



Ngaanyatjarra
Pitjantjatjara
Yankunytjatjara
Women's Council

Australian Government
Productivity Commission
Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Country, VIC 3008
Ngunnawal Ngambri Country, ACT 2600

Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – Draft Report

The Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council ('NPYWC') writes in response to Productivity Commission's invitation to comment on the Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – Draft Report ('draft report').

Who are we?

NPYWC is an Aboriginal Corporation that advocates for Anangu in the NPY region and is a major provider of human services for the NPY Lands. The NPY Lands span the tri-state Central Desert region of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, covering 350,000sq km and encompassing 26 remote communities and homelands, with an overall population of around 6,000 Anangu and Yarnangu (Aboriginal people), **annexed and labelled "A"** is a map of the region. NPY Women's Council's core purpose is to work with women and their families of the NPY region to increase their capacity to lead safe and healthy lives with improved life choices. The Council provides health, cultural and community service projects to over 6,000 men, women and children in our region. These services are not duplicated by any other service in the area.

NPYWC holds a deep legacy for the advocacy of all Anangu to have the right of living well in both worlds. This vision drives the ongoing work to 'close the gap' that exists for Anangu living in Central Australia. The effects and drivers of this 'gap' have been witnessed by NPYWC for over four decades. Anangu have always held the solutions for closing the gap. The collective agency of Anangu women and cultural guidance has frequently provided the blueprint for these very solutions NPYWC advocates for. These pillars are what make Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) the leading experts for placed-based solutions for the communities they serve. As an Anangu-led organisation we are continually guided by these values and ensure to deliver for and to our communities.

Through this model there have been advocacy challenges and triumphs that at the core advocate for the survival, dignity and wellbeing of Anangu.¹ Through these examples, it is clear that progress is best achieved when there is recognition of the leadership of Anangu decision making and this is shared with Government, and not held by Government. To strengthen the work of ACCOs there must be a greater investment and commitment of funding and support

¹ A list of NPYWC advocacy campaigns and factsheets from over the decades can be accessed on the NPYWC website - <https://www.npywc.org.au/publications/>.

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for communities to freely pursue the fundamental freedom of self-determination. ACCOs frequently demonstrate their reliability for positive and longstanding community outcomes, now they need to be catapulted with the funding, trust and leadership to close the gap.

Priority Reform 1, 'formal partnerships and shared decision making' & Priority Reform 2, 'building the community-controlled sector'

There has been a shift over the years in regards to the investment and resourcing of ACCOs. This shift has also caused a culture of creating passive and disempowering funding relationships with Government. There has also been a growing reach of placing ACCOs within generalist and mainstream funding pools, streams and roadmaps. There are two case studies that best demonstrate this point below. Simultaneously, the case studies demonstrate the innovation of the ACCO (one of their greatest strengths) and the lack of agency given to ACCOs for transferring services to meet the needs of community. Both of these points require shared decision making with Government and resource investment into ACCOs. Lastly, ACCOs need to be funded and supported to sustain corporate growth and service excellence. Investing in the community-controlled sector needs to include flexible funding for building and strengthening corporate services. An investment in corporate services for ACCOs is an acknowledgment of the critical role they play in closing the gap and as industry experts.

1. Case Study – NPYWC Walytjapiti (Family) Program

The NPYWC's Walytjapiti program is a voluntary service supporting families with children aged up to 18 years. Integrating Anangu world views and child-rearing practices, the program builds on the family strengths to keep children safe, happy and protected within their communities and culture. Approximately ten years ago the program received Government funding to deliver 'intensive family support services'. Attached to the funding was the mandatory use of two (2) assessment tools when working with families. Both assessment tools were mainstream designed, punitive and lacked cultural understanding for ways Anangu raise their children. The assessment tools did not capture nor recognise how poverty and structural restrictions limit parental capacity. NPYWC were not consulted about the appropriateness of the assessment tools or for how best to work with families to increase child safety. NPYWC were able to maintain the allocated funding but self-resourced and self-invested into the program to create a more appropriate and strengths-based family assessment tool that was underpinned by trauma-informed practice. This tool has since been incorporated into funding requirements for intensive family support services across the country and has been recognised for its advancement of utilising family strengths and culture.

Although the outcome is positive for this case study, ACCOs are frequently tasked with needing to advocate for the importance of their knowledge and practice when working with families. ACCOs are not automatically seen as the "go-to" experts nor consulted for how funding and guidelines should look. The onus continues to sit with ACCOs to argue and justify their role in decision making for what is best for the very communities and families they serve. This takes time, money and resources that could be better supported and placed with direct practice with families. It is clear from this example that often the work and ingenuity of ACCOs create practices and guidelines that not only benefit the families they serve but the Australian community overall.

2. Case Study – NPYWC Iwara Program

The NPYWC's Iwara Program came out of a community concern for the job pathways available for young people. Although there is a growing rate for the completion of secondary education, there is little to show that this is creating better post-schooling outcomes and job security for young people. Young people continue to articulate that they want to be challenged and have opportunities to try new work skills. NPYWC has self-funded the Iwara Program which is a 12 week internship for young people from the NPY region to participate in training, work experience and build network connections in different industries. NPYWC has had two classes of young people aged between 17 and 23 years successfully complete program. Of these, NPYWC were able to place 97% of the graduates in to jobs. The program is a direct investment into growing and sustaining an Anangu workforce for the organisation. Unlike other programs, the Iwara program is responsive to the needs of young people and supports sustainable workforce development for young people with a clear and tangible pathway for employment. NPYWC has evaluated and advocated the effectiveness of the program but there is still no interest from Government to invest and financially support this program. The community controlled sector holds the solutions for closing the gap and this example is not just a solution but proof of the potential social impact and ripple effect it can create. If this was the baseline and goalpost for closing the gap then the Iwara program and leadership of NPYWC would be supported, praised and replicated. NPYWC supports any initiatives that will hold Government and the Closing the Gap framework accountable to the solutions offered by the community controlled sector. There needs to be genuine investment and agency given to ACCOs for shared decision making for what will build improved health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people.

Priority Reform 4 – Shared access to data and information at a regional level

It has been the experience of NPYWC that there is a data gap and this creates service and funding blind spots for the organisation. One of the biggest blind-spots is the allocation of funding for the NPY region. It is difficult to advocate for greater funding when there is no clear information about the current level of investment in the region across all governments. Transparency is also lost when funding for programs in the region go to generalist not-for-profit organisations. The use of funding by generalist organisations has a domino effect to the funding given to ACCOs or if there is a transfer of services to ACCOs. NPYWC support any recommendations that centre a commitment to shared data – this is not limited to national but also regional and localised data that reflect service provision areas.

Regional Needs

As referenced above and annexed below, the NPY region intersects with the tristate and territory region of Central Australia. Any national initiatives, frameworks or recommendations must consider regions in accordance with the communities they service. Framing solutions by western defined state and territory boundaries disenfranchises the pursuit Anangu have to work within their understanding of place and country. Additionally, applying western territorial boundaries often creates division amongst Anangu, particularly when there is a greater investment in one state and/or territory over another. National roadmaps need to consider the needs of ACCOs that do differ from urban areas. This includes but is not limited to – the delivery of services and costs, limited accessibility to other services, levels of poverty and definitions of 'successful outcomes'. The journey for closing the gap in

the NPY region will look starkly different to other places in Australia – this is why a one-size-fits-all approach will not work and localised solutions led by ACCOs are best fit to contribute to how and what is needed for change.

Thank you for providing NPYWC with the opportunity to comment on this important review, and please do not hesitate to contact us if there are any further questions about what we have raised in this submission.

Prepared by Chloe Fragos on behalf of NPY Women’s Council

Kind Regards,

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Chief Executive Officer
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Annexure A:

