions that affect Aboriginal people, especially in regional and remote areas.

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<sup>4</sup> [https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/media/2718/draft-suicide-prevention-action-plan-2021\\_2025.pdf](https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/media/2718/draft-suicide-prevention-action-plan-2021_2025.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/our-priorities-sharing-prosperity/aboriginal-wellbeing>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/progress-report-2019-healing-past-hurts-protecting-children-now-preventing-further-harm>



## Cultural Wellbeing

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### Commitment 1: Culturally responsive government

We will put the right structures, policies and staff in place to ensure we can provide more culturally appropriate services to Aboriginal people. This will include:

- ensuring the right consultation and engagement processes are in place and adhered to;
- embracing the principles of co-design;
- making sure Aboriginal people are actively listened to;
- maintaining the cultural competency of agency staff; and
- ensuring that consideration of Aboriginal culture, particularly through Aboriginal cultural frameworks, is a key factor in proposed policies, programs or services.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendations 19 and 42, and Message Stick recommendations 7, 12, 13, 14 and 40. The engagement workshops called for community empowerment and strengths-based service delivery that reflects Aboriginal cultural frameworks. Developing more culturally responsive government will be achieved through the approaches outlined above, and incorporation of the forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy into the decision-making frameworks of all Government agencies.

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## Commitment 2: Respect and appreciation for Aboriginal culture

We will ensure that acknowledgement of, and respect and appreciation for Aboriginal culture is a key consideration in the way we work.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendation 42, and Message Stick recommendations 11, 12 and 40. Community workshops emphasised the importance of investing in communities with strong cultural governance, recognising Aboriginal leadership structures, and using a strengths-based approach.

Strategies for developing and promoting respect and appreciation for Aboriginal culture will include:

- working with and alongside Aboriginal cultural governance structures;
- acknowledging Aboriginal people as the foremost experts on matters that directly affect them;
- promoting Aboriginal culture and addressing racism; and
- focusing on strengths, rather than deficits.

The forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy will contribute significantly to implementing this commitment.



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### Commitment 3: Supporting cultural programs

Culture is at the heart of Aboriginal communities, and a key protective factor against suicide. We will work with and support Aboriginal people to develop and implement ways of using culture as a foundation for healing, resilience and social and emotional wellbeing.

This commitment reflects recommendations 16, 25, 39 and 42 of the State Coroner's report, and recommendations 7, 8, and 30 of the Message Stick report. Support for culture and culture-embedded programs was also heavily emphasised in the Kimberley community workshops, where people stressed the importance of intergenerational teaching of children and youth by people with deep cultural knowledge. They emphasised the need for on-country programs to be supported with sufficient, sustainable resources.

Strategies and approaches for supporting cultural programs will include:

- the forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy;
- the State Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025;
- the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy;
- Aboriginal cultural and arts program funding; and
- cultural wellbeing and healing programs.





## Health

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### Commitment 4: Better prevention, intervention and postvention services

Innovative approaches to supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of young Aboriginal people are crucial, along with targeted, safe and accessible clinical services. We will evaluate and improve the effectiveness of current and ongoing programs, and commit to developing new approaches according to best practice, in consultation with the Aboriginal community.

This commitment arises from State Coroner's recommendations 12, 17 and 24, and Message Stick recommendations 6, 7, 10, 15, 16, 23, 24, 34 and 37. Kimberley Aboriginal people also stressed the importance of this commitment, noting the need for suicide prevention approaches that involve family and community members, and locally implemented programs that address risk factors. Improved prevention, intervention and postvention services will be developed through evaluation of current programs, and exploration of new strategies, programs and initiatives, especially in connection with:

- the current State suicide-prevention strategy (Suicide Prevention 2020: together we can save lives);
- the draft State Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025;
- enhanced investment in early years intervention and increased focus on vulnerable cohorts such as young mothers;
- improved coordination and cooperation between State and Commonwealth services;
- the Commonwealth-funded Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial; and
- education in suicide prevention, and alcohol and other drug issues.

### Commitment 5: Building capacity in health and mental health services

We will improve the capacity of agencies, service providers and community organisations to deliver services to Aboriginal people that are flexible, responsive and culturally safe. Increasing the proportion of Aboriginal employees in the health and mental health fields will be a high priority, especially in remote areas.

This commitment addresses the Coroner's recommendations 12, 17, 19, 20, 21, 24, 26, 27 and 42, and Message Stick recommendations 6, 9, 14, 16, 18, 19, 39 and 44. The need for more culturally competent clinical services was also emphasised in the community workshops, especially the need for holistic, trauma-informed, therapeutic approaches, better support for workers in remote areas, local capacity building, and the use of both cultural and clinical leads.

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Key approaches to building capacity in health and mental health services will include:

- strategies to attract, employ and support Aboriginal people in the health and mental health sector;
- development of Aboriginal leadership in key organisations;
- quality, targeted training initiatives;
- improved coordination and cooperation between State and Commonwealth services, and increased involvement of community organisations;
- development of co-designed models for delivering culturally safe services to Aboriginal people; and
- induction and ongoing training of staff in cultural competency and trauma-informed care.

### Commitment 6: Better access to clinical services

Young people and their families in remote areas and communities are experiencing difficulties in accessing the services and follow-up they need. We will work to address these issues, balancing the needs of the community with the challenges posed by regional and remote Western Australia.

This addresses the Coroner's recommendations 1, 2, 3, 4, 12, 27, 28, 29, 31 and 34, and Message Stick recommendations 26, 32, 38, 39 and 43. The Kimberley community workshops highlighted the importance of accessible, sustainable, integrated services or service hubs, better access for young people in remote communities, shorter waiting times, and more youth mental health facilities in the Kimberley.

A range of strategies, programs and approaches will be developed to deliver better access to clinical services, including:

- expanded access to clinical care through 24/7 telehealth access across the state;
- exploring innovations in remote service delivery;
- identifying opportunities for better coordination of State and Commonwealth services, and increased involvement of the community sector;
- investigating options for additional health and rehabilitation facilities in the Kimberley; and
- the initial actions for FASD, including:
  - exploring options for a FASD screening tool, which is a critical first step towards broader screening of children in Western Australia; and
  - investigating how Children's Court-ordered assessment reports of young people suspected of having FASD can be made available to families and other government agencies (including State and Commonwealth health and disability agencies) as needed to improve treatment of and support for children with FASD and other cognitive impairments.

## Community

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### Commitment 7: Support for community wellbeing

Supporting community wellbeing is about having the right structures, programs and processes in place, and ensuring that these work together to help construct safe, happy and prosperous communities. We will work to strengthen communities with ongoing investment and support, developing strong working partnerships with Commonwealth and local governments, business, the Aboriginal community controlled sector, and Aboriginal people.

This commitment addresses the Coroner's recommendations 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 18, 22, 30, 32, 33 and 42. Kimberley community workshops emphasised the need for safe accommodation, support for young parents and families, and family-centred, streamlined services in Aboriginal communities.

We will support and strengthen community wellbeing through a range of strategies and initiatives, including:

- the forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy;
- the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy;
- strategies for addressing alcohol and drug abuse, including:
  - the Western Australian Methamphetamine Action Plan;
  - Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025;
  - Western Australian Alcohol and Drug Interagency Strategy; and
  - initial actions for FASD;
- All Paths Lead to a Home - Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030;
- coordinated regional and local programs and initiatives;
- increased recognition and support for community leaders and volunteers;
- cooperation between agencies, particularly through District Leadership Groups;
- the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council; and
- continuing to explore options for economic development and employment in regional and remote areas.



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## Commitment 8: Building local capacity

Supporting Aboriginal people to develop and drive economic and social projects in their own communities is essential to the empowerment process. We will work with Aboriginal people, the Commonwealth, local governments, business and community organisations to help develop and broaden the base of skills, capabilities and structures at the regional and local levels.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendations 12, 16, 17, 21, 33, 41 and 42, and Message Stick recommendations 12, 13, 16 and 39. Kimberley Aboriginal people also stressed the importance of investing in local people to provide services within the community, and training families and community members in mental health and suicide prevention.

We will help build local capacity through:

- long-term, strategic support for remote Aboriginal communities;
- empowering Aboriginal communities to design, lead and deliver effective local approaches, under the guidance of the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council;
- continuing to explore options for providing training and other opportunities at the local level, especially for young people; and
- increased commissioning opportunities for local providers to deliver social services to the community.

## Commitment 9: Better engagement with education

Education is crucial to equipping young people to embrace the challenges of adulthood. We will work towards improving the engagement of Aboriginal children and young people in education, in the Kimberley and across Western Australia.

This commitment aligns with the Coroner's recommendations 35, 36, 38, 39 and 40, and Message Stick recommendation 36. The community engagement workshops also called for accessible education, including the need for Aboriginal cultural education and the teaching of languages in schools.

Approaches to education in regional and remote areas will continue to be evaluated and explored, including a range of options for maximising the engagement of Aboriginal children and young people in the education system. This will include:

- approaches for supporting engagement in education;
- engaging or re-engaging children and young people currently outside the system, including working with families and exploring alternative education pathways;
- supporting early education programs;
- exploring culturally secure residential options for students in the Kimberley; and
- scoping the expansion of cultural and language programs, including in schools.



# COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

WE NEED  
RESOURCES  
FOR OUR MOB

DECISIONS  
MADE ON OUR  
LAND

WE ARE  
LOSING  
BROTHERS

SISTERS

SONS

DAUGHTERS

THE SOLUTIONS  
COME FROM US

**ABORIGINAL  
PEOPLE**

NOT GOVERNMENT.  
'HELP US DO IT OUR WAY'

THE OLD  
PEOPLE  
SUPPORT  
YOU.

'WE ARE TIRED

THE YOUNG  
VOICES STILL  
AREN'T HEARD.

HOW DO WE  
GROW  
STRONG  
RESILIENT  
YOUNG ONES?

OUR  
CULTURAL &  
GOVERNANCE  
SYSTEMS

WE ARE THE **AUTHORITY** ON CULTURE  
WE ARE STRUGGLING

By Zoe Street from voices of 'West Kimberley Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing Workshops' participants. 26th Aug 19, Yawuru Country, Broome, WA



## Youth

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### Commitment 10: Helping young people connect to culture

Connection to culture promotes social and emotional wellbeing and provides a protective factor against suicide and self-harm. The Government and Aboriginal communities will work together to develop strategies and programs to facilitate intergenerational and on-country learning of culture and culture-inspired life skills.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendations 16, 17, 25, 38, 39 and 42, and Message Stick recommendations 7, 8, 11, 12, 13 and 16. The Kimberley community workshops also called for opportunities to connect children and young people with Elders and country to build skills and resilience, and to be supported by people with deep cultural knowledge.

A range of strategies, programs and approaches will be developed to help connect young Aboriginal people to culture, including:

- the forthcoming Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy;
- Aboriginal-specific strategies under the State Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-25;
- teaching Aboriginal languages and cultures in a variety of contexts; and
- supporting cultural programs.

### Commitment 11: Building youth capacity

We will work with the Commonwealth, local government, businesses and the community sector to help build the capacity of young people to develop the skills, knowledge and experience required to live healthy, confident and independent lives. Young Aboriginal people need better access to training and employment opportunities, and outlets for self-expression through sport, recreation and social interaction.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendations 21, 30 and 37, and Message Stick recommendations 17, 19, 20 and 39. The Community engagement workshops also emphasised the importance of employment, support and capacity building for young people, and better vocational, social and sporting pathways.

A range of strategies, programs and approaches will be considered to help build youth capacity, including:

- a range of opportunities to engage in vocational education and training;
- exploring options for economic development and employment in regional and remote areas;
- enhancing access to sport and recreation;
- upgrading sporting and recreational facilities; and
- exploring opportunities to increase young people's involvement in community life.



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## Commitment 12: A voice for young people

Building youth voice is about identifying, recognising and supporting young people and their right to have a say about decisions that affect them. Young people should be empowered to speak up and contribute to decision making, and to become leaders of change on behalf of their own, and future generations.

This commitment arises from the Coroner's recommendation 42, and Message Stick recommendations 12 and 17. The Community engagement workshops provided a strong message about the role of young people and the need for a youth voice, including a representative structure for young people in the Kimberley, and a seat at the table for decision making.

A range of strategies, programs and approaches will be developed to help build a voice for young Aboriginal people, including:

- supporting the establishment of a network of empowered young leaders in the Kimberley;
- supporting the development of local youth representation structures;
- ensuring young people have a seat at the table for key decisions that directly affect them; and
- identifying and nurturing young leaders in the Aboriginal community through a range of supports and opportunities.



## The next steps

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This document outlines the Western Australian Government's approach to improving the outlook of young Aboriginal people. Aboriginal youth wellbeing must be an essential consideration for all Government agencies responsible for developing and implementing strategies, programs and initiatives that affect Aboriginal communities, and regional and remote areas more broadly. Aside from how these 12 commitments will influence the Government's approach to delivering key outcomes for Aboriginal people, there will be a number of specific actions over the next 6-12 months, through which a broad, whole-of-government Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing will begin to take shape.

### By June 2020

- A number of programs and initiatives will be announced which will demonstrate a streamlined, whole-of-government approach to our Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing, as set out in this document.
- A range of initiatives under the Kimberley Juvenile Justice Strategy will be underway.
- Initial actions for FASD will commence.

### By December 2020

- The State Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-25 will be released. This will include an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy, with dedicated regional streams, based on a consultation and co-design process.
- The finalised Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy will be released, outlining strategic foundations for the Western Australian Government to work better with Aboriginal people, community and organisations.

### By June 2021

- Release of the first Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing annual report (outlined below).



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### Supporting statement from the Commonwealth Government:

Recognising that suicide prevention and mental health are national priorities, the Australian Government is working closely with the Western Australian Government and Aboriginal communities in Western Australia on this important issue.

Messaging from the Kimberley community is clear and governments are listening; there must be a whole-of-community co-design approach to boost protective factors, and activities must be culturally safe, accessible, targeted and well-connected. We are working together to develop practical options to ensure that the right support is available to individuals, families and communities, at the right time and in the right place, drawing on community expertise.

The Prime Minister has appointed Ms Christine Morgan as his National Suicide Prevention Adviser and she is considering how we can better work together to reduce suicide rates. The Australian Government has committed \$509 million to a Youth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. This is the largest suicide prevention plan in Australia's history. The plan focuses on expanding the headspace network, Indigenous suicide prevention and early childhood and parenting.

This includes \$34.1 million for Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention, including \$15 million for a national expansion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid training. Specific to the Kimberley region, the Australian Government is providing \$4.6 million for activities aimed at supporting Aboriginal families, youth leadership and young people at risk of suicide. As chair of the community advisory group for suicide prevention in the Kimberley, the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP will continue to work in partnership with Indigenous Australians and communities to reduce suicide rates and improve life outcomes.





## Accountability

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The Government accepted or accepted in principle, or was already implementing, all but 15 of the recommendations. None of the recommendations were rejected, but four had been superseded. The Government will give account to the people of Western Australia for progress against its commitments to Aboriginal youth wellbeing over the next 5 years.

In June 2021, we will release a report on actions arising from the Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing, including those commenced in the 2019-2020 financial year, as well as 2020-2021.

This will be followed by annual progress reports in 2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025. These updates will review progress and renew the State's commitment, providing a report-back on the progress of Aboriginal youth wellbeing initiatives and outline any new or amended approaches. These updates will also set out progress made against the recommendations of the State Coroner's and Message Stick reports, and will be tabled in Parliament and made available on the internet.

While initial programs and initiatives under the Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing will have a strong Kimberley emphasis, future developments are expected to address issues across the state, particularly via dedicated regional streams under the State Suicide Prevention Action Plan 2021-2025. While it is difficult to develop precise measurement tools for success for such a broad concept as 'wellbeing', we will ensure that there are strong feedback loops between agencies and with the Aboriginal community, through the Western Australian Aboriginal Advisory Committee, District Leadership Groups, and ongoing community engagement. This feedback, and a range of data relating to the progress of key programs will be provided as part of the annual review cycle.





