

# Aboriginal cultural heritage, wellbeing and enterprise



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The *Closing the Gap report 2020* identified that the target to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by 2031 is not on track, with **WA recording the largest gap** of all jurisdictions for males, at 13.4 years.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the **child mortality rate** for Indigenous children was **141 per 100,000**, which is twice the rate for non-Indigenous children.<sup>2</sup> The **employment rate** for Indigenous Australians was around **49%**, compared to 79% for non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>3</sup>



## What IWA heard

During consultation on the draft strategy, there was strong support for the Aboriginal engagement, empowerment, co-design and wellbeing themes. There was significant feedback on procurement and capacity building, including economic opportunities for Aboriginal people and businesses. It was suggested that initiatives to build capacity and capability of Aboriginal businesses be Aboriginal-led where possible. In addition, an update to the Aboriginal Procurement Policy was released, resulting in amendments to relevant recommendations.

Stakeholders highlighted the need to strengthen and support governance arrangements within remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves, and clarify the role of local government, which is now discussed further in this chapter.

Native title and cultural heritage were also raised, and the link to infrastructure has been made clearer.

**Aboriginal people are strong and resilient, with an enduring culture, deep knowledge, history and connection to country. They know what is best for themselves and their communities, lands and waterways. Despite efforts, a significant gap still exists between the life outcomes of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and our existing systems are not serving Aboriginal people as well as they could. Issues are many and complex, and it will take significant engagement, effort and time to bring about real change and achieve better outcomes. By promoting and leveraging Aboriginal cultural heritage and enterprise, Aboriginal wellbeing will be supported into the future.**

The *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (Closing the Gap) includes a range of socio-economic targets that measure the outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including outcomes relating to education, child mortality, employment and life expectancy.<sup>4</sup> Progress on reducing disadvantage has been largely unsuccessful despite significant government investment at both a federal and state level.<sup>5</sup> A lack of opportunities for self-determination and capacity building, poor environmental health conditions in remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves and inconsistent funding arrangements have contributed to this lack of progress.<sup>6</sup> A new approach is needed to deliver improved life outcomes – one that places culture at the heart, embraces inclusive and genuine partnerships, and structurally changes the way government works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>7</sup>

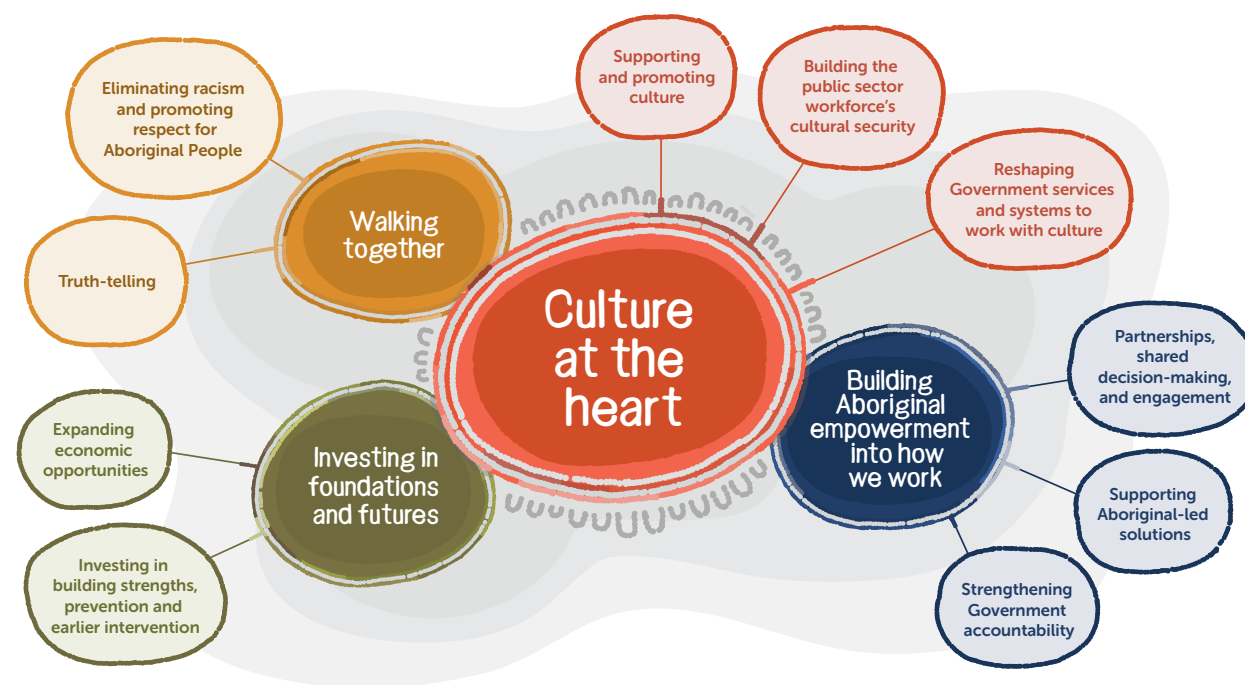
Infrastructure planning, design, delivery, operation and maintenance offers a range of

opportunities for Aboriginal empowerment and self-determination to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people and increase the sustainability and resilience of their communities. While some progress is being made, more needs to be done through infrastructure development to build cultural understanding and respect, boost economic opportunities and improve participation, and enable fit for purpose community-led infrastructure solutions. It will take some time to embed and normalise new processes and realise improved outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Empowering Aboriginal people, families and communities is a focus of the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. The strategy provides a vision ('Aboriginal people, families and communities empowered to live good lives and choose their own futures from a secure foundation') and framework to enable government to work more coherently together, and to work better with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations, federal and local governments and the private sector.<sup>8</sup>

This will help to improve social, economic, health and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people. It includes 10 strategic elements, grouped into 4 themes that place Aboriginal culture at the heart (Figure 21).<sup>9</sup> Closely aligned with the strategy is the WA Government's first *Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan*. The plan outlines actions that will be taken to meet Closing the Gap priority reforms and targets, and information on specific activities, programs and services.<sup>10</sup>

Figure 21: Strategic elements of empowerment<sup>11</sup>



**Culture is central to Aboriginal people's wellbeing.** It is at the heart of a secure foundation for life, and forms the bridge between a person's identity and the futures they might choose.<sup>12</sup>

Achieving the goal of empowerment is not simply about more or better services, but a change in the relationship between Aboriginal people and government. This requires a shift from structures that sometimes position Aboriginal people as passive, individual consumers of services to structures that empower Aboriginal people and communities to actively identify solutions. Issues relating to Aboriginal heritage, wellbeing and enterprise are complex, deeply entrenched and stretch far beyond the remit of this Strategy. However, infrastructure presents a range of opportunities to contribute to Aboriginal empowerment, build self-determination and enable solutions designed for and with Aboriginal people.

There are 3 themes and subsequent recommendations addressed in this chapter that require both central and multi-agency responses:

**1. Aboriginal engagement and co-design for infrastructure**

Infrastructure is vital to support social and essential services and improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. It should be planned and delivered in a co-designed process that embraces self-determination and empowerment of Traditional Owners and Custodians and their communities (including Aboriginal people whose families have been displaced from their traditional lands).

## 2. Procurement and business development

Economic participation provides a strong foundation to realise better social, economic, health and cultural outcomes. There are opportunities – which should be Aboriginal-led and informed – across many areas of government activity to increase Aboriginal employment and procurement, and support the establishment, growth and sustainability of Aboriginal businesses.

## 3. Infrastructure for remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves

Remote Aboriginal communities provide a deep connection to country and cultural security, uphold customs, cultures and traditions and provide traditional authority structures. Poor living conditions and environmental health in some communities contribute to higher rates of infection, injury and chronic disease and low community amenity and perceptions, impacting on wellbeing and participation. There is an urgent need to improve infrastructure in many of these communities.

The following infrastructure sector-specific challenges and opportunities will benefit from consideration in line with these 3 themes. Relevant chapters of the Strategy provide further detail, as they relate to infrastructure, along with the recommendations being made. Many of these support Closing the Gap targets.

- **Digital connectivity and technology:** Addressing digital connectivity constraints in remote areas, where small and geographically dispersed populations are difficult to service with reliable and affordable mobile and internet services, will assist in providing regional economic development opportunities, providing equitable access to services and closing the digital divide.
- **Housing:** Some Aboriginal people face housing issues such as poor-quality infrastructure, overcrowding and homelessness. Progress in improving housing outcomes for Aboriginal people has been slow, with significant negative environmental health impacts. Access to safe, good-quality and culturally appropriate housing is fundamental to achieving outcomes in health, education, employment and community safety.<sup>13</sup>
- **Health:** Aboriginal people across WA do not always have access to culturally appropriate health care. Aboriginal people experience unequal health outcomes compared to non-Aboriginal people, ultimately resulting in rates of lower life expectancy and higher childhood mortality.<sup>14</sup> There is an urgent need for government to address this inequity in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities to improve health outcomes.<sup>15</sup>
- **Education:** Education outcomes are significantly lower for Aboriginal people than non-Aboriginal people.<sup>16</sup> While solutions are multi-faceted and complex, they should



include place-based, co-designed education facilities. A shift towards greater engagement with young Aboriginal people in the design of kindergarten, pre-primary, primary and high school infrastructure and services has the potential to achieve positive outcomes. For example, the planning for redevelopment of Roebourne District High School is underway, with students involved at all stages of the process, together with a focus on providing facilities for programs that engage Aboriginal children.<sup>17</sup>



- **Arts, culture, sport and recreation:** Empowering Aboriginal people has the potential to realise socio-economic benefits, particularly in rural and remote communities. This will require investment in cultural infrastructure and tourism experiences that recognise and celebrate the world's oldest continuous culture and develop pathways for Aboriginal enterprise in domestic and international markets, including development of a flagship Aboriginal cultural centre for WA.
- **Justice and public safety:** High rates of imprisonment have resulted in profound and ongoing intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal people and communities. These challenges and drivers, along with historical disempowerment leading to a level of distrust in law-and-order systems, contribute towards WA's lack of progress in closing the gap for Aboriginal incarceration rates.<sup>18</sup> Early intervention, diversion and rehabilitation initiatives provide the opportunity to improve outcomes.

## Governance

Many state agencies and government trading enterprises (GTEs) have responsibilities and obligations in relation to Aboriginal people, communities and enterprises. This can be through (but not limited to) the provision of infrastructure and services, policy development, reconciliation action plans and engagement plans, along with employment and procurement targets.

The Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia is the primary body advising the WA Government on Aboriginal affairs. The council's role includes co-designing a community engagement framework, providing stewardship and direction to the federal and state governments regarding Closing the Gap initiatives, and undertaking dialogue between Aboriginal communities and the WA Government regarding Aboriginal recognition, and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal reconciliation.<sup>19</sup> Membership comprises 12 Aboriginal leaders representing diverse regions, organisations, areas of expertise and genders.<sup>20</sup>

Several WA Government entities have an active role in leading Aboriginal policy matters in WA:

- The Department of the Premier and Cabinet leads strategies to build positive relationships between Aboriginal people and the state government. The department provides leadership, direction, and management of strategic policy and program development in relation to Aboriginal affairs within WA and nationally. It also shapes the WA Government's approach and engagement with native title groups and Aboriginal communities, and implements agreements and projects in partnership with communities.
- The Department of Communities plays a role in the management of remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves, providing housing and essential and municipal services in many locations. They also provide housing services for people across WA.
- Through its oversight of Aboriginal cultural and built heritage matters, land use and management of Crown land and policy development, the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage also manages Aboriginal land access, issues grants to preserve and promote Aboriginal sites and is a source of information about Aboriginal sites and other heritage places.



- The Aboriginal Lands Trust is a statutory board with management responsibility for 10% (24 million hectares) of WA's land mass and holds the land title for almost all of WA's remote Aboriginal communities.
- The Department of Finance manages and administers the Aboriginal Procurement Policy, which sets targets for the number of registered Aboriginal businesses awarded government contracts and seeks to develop entrepreneurship and business opportunities for the Aboriginal community.

At the federal level, the National Indigenous Australians Agency leads policy development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, provides advice on whole of government priorities, and leads and coordinates the development and implementation of Australia's Closing the Gap targets in partnership with Indigenous Australians.

## Recommendations

### Aboriginal engagement and co-design for infrastructure

Infrastructure is essential to support social and essential services and improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal communities. Historically, WA's planning and delivery approach has been shaped around Western ideals and standards and has not always included early, genuine and culturally appropriate engagement with Aboriginal people. This has resulted in assets that Aboriginal people do not connect with and that are not fit for purpose.

A significant shift is required to embed a genuine process of co-design across the full infrastructure lifecycle that embraces self-determination and empowerment of Traditional Owners, Custodians and their communities (including Aboriginal people whose families have been displaced from their traditional lands). This can only be achieved over



time by working side by side with Aboriginal people, ensuring cultural heritage, training, enterprise and employment is considered and supported through strategies, processes and structures that empower Aboriginal communities to identify their own solutions and create services and products that meet their needs.

It starts with inclusive, genuine and consistent engagement to build long-term trust and rapport. Proponents of WA Government projects and programs with a capital cost of \$100 million or more should prepare an Aboriginal engagement strategy. Along with the requirement for this

engagement strategy to be embedded in the Strategic Asset Management Framework, it should also be published and address, at a minimum:

- cultural recognition and interpretation
- design
- governance and decision-making structures
- engagement processes
- stakeholder identification
- training, employment and enterprise opportunities and targets as part of the project or program
- strategy reporting and/or evaluation measures.

This engagement should be embedded across all stages of the infrastructure lifecycle and the preparation of engagement strategies is also strongly encouraged for all projects and programs, including those with a capital cost below \$100 million. These strategies can increase participation, support ongoing partnerships with Aboriginal people, and improve awareness of Aboriginal cultural heritage for all Western Australians. Principles of engagement and co-design should also be applied to program development and service delivery to ensure they are culturally appropriate and fit for purpose.

Native title recognises Aboriginal peoples' rights and interests in their traditional lands and waters, and can often co-exist with other interests in land, such as pastoral or mining leases.<sup>21</sup> The WA Government applies a whole of government approach to native title, with all activities across WA needing to comply with the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth) and other relevant legislation, including infrastructure planning and delivery.<sup>22</sup> Approximately 85% of WA is covered by native title claims determinations and/or Indigenous Land Use Agreements, which often co-exist with other interests in land, and federal, state and local government policies and laws.<sup>23</sup> This adds complexity to planning for land use and infrastructure, with the need to allow additional time in some cases to resolve land tenure for economic opportunities.

The *Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Act 2021* reflects contemporary Aboriginal cultural heritage management principles and practices and resets the relationship between Aboriginal people, industry and other land users.<sup>24</sup> It recognises the fundamental role of Aboriginal cultural heritage in the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.<sup>25</sup> Aligning state legislation with federal native title laws enables Aboriginal people to negotiate outcomes for projects and opportunities on their land and assist with navigating the complexities of federal and state laws and policies. The Act provides clarity around processes for all stakeholders.

### Recommendation 6

**Embed and support early, inclusive, genuine and culturally appropriate engagement with Traditional Owners and Custodians addressing all stages of the infrastructure lifecycle by:**

- a. developing and implementing engagement guidelines that:
  - promote community-led processes and place-based infrastructure outcomes for Aboriginal communities
  - include guidance to identify and understand, at an early stage, native title and cultural heritage implications of infrastructure proposals
  - align with principles of the WA Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy
- b. updating the Strategic Asset Management Framework's Strategic Asset Plan and Business Case guidelines to require preparation and publication of an Aboriginal engagement strategy, including Aboriginal employment targets, for projects and programs with a capital cost of \$100 million or more.



## Case study

# Gnarla Biddi: METRONET's Aboriginal Engagement Strategy

Gnarla Biddi (Our Pathways) provides a Noongar-led guide and framework for Aboriginal engagement and participation on the METRONET program of works.<sup>26</sup> The focus is on long-term, consistent and genuine engagement with the Aboriginal community, throughout the planning, design and operational phases of each project.<sup>27</sup> The framework of 5 engagement streams puts cultural, business, job and land access outcomes for the Aboriginal community at the centre.<sup>28</sup>

The streams are:

- Noongar cultural recognition
- Noongar cultural input into place-making
- Aboriginal procurement
- Aboriginal employment
- land access and sites management.

In accordance with Gnarla Biddi, the METRONET Noongar Reference Group provides cultural input, advice and support to the program of projects. This includes, but is not limited to, guiding cultural recognition activities, such as ceremonies and welcomes, input into cultural awareness training programs, and cultural input on design elements, including landscaping, art and urban design.

Prior to contract award, project delivery contractors are required to prepare Aboriginal engagement and participation plans that outline how the 5 engagement streams will be embedded into the project delivery processes.

These streams align with the targets of the Aboriginal Procurement Policy and provide Noongar and other Aboriginal people with direct employment and career development opportunities. METRONET's Construction Business Register connects registered Aboriginal businesses with successful contractors, supporting the development of Aboriginal enterprise opportunities.

Gnarla Biddi demonstrates what can be accomplished when government, the private sector and the Aboriginal community work together towards positive outcomes. While Noongar-led, its principles for the delivery of major transport infrastructure on Noongar land are universal. The application of place-based, Aboriginal-led engagement to other infrastructure projects has the potential for far-reaching and positive long-term outcomes.

For further information, refer to [www.metronet.wa.gov.au](http://www.metronet.wa.gov.au).







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Aboriginal people know what is best for themselves and their communities, lands and waterways. The WA Government needs to lead the way in co-designed infrastructure planning and delivery – **leveraging Traditional Owners' and Custodians' knowledge, history and connection to country.**

## Aboriginal procurement, participation and business development

As a major employer, capital investor, asset manager and purchaser of goods and services, the WA Government can play a critical role in increasing economic participation of Aboriginal businesses in WA, creating a strong foundation to realise greater social, economic, health and cultural outcomes for Aboriginal people. Nationally, Closing the Gap targets aim to increase the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by 2031 – targeting 67% of people aged 15 to 24 and 62% of people aged 25 to 64 in employment and/or training within the next decade.<sup>29</sup>

The WA Government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy was introduced in 2018 and updated in July 2021.<sup>30</sup> The policy mandates progressive targets for the awarding of government contracts (valued at \$50,000 or more) to registered Aboriginal businesses.<sup>31</sup> The policy commenced with a target of 3% of government contracts by the end of June 2021, increasing to 4% by 2024.<sup>32</sup> In 2019–20, state agencies awarded 5.6% of all contracts to Aboriginal businesses, significantly exceeding the policy's target when viewed at a whole of government scale.<sup>33</sup> Although there have been significant achievements by individual state agencies to date, many have not met current targets and will have to work harder to engage with the Aboriginal business sector.<sup>34</sup>

The 2021 update of the policy saw the inclusion of Aboriginal participation requirements (that is, subcontracting or region-specific employment targets) for specific contract types with a value of \$5 million or greater.<sup>35</sup> Higher-value and longer-term contracts are important for growing Aboriginal business capability, and for those businesses to become more sustainable and provide greater employment opportunities. This could be supported through inclusion of contract value targets in the policy. Lifting awareness among state agencies and GTEs about the capacity, capabilities and breadth of services available from Aboriginal businesses is an important challenge. Building the cultural competency of the public sector through updated guidance and education (including encouraging a greater uptake of unconscious bias training) should also be addressed.

Initiatives implemented by the private sector should be considered and adapted. This could be through, but not limited to, partnering or joint ventures with Aboriginal businesses to share, develop and expand skills and capability. Other supporting measures, such as establishing a community of practice, improving awareness of the policy across state agencies, ongoing transparent evaluation of policy effectiveness and improving registers of Aboriginal businesses, could also assist.



While government provides some capability-building services to support the development of the Aboriginal business sector, more is needed to improve business capacity and capability across broader business types, including advisory, community and social services. The development of these measures and initiatives should be done with the Aboriginal business community and be Aboriginal-led where possible. Consideration needs to be given to initiatives that extend from business establishment and emerging industries through to mentoring across tendering and contract delivery phases.

### Recommendation 7

Ensure infrastructure investment delivers tangible benefits to Aboriginal businesses and people by strengthening application of the WA Government's Aboriginal Procurement Policy, including:

- a. establishing targets that also consider contract value
- b. providing updated guidance and education, including unconscious bias training, for procurement and other relevant public sector officers involved in procurement decision-making to support Aboriginal business contracting
- c. implementing mechanisms to mandate application of the policy by government trading enterprises
- d. setting new incremental procurement stretch targets (over and above current overall performance levels) in the policy over time.

### Recommendation 8

Progressively build capacity and capability of Aboriginal businesses by developing and implementing complementary and proactive measures that are Aboriginal-led where possible.

For every dollar spent with an Aboriginal business, **\$4.40 worth of economic and social value is created for Indigenous communities.**<sup>36</sup> Higher-value contracts are important to grow Aboriginal business capability, and sustainability, and to provide greater employment opportunities.<sup>37</sup>



## Infrastructure for remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves

Approximately 15,000 Aboriginal people reside in WA's 274 remote Aboriginal communities and 37 town-based reserves.<sup>38</sup> These communities play a vital role in wellbeing, providing cultural security and a deep connection to country, while upholding customs, cultures and traditional authority structures.

Shocks and stresses can disproportionately affect remote Aboriginal communities. Events like floods, fires and pandemics can impact access to critical infrastructure or require additional response capacity and resources. As the climate continues to change, these communities may become increasingly vulnerable, and their resilience may be increasingly dependent on infrastructure beyond their direct control.



## Funding, governance and land tenure

Through the Remote Essential and Municipal Services Program, the Department of Communities provides many Aboriginal communities with basic essential services, including maintaining housing, power, water and wastewater infrastructure, as well as municipal services such as maintaining community roads and providing waste management services.<sup>39</sup> Improving outcomes will require funding above that currently provided to deliver baseline services. A sustainable funding model is crucial for successful and ongoing planning and delivery of infrastructure and services and to provide certainty about funding and support. The private sector has the potential to be an additional funding source for provision of critical services in remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves, and to support Aboriginal traineeships and enterprise, when undertaking large projects on Aboriginal lands and waters.

Limitations in governance are disempowering many remote Aboriginal communities and restricting the potential of government investment in infrastructure and planning. A lack of legislative powers, funding and formalised decision-making authority means many of these communities' leadership councils function without appropriate support. Effective governance is a key factor in the successful delivery and operation of sustainable infrastructure and services within and for Aboriginal communities. While beyond the remit of this Strategy, the implications of remote Aboriginal community governance for infrastructure delivery and asset management are acknowledged.

Complex land tenure arrangements also create uncertainty over asset ownership and service delivery responsibility. The Bidyadanga Land Activation Pilot provides an example of the complex land tenure issues and the barriers to economic activation that result.

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**Land tenure change** is a fundamental first step in improving the economic sustainability of remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves by attracting new forms of investment, improving services and creating opportunities for home ownership.



## Case study

# Bidyadanga Land Activation Pilot

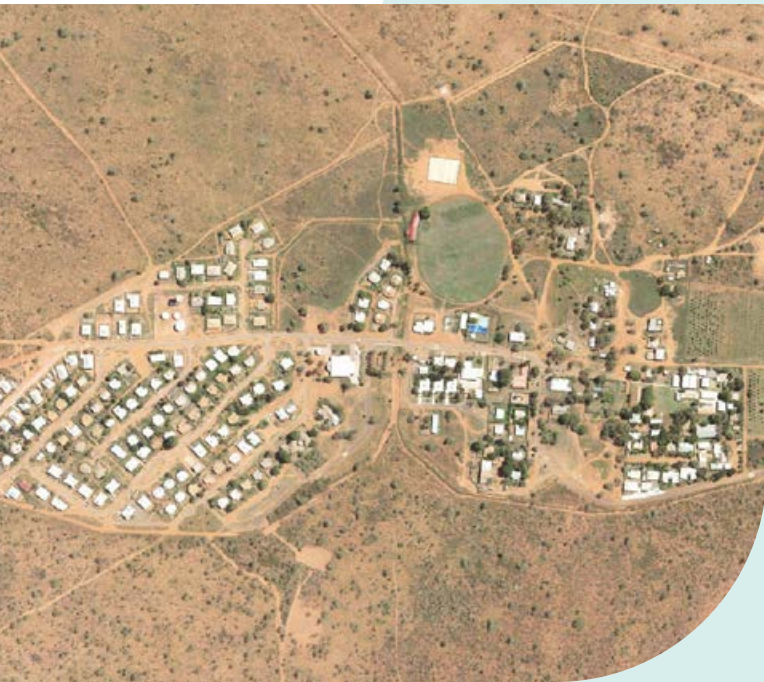
The Bidyadanga Land Activation Pilot in the Kimberley region is a \$7.3 million innovative place-based partnership between the WA Government, community residents and native title holders to remove land tenure barriers and deliver a sustainable future for Bidyadanga, WA's largest remote Aboriginal community, through an Indigenous Land Use Agreement.<sup>40</sup>

Land tenure reform is considered the first step of full economic transformation and its resolution will enable future economic activation, business development and the regularisation of community services.

As is common across remote Aboriginal communities, the Bidyadanga community has historically faced an inflexible and confusing mix of land tenure arrangements. As a new way of doing business, the objectives of the pilot stretch beyond the resolution of land tenure and native title issues, to adhering to land-use planning, building code and heritage laws, regulations and other statutory requirements that have often hindered community and native title aspirations. Community by-laws and divestment of the Aboriginal Land Trust Reserves are also considerations of the pilot. Divestment should result in a change of tenure that provides Aboriginal people with direct control or management of the land.

The pilot recognises that place-based partnerships keep culture at the heart of reform. Transformation must be built around the Bidyadanga community's own future vision and cannot be realised without local leadership and the active participation of native title holders and community members. To support this co-design process, cultural mapping is being used as a valuable engagement tool to assist the Bidyadanga community to identify and reclaim resources. Data about the Bidyadanga community and native title holders' use of country, and of important ceremonial sites, is vital information for the future negotiation of any land-use management, resource extraction and development proposals.

For further information, refer to [www.dplh.wa.gov.au](http://www.dplh.wa.gov.au).



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Access to **safe, effective and reliable water, power and wastewater services is essential to liveability** in any community.<sup>41</sup> Providing those services in remote Aboriginal communities is a particularly significant challenge that successive governments have grappled with, often with mixed results.<sup>42</sup>



### **Power, water and wastewater services**

Many remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves are provided with unlicensed and unregulated essential services. In 2021 the Auditor-General reported that while water quality had improved (since 2015) in 38 communities, 37 communities remained at risk from unsafe water.<sup>43</sup> There was no water quality testing conducted in 51 of the smallest communities.<sup>44</sup> The Department of Communities, Horizon Power and Water Corporation are working collaboratively to better understand the condition of infrastructure within these communities,<sup>45</sup> and are progressing a proposal to transfer responsibility for power and water from the Department of Communities to Horizon Power and Water Corporation respectively, to ensure services are safe, reliable, efficient, equitable and fit for purpose. This will continue over the medium to long term, given the large number of existing remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves in WA. An enforceable mechanism that outlines minimum service levels for power, water and wastewater services to all remote settlements – including Aboriginal communities – is required. A regulated service standard would also provide clear direction to GTEs and the WA Government on investment required.

### **Municipal services**

Municipal-type services such as maintenance of local roads, parks and sporting facilities or provision of waste management services are provided to 133 remote Aboriginal communities through the Remote Essential and Municipal Services Program.<sup>46</sup> Infrastructure and services such as these are critical to environmental health and community health and wellbeing. These services are normally provided by local government in settlements across the state, but this is generally not the case for these communities, with the lack of local government presence often attributed to complex land tenure arrangements and lack of revenue from rates. Roads are mostly ungazetted and in poor condition and amenities such as parks and playgrounds are often poorly maintained, with funding not often available for ongoing operation and maintenance. Waste management facilities and services are ineffective or non-existent, contributing to poor environmental health outcomes for people living in these communities, which has numerous flow-on impacts.

The roles and responsibilities of relevant entities require clarification as a priority, along with resolution of funding needs, to ensure remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves are provided with necessary municipal services. The planning, delivery, operation and maintenance of infrastructure and services should be community-led and place-based where possible, and managed by the entity best placed to do so. This has the potential to provide opportunities for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and to build local workforce capacity.

The maintenance of infrastructure in many remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves is generally managed by separate entities, undertaken by a workforce who live in distant towns and centres.



Multiple visits may be required to conduct inspections and subsequent repairs. For different types of infrastructure, assets maintenance tends to occur in isolation from each other. Consideration should be given to opportunities for infrastructure and service providers to train and upskill a local workforce to conduct general maintenance within and across communities. Opportunities such as these may assist to build capacity, accountability and self-determination. In addition, while in some cases visits to remote Aboriginal communities are coordinated across government, there are opportunities to better organise and coordinate visits, to improve efficiencies and reduce consultation fatigue.

### Recommendation 9

**Support improved environmental health, social and economic outcomes in remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves by improving the quality and resilience of infrastructure and services, ensuring they are safe, reliable, equitable and fit for purpose, including:**

- a. developing a sustainable funding model and investment framework for state government infrastructure that considers whole of lifecycle asset costs, including recurrent funding for the operation and proactive maintenance of assets
- b. ensuring state agencies and government trading enterprises share information relating to the delivery of state government infrastructure and services to improve efficiency and coordination
- c. investigating opportunities for the private sector to fund and/or participate in the delivery, operation and maintenance of infrastructure and services
- d. evaluating the outcomes of the Bidyadanga Land Activation Pilot Project, and once completed, assessing the suitability of the model for application in other remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves
- e. ensuring licensed and regulated water, wastewater and power services are provided by accelerating the regularisation of water and wastewater services to the Water Corporation and power services to Horizon Power, and prioritising these works based on agreed criteria
- f. establishing and implementing a tiered regulated water, wastewater and power service standard for remote settlements (including remote Aboriginal communities and town-based reserves) to achieve equitable levels of service with other population centres of a similar size across the state
- g. clarifying the roles and responsibilities of entities providing municipal infrastructure and services, including roads, waste management and sport and recreation facilities
- h. determining appropriate funding arrangements for the provision of municipal infrastructure and services, including the need for subsidies
- i. investigating and pursuing opportunities for local Aboriginal residents to be trained to deliver operations and maintenance services for infrastructure.

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Planning, delivering and maintaining infrastructure and services should be done in a manner that is **community-led, place-based and builds the capacity of the local community**, including employment and business development opportunities.