



**2025**

# **Election Statement**

**Southern Aboriginal Corporation**

**September 2024**



## **Acknowledgements**

This Southern Aboriginal Corporation Election Statement (2025) was developed as part of the organisations advocacy for investments in its local community ahead of the upcoming State Election.

The content was developed following a series of engagement approaches with the SAC Board of Directors, executive management team, internal staff and external stakeholders.

## **Disclaimer**

Whilst every effort has been made to reflect accurate information throughout this document, nothing in this document should be construed as legal advice.

# Contents

Who we are . . . . .	4
Our Vision . . . . .	4
Pathway to achieving our Vision . . . . .	5
Key Focus Areas . . . . .	6
Key Ask 1 – AOD Rehabilitation Centre. . . . .	8
Key Ask 2 – Safe Places . . . . .	13
Key Ask 3 – FVPLS Program . . . . .	17
Key Ask 4 – Health Promotion Program . . . . .	25
Key Ask 5 – Suicide Prevention . . . . .	29
Key Ask 6 – Men’s Program . . . . .	34
Key Ask 7 – Kairli Cultural and Language Centre . . . . .	37
Key Ask 8 – Youth Program . . . . .	42
Key Ask 9 – Rangers Program . . . . .	47





## Who we are

Southern Aboriginal Corporation (SAC) is a leading Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation in Western Australia, with services spanning the Great Southern, Wheatbelt and South West regions.

SAC offices are located in Albany, Katanning, Bunbury and Narrogin, from which services are delivered to 17 regional and remote locations. SAC supports the unique and evolving needs of our local communities by promoting Noongar social and cultural values and implementing a culturally informed, trauma integrated healing approach. Our suite of services involves:

- Improving justice outcomes for survivors of family violence and sexual assault
- Coordinating access to quality and affordable housing
- Supporting better mental and physical health outcomes
- Enabling increased access to meaningful employment opportunities
- Supporting our local people to successfully transition out of and stay away from the justice system
- Coordinating accessible programs and initiatives that build a solid foundation for future prosperity, and
- Providing a united voice for our community.

## Our Vision



### Step Up....

Empower self-determination and Aboriginal led solutions

### Stand Tall....

Lead the way with cultural and business integrity

### Walk Together...

Build inclusive relationships, partnerships and community through mutual respect and empathy

# Pathway to achieving our Vision

Our pathway to achieving our vision is strengthened by our values and our cultural way of working



We **empower** our people through supporting **self-determined** and **Aboriginal-led solutions** which leads to building our people and our community.

We promote **equity** and **seeking justice** for all by implementing a culturally informed trauma integrated healing approach which allows us to provide a culturally safe place and dignified service provision.

We **embrace change** and new perspectives which helps us grow and make informed decisions.



We acknowledge and take **pride** in sharing where our journey started and how this influences our journey ahead.

We embrace **cultural integrity** as a norm and inspire others to do the same.

Our commitment to practicing good governance builds **trust** and **faith** in all that we do through operating with **integrity, accountability** and **ethical** business practices.



We value relationships based on **mutual respect** and treat people with **empathy** and **compassion**.

Through a community led approach we build partnerships by embracing **collaboration** and **co-design** principles.

## Key Focus Areas

We will focus on the following priority areas to achieve our vision:

Demonstrating  
excellence in  
governance

Delivering  
quality and  
effective  
services

Representing  
as an  
employer  
of choice

Strengthening  
organisational  
profile and  
brand

Building  
sustainability  
and prosperity

Fostering  
a leadership  
function

Providing  
comprehensive  
asset  
management





STRONGER  
TOGETHER

# Key Ask 1 - AOD Rehabilitation Centre

## Context

In 2016, SAC led community engagement across the Great Southern to find potential solutions to address the substance abuse epidemic that was, and continues to, plague the region. As the only region in Western Australia without a dedicated residential rehabilitation facility for drug and alcohol abuse, SAC recognised then, and continues to recognise now, the detrimental impact of substance abuse on Aboriginal people and communities across the Great Southern.

SAC's engagement with almost 400 members of the local community identified methamphetamine as the most problematic substance across the region, followed by alcohol and marijuana. Abuse was, and continues to, result in:

- Increased rates of drug-induced family and domestic violence
- Safety risks to children and young people in drug-dependent homes, leading to increased rates of child removal
- Negative impacts on spiritual, mental and physical health and wellbeing for those under the influence of substances and their family members
- Increased rates of incarceration for drug-related offences
- Intergenerational drug use in families, and
- Increased rates of hospitalisation for drug-related illnesses, causing long-term health impacts or early death.[1]

In 2022, a Needs Assessment of the Great Southern for the 2022-2024 period determined that:

- 21.6% of Albany residents were at long-term risk from alcohol consumption
- Albany had the highest rate of unintentional drug induced deaths in country WA between 2014 and 2018, and
- Between 2018 and 2020, 63% of emergency department presentations related to alcohol and other drugs in Albany were made after hours, and presentation rates per 100k population per year in Albany (468) were well above the state rate (369).[2]

While we recognise the great work done by existing AOD services for the local community, the lack of cultural safety inherent in service delivery to Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations creates barriers to access for Aboriginal communities across the region. Research into the lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians in AOD treatment services argues that cultural safety is imperative:

*...because it can enhance personal empowerment and subsequently improve service delivery. Since cultural safety is best enabled by people of the same culture, respecting Indigenous peoples as experts in their lives is pertinent to effective, culturally safe and appropriate AOD services for Indigenous peoples.*

.....

[1] Southern Aboriginal Corporation, 'Great Southern Noongar Community Response to Substance Abuse', 2016.

[2] WA Primary Health Alliance, 'Great Southern: Needs Assessment 2022-2024', 2022, [Needs-Assessment\\_Country-WA\\_Great-Southern.pdf \(wapha.org.au\)](https://wapha.org.au/Needs-Assessment_Country-WA_Great-Southern.pdf).



*It is imperative to better understand the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples within AOD treatment settings in Australia, whereby lived experiences refer to unique personal perspectives and subjective experiences, choices and options that influence identity.[3]*

When we consider the complex interplay between substance abuse and family and domestic violence in Aboriginal communities, the problematic nature of this lack of investment becomes even clearer. 'Alcohol-related violence, for example, is recognised as a major public health concern and there is "dearth of epidemiological data that link three contributing epidemics: alcohol misuse, violence and trauma".[4] In the years between SAC's 2016 consultation and the present day, for example, rates of reported drug offences, family assaults and breaches of violence restraining orders combined have almost doubled in Albany.[5] In the same period, rates of Aboriginal children in the out-of-home care system in the Great Southern region have continued to grow; at 30 June 2023, over 57% of children in care in the region were Aboriginal.[6]

The impact of AOD abuse on Aboriginal people's psychological wellbeing is also profound; research into co-occurring psychological distress and AOD use among Indigenous Australians using data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey determined that approximately 1 in 25 Aboriginal individuals experienced co-occurring risky alcohol, substance use and psychological distress.[7] Co-occurring conditions were almost more common among those who had been a victim of physical harm in the last 12 months. The research concluded that the provision of holistic support is likely to be beneficial for those who report physical harm in a health or legal setting, which "could occur through conducting screening and referrals for psychological distress and AOD use, in addition to addressing physical harm." [8]

.....  
[3] Heath, Martin and Krakouer, 'Exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians within the context of alcohol and other drugs treatment services: A scoping review', Drug and Alcohol Review, November 2022, 41(7), [Exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous Australians within the context of alcohol and other drugs treatment services: A scoping review - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#).

[4] Ramamoorthi, Jayaraj, Notaras and Thomas, 'Alcohol-Related Violence among the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of the Northern Territory: Prioritizing an Agenda for Prevention', Iranian Journal of Public Health, May 2014, 43(5), [Alcohol-Related Violence among the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders of the Northern Territory: Prioritizing an Agenda for Prevention-Narrative Review Article - PMC \(nih.gov\)](#).

[5] Western Australia Police Force, Crime Statistics, [Crime Statistics | Western Australia Police Force](#).

[6] Department of Communities, Government of Western Australia, 'Child Protection Activity Performance Information 2022-2023', [Child Protection Activity Performance Information 2022-23 \(www.wa.gov.au\)](#).

[7] Hobden, Bryant and Freund, 'Co-occurring psychological distress and alcohol or other drug use among Indigenous Australians: Data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey', April 2024, 58(8), [Co-occurring psychological distress and alcohol or other drug use among Indigenous Australians: Data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey - Breanne Hobden, Jamie Bryant, Robert Davis, Todd Heard, Jenn Rumbel, Jamie Newman, Bron Rose, David Lambkin, Rob Sanson-Fisher, Megan Freund, 2024 \(sagepub.com\)](#).

[8] Hobden, Bryant and Freund, 'Co-occurring psychological distress and alcohol or other drug use among Indigenous Australians: Data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey', April 2024, 58(8), [Co-occurring psychological distress and alcohol or other drug use among Indigenous Australians: Data from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey - Breanne Hobden, Jamie Bryant, Robert Davis, Todd Heard, Jenn Rumbel, Jamie Newman, Bron Rose, David Lambkin, Rob Sanson-Fisher, Megan Freund, 2024 \(sagepub.com\)](#).

## Funding and Policy Environment

In Western Australia, the 2024-25 State Budget will deliver more than a billion dollars to mental health, alcohol and other drug services. This includes over \$32 million for community bed-based AOD services and \$85 million for community treatment AOD services.[9] Despite these investments being made in the context of the WA Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025, which explores the various partnerships through which the state has worked with ACCOs to provide AOD treatment and support services for affected Aboriginal peoples, the Great Southern region remains without a dedicated residential AOD rehabilitation centre, with SAC's portion of the 24-25 AOD service funding totalling \$0. This is despite SAC's ongoing advocacy for a Great Southern Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre, developed and run by SAC in partnership with a clinical provider, to provide therapeutic detox and rehabilitation for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people across the region. This is, in our view, a missed opportunity by the State Government to achieve progress against its obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, to ensure that:

- a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives (Outcome 1);
- b. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong (Outcome 2);  
and
- c. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing (Outcome 14).[10]

At a Federal Government level, the 2024-2025 Federal Budget allocated \$41.6 million over two years to extend funding for 20 existing treatment and prevention services; however, the funding measure is primarily focused in South Australia, where a number of AOD services were facing funding cessation at the end of the 2023-24 financial year.[11]

The ability of current AOD service providers in the Great Southern region of Western Australia, therefore, to achieve the best outcomes for Aboriginal people experiencing AOD abuse, their families and broader communities is limited by the barriers experienced by Aboriginal people in accessing non-Aboriginal controlled rehabilitation and AOD support.

## Next Steps

In the Great Southern region of Western Australia, the absence of a residential AOD rehabilitation facility is a missed opportunity by the State and Federal Governments respectively to invest in prevention and reduction of AOD related health, social and economic harms for Aboriginal people. The severity and complexity of AOD related harms for Aboriginal people across the region requires tailored interventions, treatments and support options, unique to the needs of affected individuals, their families and communities.

.....

[9] Mental Health Commission, Government of Western Australia, 'Budget Breakdown 2024-25', [budget-breakdown-2024-25.pdf \(mhc.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.mhc.wa.gov.au/budget-breakdown-2024-25.pdf).

[10] Government of Western Australia, 'Closing the Gap: Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Western Australia', October 2023, [ctgseptember\\_0.pdf \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/closing-the-gap-implementation-plan-2023-2025-western-australia).

[11] Australian Alcohol and Other Drugs Council, 'Federal Budget 2024-25: Summary Snapshot', [Federal Budget 2024/25 - NADA.](https://www.aadoc.org.au/federal-budget-2024-25-summary-snapshot)

For this reason, and in light of the ongoing impacts of alcohol and drug abuse on Aboriginal people across the Great Southern region, SAC continues to advocate for a funding commitment for construction and operation of Stage 1 of the Great Southern Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Centre (GSDARC).

GSDARC would be developed and run by SAC, in partnership with a clinical service provider. The facility would service both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and would be operated under a recognised therapeutic community model. Enrolments from the Great Southern would receive priority, with candidates from other regions considered in the event of vacancies. Programs would be designed using local cultural connection as part of therapeutic programming, drawing on our understanding of best practice as embedded in local culture.

Stage 1 of the centre is proposed to include:

- Two 11-bed residential blocks (one male and one female);
- A 4-bed detox facility with medical and staff rooms;
- A main building facility with kitchen, dining room, program rooms, group counselling and therapy rooms, staff offices, reception and administration areas, four case worker therapy rooms and service areas; and
- Ancillary rooms and external resident-use areas.

The facility would be located within 30 minutes of the Albany hospital, on land between 500 and 1000 acres in size with areas of native vegetation in combination with arable land to provide opportunities for cultural and healing activities and skill development at later stages of rehabilitation.

Subject to further design and costing, Stage 2 of the project would include construction and operation of a Women's Halfway House on the facility grounds, and a Men's Halfway House within the Albany community. Stage 3 would include an additional 22 beds for drug and alcohol rehabilitation, four additional counselling rooms, on-site family residences, half-size AFL oval and a basketball court.

## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Health or the Mental Health Commission, to:

- a. Inject \$9 million in new funding for capital and operational costs to enable SAC to meet the overwhelming community need for a dedicated alcohol and drug residential rehabilitation facility in the Great Southern region.
- b. Work with SAC to identify suitable Government owned land for purchase, ideally at a low cost or a peppercorn lease.
- c. Ensure any funding provided includes adequate indexation to assist SAC to absorb the impacts of inflation and increasing wage costs. Nationally, the Australian Services Union and Australian Council of Social Services recommend a minimum indexation rate of 4.6% for all funded social and community service contracts, as a matter of urgency.





## Key Ask 2 - Safe Places

### Context

Violence against Aboriginal women is severe in Western Australia:

- Aboriginal women are 45 times more likely to be assaulted and 17.5 times more likely to be murdered by their spouse or partner in regional and remote WA, compared to non-Aboriginal women.[10]
- Of the 154 FDV fatalities in WA between 1 July 2012 and 20 June 2022, 36% (54) were Aboriginal. This is despite Aboriginal people comprising only 3.5% of the total population of WA.[11]
- 44% of mothers identified as victims of family and domestic violence in police data are Aboriginal, and 73% of victims identified in hospital morbidity data are Aboriginal.[12]

Per the Aboriginal Family Legal Service:

*The complex vulnerabilities of Aboriginal victims of family and domestic violence, who regularly experience a diversity of impacts from intergenerational trauma, mental health issues and long histories of alcohol and other substance abuse among a myriad of other factors concurrent to their victimisation, means that they rarely have one service need. And yet, the service system continues to discriminate against and dispossess Aboriginal women, children and their families.[13]*

Across the Great Southern region, rates of family, domestic and sexual violence have continued to rise over the last decade. Rates of reported family assaults, family threatening behaviours and breaches of Violence Restraining Orders, for example:

- more than doubled in Albany in the financial years between 2016-17 and 2022-23;
- more than tripled in Tambellup in the years between 2015-16 and 2023-24;
- more than septupled in Gnowangerup in the years between 2019-20 and 2023-2024;
- more than decupled in Kojonup in the years between 2017-18 and 2023-24; and
- almost doubled in Katanning in the years between 2021-2022 and 2023-24.[14]

[10] Ombudsman WA, 'Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Review', 2017, [https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/Publications/AR1617/HTML/Annual Report 201617 Family Domestic Violence Fatality Review.htm#:~:text=In%20Western%20Australia%2C%20it%20is,all%20victims%20\(page%204\)](https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/Publications/AR1617/HTML/Annual%20Report%20201617%20Family%20Domestic%20Violence%20Fatality%20Review.htm#:~:text=In%20Western%20Australia%2C%20it%20is,all%20victims%20(page%204).).

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 'Women's Health News Communique', 2016, <https://nacchocommunique.com/2016/07/14/naccho-womens-health-news-new-study-finds-aboriginal-mothers-are-17-5-times-more-likely-to-be-murdered/#:~:text=The%20study%2C%20published%20in%20BMC,behind%20a%20child%20under%20five.%20Ombudsman%20Western%20Austra>.

[11] Ombudsman WA, 'Family and Domestic Violence Fatality Review', 2022, <https://www.ombudsman.wa.gov.au/Publications/AR2122/Family-Domestic-Violence-Fatality-Review-2021-22>.

[12] Orr et al., 'A Demographic Profile of Mothers and Their Children Who Are Victims of Family and Domestic Violence: Using Linked Police and Hospital Admissions Data', Journal of Interpersonal Violence, Vol. 37, Issue 1-2, January 2022, [A Demographic Profile of Mothers and Their Children Who Are Victims of Family and Domestic Violence: Using Linked Police and Hospital Admissions Data - Carol Orr, Colleen M. Fisher, Rebecca Glauert, David B. Preen, Melissa O'Donnell, Dip Ed, 2022 \(sagepub.com\)](https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260521101111).

[13] Aboriginal Family Legal Service WA, '2025 Election Statement', 2024.

[14] Western Australia Police Force, 'Crime Statistics', [Crime Statistics | Western Australia Police Force](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/department/police/crime-statistics).



Concurrently, Aboriginal people have continued to be overrepresented among people who are homeless, who are users of specialist homelessness services, and who are seeking assistance with housing. Per the Specialist Homelessness Services Annual Report 2022-23:

*Indigenous people make up around 3.2% of the Australian population, yet they made up around 20% of the estimated number of people experiencing homelessness on Census night in 2021 and over one-quarter or 29% of the clients (an estimated 74,700) assisted by specialist homelessness services in 2022-23.[15]*

Of those Indigenous people accessing specialist homelessness services, 39% reported experiencing family and domestic violence. The displacement of Aboriginal women from their homes due to violence is a pervasive health and welfare issue in the Great Southern, where the only crisis accommodation service run by Anglicare WA has reportedly been overwhelmed by demand for short-term accommodation options. In December 2021, the service reported that they had seen a 61% rise in demand for services over the previous 18 months, and a 50% increase in requests for crisis accommodation.[16]

## Funding and Policy Environment

In Western Australia, the 2024-25 State Budget will deliver more than a billion dollars for housing and homelessness, including funding for social and affordable housing, and for homelessness services. [17] Despite this investment being made in part in the policy context of the All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10 Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030, SAC, as a preferred housing provider of the Department of Communities will receive none of this money. That is because eligibility for funding is conditional on registration as a tiered community housing provider, a comprehensive and timely process that SAC is currently in the middle of. The administration of the homelessness and housing sector, therefore, leaves providers like SAC, which regardless of registration status provide uniquely effective housing solutions for Aboriginal people, isolated with limited internal capacity to grow and diversify service provision. This is ultimately inconsistent with the State's commitments under All Paths Lead to a Home, which specifically includes actions to make sure Aboriginal people have safe, secure and stable housing that is culturally appropriate; to ensuring that Aboriginal communities and organisations design and deliver services primarily affecting Aboriginal people; and to ensuring social housing policies and practices are flexible and culturally responsive.[18] It is further inconsistent with the State's commitments within the WA Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2023-2025, which

[15] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Australian Government, 'Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23', February 2024, [Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23, Indigenous clients - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](https://www.aihw.gov.au/publications-specialist-homelessness-services-annual-report-2022-23).

[16] Asha Couch, Tom Edwards, ABC Great Southern, 'Albany Women's Centre sees huge spike in demand as housing crisis continues', December 2021, [Albany Women's Centre sees huge spike in demand as housing crisis continues - ABC News](https://www.abc.net.au/greatsouthern/news/local/albany-womens-centre-sees-huge-spike-in-demand-as-housing-crisis-continues/10088888).

[17] Government of Western Australia, 'Western Australia State Budget 2024-25: Investing in housing and homelessness initiatives', 2024, [2024-25 Western Australia State Budget | Investing in housing and homelessness initiatives \(ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/western-australia-state-budget-2024-25-investing-in-housing-and-homelessness-initiatives).

[18] Department of Communities, Government of Western Australia, 'All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030', [All Paths Lead to a Home: Western Australia's 10-Year Strategy on Homelessness 2020-2030 \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/all-paths-lead-to-a-home-western-australia-s-10-year-strategy-on-homelessness-2020-2030).



identifies strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled Housing Sector as a key action to achieve progress against Outcome 9 of the National Agreement (Aboriginal people secure appropriate affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need). [19]

At a Federal level, the Government announced a \$1 billion spend on crisis and transitional accommodation for women and children fleeing family violence and for youth through the National Housing Infrastructure Facility (NHIF). Eligibility for housing provided through the NHIF via Housing Australia includes registration as a community housing provider, similar to the state model.

## Next Steps

SAC has received \$3.8 million in construction funding from the Department of Social Services to build Stage 1 of a new crisis accommodation service for women and children experiencing family and domestic violence in the Great Southern and surrounding regions. The **Stage 1** build will include:

- Six self-contained, two-bedroom units across three duplexes, and
- One staff unit adaptable for client use.

SAC is seeking an additional funding commitment for construction of **Stage 2** of a new crisis accommodation service. Stage 2 of the facility will include:

- 6 units for single women
- External landscaped play spaces and reflective spaces, and
- Parking for staff, residents and visitors.

The proposed operational model will provide safe accommodation and outreach support to women and children managing and surviving family and domestic violence that may also be at risk of homelessness. This will be achieved through strengths based, trauma informed and culturally appropriate practices, whilst honouring resilience and acknowledging perpetrator accountability.

Stage 2 represents an opportunity to significantly reduce lead in time, as concept design has already occurred for stage 2 and stage 1 will be under construction soon. With all in place, construction of stage 2 would start soon after announcement of funding.

## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Communities (Housing Authority) to:

- a. Inject \$6.8 million in new funding for capital and operational costs to enable SAC to progress Stage 2 of the crisis accommodation facility and address the overwhelming community need for increased access to crisis accommodation services, in particular for victims of family and domestic violence.

.....

[19] Government of Western Australia, 'Closing the Gap: Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Western Australia', October 2023, [ctgseptember\\_0.pdf \(www.wa.gov.au\)](#).







## Key Ask 3 - FVPLS Program

### Context

For over a decade, the Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS) in the Great Southern, South West and Wheatbelt regions of WA has operated under the auspice of SAC, funded by the Federal Government via the National Indigenous Australians Agency (formerly Attorney General's Department and Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet). The FVPLS unit exists to provide culturally safe, trauma informed and client centric legal assistance and social support services within an integrated service delivery model to Aboriginal people experiencing or at risk of family, domestic and sexual violence. Since its inception, the FVPLS has supported over thousands of clients across four key priority areas of law: care and protection, family law, criminal injuries compensation and family violence restraining orders (FVRO). Most clients who access the FVPLS present at a point of crisis, with a history of long-term family violence which results in, amongst other things, compromised mental health. Per the Attorney General's Department National Legal Assistance Data Standards Manual, the FVPLS provides services for individuals and services for the community.[20]

In 2019, a Charles Darwin University evaluation of all the FVPLS units across Australia, including SAC, reported that FVPLS service strategies and activities actively contribute to reducing costs to the legal, court and child protection systems by:

- Lowering rates of breaches of Family Violence Restraining Orders with resulting reduced consequences for victims and perpetrators;
- Supporting victims to negotiate parenting plans and property settlement out of court settlements in family law matters;
- Supporting extended family members to apply to care for children outside of the court system;
- Increasing the likelihood of perpetrators pleading guilty through support to the victim to be actively engaged in the legal case against the perpetrator and to appear in court;
- Reducing rates of drop-out from legal processes by victims; and
- Supporting more successful prosecutions and more appropriate sentences.[21]

And yet, in the 11 years since the FVPLS commenced service delivery and despite catapulting rates of family and domestic violence against Aboriginal women, the program has been subject to numerous funding cuts and administrative changes that have negatively impacted the service delivery capacity of the unit.

Across Western Australia, research commissioned by the Department of Justice into legal needs determined that Aboriginal people continue to be disproportionately impacted by key risk factors which contribute to higher levels of need for legal assistance services.

.....

[20] Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government, 'National Legal Assistance Data Standards Manual', July 2021, [National Legal Assistance Data Standards Manual | Attorney-General's Department \(ag.gov.au\)](https://www.nlaa.gov.au/resource-centre/family-violence-prevention-legal-services-national-evaluation-report).

[21] Charles Darwin University - Northern Institute, 'Family Violence Prevention Legal Services: Evaluation Report', 2019, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/family-violence-prevention-legal-services-national-evaluation-report>.



The 2022 WA Legal Needs Report, for example, concluded on the topic of unmet legal need, which it refers to as the 'statistical inference of need for legal assistance which is not serviced according to observable provider data', that for every person:

- With a potential need of legal assistance in civil law matters, there were approximately 0.43 weighted services delivered;
- With a potential need of legal assistance in child protection matters, there were approximately 0.005 weighted services delivered;
- With a potential need of legal assistance in restraining order matters, there were approximately 0.61 weighted services delivered; and
- With a potential need of legal assistance in family law matters, there were approximately 0.24 weighted services delivered.[22]

The report also noted a higher service-to-need ratio in the Perth Metropolitan and Peel regions compared to regional Western Australia.

## Funding and Policy Environment

At a Federal level, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032 includes access to culturally safe and appropriate legal assistance as a key outcome under its Justice and Equitable outcomes reform area, speaking to the importance of investment in early and ongoing access to culturally safe, Aboriginal controlled legal assistance at every stage of the justice process for Aboriginal victims of family and domestic violence.[23]

While we welcomed the Federal Government's commitment of \$8.6 million to the FVPLS sector in the 2024-25 Budget to support pay parity across the sector, the investment pales in comparison to the real dollars required to adequately ensure the sustainability of best practice, high quality legal services under the FVPLS program. As the primary funding body of the FVPLS program, the National Indigenous Australians Agency has continued funding the program under a model that is not based on legal need or the actual cost of providing services, unlike other legal assistance providers. The Productivity Commission criticised this model in their review of access to justice arrangements and recommended that Commonwealth funding for FVPLS providers should be "allocated according to models that reflect the relative costs of service provision and indicators of need given their priority clients and areas of law." [24] We note that the FVPLS units may transition to funding arrangements under the Attorney General's Department, via the Department of Justice, from 2025.

In the lead up to the 2024-25 Federal Budget, the FVPLS units across the country advocated for an additional \$60 million per annum for core funding, with a minimum term of 5-year contracts, to be shared across all FVPLS units. Instead, the Federal Budget largely

[22] ACIL Allen report to Government of Western Australia, Department of Justice, 'Assessment of the Current Legal Needs in Western Australia: Final Report', 2022, <https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2022-12/WA-Legal-Needs-Summary-Report.pdf>.

[23] Department of Social Services, Australian Government, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025', August 2023, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025](https://www.dss.gov.au/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1000000/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Action-Plan-2023-2025.pdf) | Department of Social Services, Australian Government (dss.gov.au).

[24] Productivity Commission, 'Access to Justice Arrangements: Productivity Commission Inquiry Report', 2014, [Inquiry Report - Access to Justice Arrangements - Productivity Commission](https://www.pc.gov.au/research/other/inquiries/2014/access-to-justice) (pc.gov.au).

continued the chronic underfunding of the FVPLS units, and in doing so continued to jeopardise the country's chances to achieve meaningful success under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

At a State level, the Department of Justice distributed more than \$132 million to the State's legal assistance sector in 2023-2024, including approximately \$61.6 million under the National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020-2025, with \$17 million for the Aboriginal Legal Service, \$31.5 million for Legal Aid WA, and \$14.97 million for Community Legal Centres. The State also provided \$4.665 million in 23-24 to the community legal sector as part of the State Baseline Funding Boost to maintain the sector's capacity to respond to the demand for its services. SAC's portion of the \$132 million totalled \$180,000.

## Next Steps

### 1. Service expansion into the Peel region

As a priority, SAC is seeking to extend service provision into the Peel region, which FVPLS program data indicates that 12.9% of the service's clients have at some point been located in over the last 2 years. The FVPLS is currently only funded to service the Great Southern, South West and Wheatbelt, but the transient nature of Aboriginal people means that clients regularly travel and relocate to Peel, which borders the Wheatbelt and South West. The specific demand for FVPLS service delivery in Peel is evident in rates of Sexual Offences, Family Assaults, Family Threatening Behaviours and Breaches of Violence Restraining Orders in the region, which almost doubled in Mandurah alone in the financial years between 2015-16 and 2023-24.[25]

The region is currently only serviced through an outreach model by the Perth Metro based FVPLS unit, and otherwise services available are not Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations nor specialists in the provision of legal assistance in family law, care and protection, criminal injuries and family violence restraining order matters to Aboriginal victims of family and domestic violence. It is, in our view, insufficient to service the entire Peel region, which covers 6,648 square kilometres and which is projected to have a population of 444,000 by 2050, through an outreach model.[26] The SAC FVPLS is in a unique position to leverage its existing service delivery expertise across the region, its networks and relationships with clients, community services and stakeholders, to permanently expand service delivery to Peel, with an office in Mandurah.

### 2. Continuity of legal service delivery in Bunbury

In May 2020, the Commonwealth Government allocated \$6.325 million for legal services across the legal assistance sector in WA, in recognition of the significant social and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated restrictions.

In September 2021, the State Government announced an additional \$8 million in funding the sector to respond to increased demand for services arising from the impact of the pandemic.

.....

[25] Western Australia Police Force, 'Crime Statistics', [Crime Statistics](#) | [Western Australia Police Force](#).

[26] Peel Development Commission, Government of Western Australia, 'Peel Development Commission: Our Region', [Our Peel Region - Peel Development Commission](#).

In May 2022, the State Government announced that it would provide \$4.5 million to maintain funding and service delivery in the sector at existing levels. This funding ceased on 30 June 2023, at which point the Department of Justice provided SAC with \$180,000 to transition out of providing the services delivered with the State Community Legal Assistance Sector Funding Boost 2022-23. This funding will cease on 30 June 2025, at which point SAC will be left to cover the costs of the salaries of two solicitors employed in Bunbury under the previous transitional funding through other means.

SAC has been able to find and use spare funding to continue the employment of those staff members and ensure the continuity of culturally safe service delivery to our vulnerable cohort of clients in Bunbury and surrounding areas in the short term; however, we are at serious risk of being unable to continue their employment beyond the end of the financial year. This would mean that the FVPLS unit would be down to 3 lawyers from 5 and would see the loss of an Indigenous lawyer. Narrogin legal files are also managed by Bunbury, so reduction of capacity in Bunbury solicitors would also reduce capacity in Narrogin. This would seriously impact our service delivery capacity, noting that the Bunbury office had the highest caseload of clients in the January - June 2024 reporting period (71). The Narrogin office also had 34 clients in the reporting period. The loss of an Indigenous lawyer would also have a tangible, negative impact on our organisational capability to provide best practice supports for our clients.

SAC is seeking a commitment to reinstate funding for the two solicitor roles in Bunbury, to ensure the ongoing availability of best practice, culturally safe and trauma informed legal assistance to Aboriginal people experiencing and/or at risk of family, domestic and sexual violence.

### **3. Additional staffing required**

SAC is additionally seeking to address increased demand for service delivery through:

- The introduction of at least 1.0 FTE Social Worker in both the Katanning and Narrogin offices (2.0 FTE total);
- 1.0 FTE Financial Counsellor to work across the entire FVPLS program; and
- 1.0 FTE Senior Counsellor to work across the entire FVPLS program.

#### Social Workers

The Katanning and Narrogin offices are currently only staffed by one Community Support Officer each, with legal services provided on outreach from the Albany and Bunbury offices. In the January-June 2024 reporting period, FVPLS clients were supported from each respective SAC office as follows:

- 71 Bunbury
- 58 Albany
- 55 Katanning
- 34 Narrogin

The client caseloads in Katanning and Narrogin impose significant pressure on the single staff members in those respective offices, who are the only available ongoing source of face-to-face contact for clients with SAC. Staff are regularly required to provide support to clients beyond the scope of the funding of their role, including social work and counselling



supports, and do so in the context of small towns with decades long histories of family feuding. We, therefore, have additional concerns related to the safety of our staff members when they are alone in their respective offices. The introduction of at least 1.0 FTE Social Worker in both the Katanning and Narrogin offices would reduce risk of staff burnout across those offices, ensure staff are appropriately remunerated for their role and their expertise, increase SAC's capacity to support victims of family and domestic violence in those communities, and ensure the holistic needs of clients are met beyond the demands of their legal matters.

#### Financial Counsellor

In 2019, a consortium of Western Australian organisations partnered under the Economic Empowerment Project to provide industry feedback on the development of a Financial First Aid tool and a Train the Train Program called Me, Myself and Money. The consortium agreed that:

*On an individual level, domestic and family violence creates complex economic issues for women and their children and disrupts their lives over the short and long term.*

*Regardless of their prior economic circumstances, many women experience financial issues or poverty as a result of domestic violence hampering their recovery and capacity to regain control over their lives.[27]*

In a national policy context, the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025[28] notes that financial abuse often co-occurs with other forms of violence and allows perpetrators to gain control and power over victims. Research by the Gendered Violence Research Network suggests that when Aboriginal people specifically experience financial abuse in the context of family and domestic violence, they tend to experience greater hardship and disadvantage than non-Aboriginal people following that abuse:

*Some Indigenous women may experience further barriers to leaving an abusive partner, such as the pressure to not leave their partners or pursue financial related matters with them in situations where everyone in the community knows one another, as well as lack of privacy in the community.[29]*

In SAC's experience, financial dependence is weaponised against clients by their perpetrators. Clients become at increased risk of financial abuse upon receipt of financial payouts from Criminal Injuries and Redress compensation schemes. SAC currently refers clients externally to non-Aboriginal controlled financial counselling organisations for financial counselling purposes, due to not having an in-house financial counsellor. In a family and domestic violence context, the lack of culturally safe service delivery options for Aboriginal victims only further entrenches disadvantage and heightens their risk of ongoing victimisation. Financial Counselling Australia, for example, suggests that financial counsellors in mainstream organisations struggle to support victims of family and domestic

.....

[27] Economic Empowerment for Women, 'Economic Empowerment Project for Women', October 2019, <https://sfv.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Economic-Empowerment-Project-for-Women-B-Jowle.pdf>.

[28] Department of Social Services, Australian Government, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025', August 2023, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au/abstisap).

[29] Gendered Violence Research Network, 'Understanding Economic and Financial Abuse in First Nations Communities', March 2021, <https://www.commbank.com.au/content/dam/commbank-assets/support/2021-03/unsu-report2-first-nations.pdf>.

violence due to their ability to provide only short-term fixes that do not comprehensively address client needs, let alone provide cultural safety for Aboriginal people.[30]

SAC continues to strongly advocate for funding to introduce a financial counselling stream into the FVPLS program, which would enable SAC to increase our capacity to provide integrated family violence services for victims by minimising the need for referral to external, mainstream agencies for financial counselling. This would minimise the risk of re-traumatisation of victims by requiring them to visit and tell their story to an entirely new service and would ensure that financial counselling services provided would be within the SAC cultural framework.

#### Senior Counsellor

FVPLS clients experience a complexity of social issues that ultimately precede and continue post the escalation of a legal issue. Clients regularly present with serious mental health issues, alcohol and drug abuse issues, experiencing homelessness and having had their children removed. It is critical that clients can access culturally safe, community-based counselling/healing services that apply a trauma informed approach, to positively impact their social and emotional wellbeing. In the January-June 2024 reporting period, SAC Community Support Officers provided 232 counselling services to 42 clients, in addition to 890 client support services, achieving 187% of the funding target. The extreme stress imposed on Community Support Officers by the realistic demands of service delivery, which includes the requirement to provide client support, counselling and community engagement services, is a risk to the sustainability of the program and the longevity of their employment.

SAC is seeking an additional financial investment to employ a Senior Counsellor with extensive expertise and appropriate qualifications to provide oversight of and deliver counselling services direct to clients. The role would work across all SAC offices serviced under the FVPLS program, and would collaborate with Community Support Officers and Social Workers to ensure the successful integration of non-legal supports for clients, concurrent to legal assistance.

### **Recommendation**

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Justice, to:

- a. Commit to increased, 5-year funding for the three FVPLS units across the state, commensurate with Legal Aid funding at a minimum. Funding allocations must be made immediately and funding amounts included across the forward estimates to enable the FVPLS units to keep staff, continue to deliver essential services and plan and innovate for the future.

.....

[30] Financial Counselling Australia, 'Assisting clients affected by family violence: The results of a survey of financial counsellors and financial capability workers', October 2016, <https://www.financialcounsellingaustralia.org.au/fca-content/uploads/2019/10/Family-Violence-Survey-Results-v2.pdf>.

- b. Commit to injecting an additional \$4 million in annual funding, with a commitment to making this recurrent funding over the next 5 years via the forward estimates, to meet community need and ensure the ongoing sustainability of service delivery to Aboriginal victims of FDV.

This would include:

- \$439,010 for the establishment and operation of a Peel office;
  - \$315,735 for the continuation of 2.0 FTE Solicitor Salaries in Bunbury, previously funded by the Department of Justice;
  - \$236,801 for the introduction of 2.0 FTE Social Worker roles for the Narrogin and Katanning offices;
  - \$118,401 for the introduction of a Financial Counsellor role; and
  - \$131,556 for the introduction of a Senior Counsellor role.
- c. Ensure any funding provided includes adequate indexation (at least 4.6%) to assist the FVPLS units to absorb the impacts of inflation and increasing wage costs.
- Nationally, the Australian Services Union and Australian Council of Social Services recommend a minimum 4.6% indexation rate for all funded social and community service contracts, including legal assistance services, as a matter of urgency.
- d. Ensure any funding provided is flexible and adaptable to be adjusted in the forward budget years based on the projected costs of delivering services informed by the most recent financial year's actual results.
- Funding agreements must factor in cost and demand pressures and apply drivers such as the Consumer Pricing Index, Wages Pricing Index and projected population growth.
- e. Clearly communicate their response to the NLAP review report's recommendations and work closely with the FVPLS units to determine processes and timelines for those recommendations to be implemented in the new Access to Justice Partnership agreement (A2JP).
- In particular, the FVPLS units need clarity that:
    - a. If they are to transition to funding arrangements under the new A2JP, funding will be quarantined, and detail on how that quarantine will work;
    - b. They will have adequate funding to develop their organisations and people to enhance the scope, scale, quality and cultural appropriateness of services; and
    - c. They will be involved in decision making involving the provision of legal assistance services to Aboriginal people.
- f. Commit to a clear and transparent process to finalise the A2JP by December 2024.
- The FVPLS units must have as much time as possible to prepare and negotiate with governments ahead of the proposed transition of the FVPLS units to funding arrangements under the A2JP.





## Key Ask 4 - Health Promotion Program

### Context

Tobacco smoking is the most preventable cause of ill health and early death among Aboriginal people, and smoking is responsible for around one in five deaths among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohort.[31] The Great Southern region has been impacted by tobacco smoking for decades; in the years between 2009-10 and 2018-19, the number and annual cost of tobacco-attributable hospitalisations across the Great Southern region continued to rise, totalling 393 per 100,000 population and \$3,316,874 in 2018-19.[32] In 2021, 13.2% of the total population of the region reportedly smoked tobacco, compared with 11.1% of the national population.[33] In 2022, the WA Primary Health Alliance's Need Assessment of the Great Southern for the 2022-24 period reported that indicators of maternal and early childhood health outcomes showed that there were high rates of smoking during pregnancy for Aboriginal mothers in Albany (39%) and Kojonup - Gnowangerup (45%).[34]

To combat the physical health, emotional and financial impacts of tobacco smoking amongst Aboriginal people across the Great Southern region, SAC entered into a Service Agreement with the WA Country Health Service in 2021 to deliver Gnumaries Hurt: a health promotion program designed to deliver education and information to Noongars to raise awareness of the health risks associated with tobacco consumption. SAC employs 1.0 FTE health promotion officer under the program to deliver activities designed to:

- Provide brief intervention to clients on cessation support, treatment services and referral pathways;
- Deliver local health promotion and education awareness campaigns on harms of smoking and second hand smoking;
- Distribute resources and material to the public that promote quitting smoking; and
- Collaborate with other services to increase knowledge throughout the Great Southern.

The long term aims of the program are to:

- Reduce prevalence of tobacco smoking amongst Aboriginal people across the Great Southern;
- Reduce rates of potential avoidable mortality; and
- Reduce rates of potential preventable hospitalisations.

In the January-June 2024 reporting period alone, the program supported almost 150 clients. 100% of those clients surveyed after their engagement indicated that they had increased knowledge and awareness of the harms of smoking and subsequent exposure to second hand smoke, and 100% of clients who identified as smokers before participation in the program noted their intention to stop smoking after the program.

.....

[31] Department of Health, Australian Government, 'Tackling Indigenous Smoking - Grant Guidelines', August 2015, [Tackling Indigenous Smoking grant activity guidelines \(health.gov.au\)](https://www.health.gov.au/tackling-indigenous-smoking-grant-activity-guidelines).

[32] Department of Health, Government of Western Australia, 'Methodology for developing tobacco smoking aetiological fractions for Western Australia', 2021, [Methodology for developing tobacco smoking aetiological fractions for Western Australia \(health.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.health.wa.gov.au/methodology-for-developing-tobacco-smoking-aetiological-fractions-for-western-australia).

[33] Shannon Smith, 'Push for more help to quit smoking in Great Southern', Albany Advertiser, May 2021, [Push for more help to quit smoking in Great Southern | The Albany Advertiser](https://www.albanyadvertiser.com.au/news/push-for-more-help-to-quit-smoking-in-great-southern).

[34] WA Primary Health Alliance, 'Great Southern: Needs Assessment 2022-2024', 2022, [Needs-Assessment Country-WA Great-Southern.pdf \(wapha.org.au\)](https://www.wapha.org.au/needs-assessment-country-wa-great-southern.pdf).

## Funding and Policy Environment

The demand for provision of health services to Aboriginal people by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations is a core component of the National Tobacco Strategy 2023–2030, which recognises that Aboriginal Organisations should have responsibility for delivery of:

*Best practice and culturally safe education, intervention, screening and tobacco and nicotine cessation as part of all routine health service delivery and social and community service provision to First Nations clients.[35]*

*Culturally appropriate nicotine cessation support should be provided... with referrals to local Aboriginal community controlled health services and supports to assist in maintaining smoke free behaviours."*

In 2023–24, the Federal Budget allocated \$737 million to fund several measures to protect Australians against harm caused by tobacco and vaping products, including \$141 million to extend the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program. SAC did not receive any of this funding, as its Service Agreement for the provision of the Gnumaries Hurt program is with the State Government via the WA Country Health Service.

In 2024–25, the WA State Budget allocated millions of dollars into healthcare in regional WA; however, large sums of additional funding for healthcare were allocated only to cover the cost of blowouts of works already planned on major hospital redevelopments. Dedicated investments into health and mental health for Aboriginal people within that same budget further focused on social and emotional wellbeing, renal dialysis, suicide prevention and eye services, and notwithstanding the significant demand for those programs, there was a notable absence of funding for measures to protect Aboriginal Australians against the harm caused by tobacco and vaping products. Once again, this represents a failure by the State Government to make tangible in roads on its obligation to achieve progress against Outcome 1 and its subsequent target of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

*Outcome 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives.*

*National target: Close the Gap in life expectancy within a generation, by 2031.[36]*

## Next Steps

SAC has been challenged by the constraints of its current funding for the provision of the Gnumaries Hurt program, which limits service delivery to 1.0 FTE Health Promotion Officer role. Beyond the practical impacts of the funding constraints on service delivery capacity, the model of service delivery is inconsistent with best practices in SAC's Cultural Capability Model, which requires the organisation to remove barriers to service delivery and engagement for clients in a culturally safe way. Research into cultural barriers and inequitable healthcare access for Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islander people

[35] Department of Health and Aged Care 2023, Australian Government, 'National Tobacco Strategy 2023–2030', [National Tobacco Strategy 2023–2030 \(health.gov.au\)](https://www.health.gov.au/national-tobacco-strategy-2023-2030).

[36] Government of Western Australia, 'Closing the Gap: Implementation Plan 2023–2025 Western Australia', October 2023, [ctgseptember\\_0.pdf \(www.wa.gov.au\)](https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/closing-the-gap-implementation-plan-2023-2025-western-australia).



suggests that gender is a cultural barrier in the health system, which can seriously impact the ability of service providers to ensure the accessibility of healthcare and health promotion programs.[37] In practice, the provision of funding for 1.0 FTE only means that there is not enough money available to employ 1 male staff member and 1 female staff member to deliver the program; this reflects a lack of consideration by the funding body of the separate cultural considerations required in service and program delivery to and for Aboriginal men and women. This subsequently negatively impacts the accessibility of the program for the opposite gender cohort of the staff member employed to deliver the program.

Further, SAC's Service Agreement for the provision of the Gnumaries Hurt program is due to end on 30 September 2026.

## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Country Health Service, to:

- a. Enter a new 5-year agreement with SAC for the purpose of delivering the Gnumaries Hurt program;
- b. Increase annual funding within that agreement to \$276,268 (totalling \$1.38 million over a 5-year period) to cover the costs of employing 2.0 FTE Health Promotion Officers to deliver the program, consistent with cultural best practices; and
- c. Ensure any funding provided is flexible and adaptable to be adjusted in the forward budget years based on the projected costs of delivering services, informed by the most recent financial year's actual results.

.....

[37] Jie-Li li, 'Cultural barriers lead to inequitable healthcare access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians', *Chinese Nursing Research*, Vol. 4, Issue 4, December 2017, [Cultural barriers lead to inequitable healthcare access for aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders - ScienceDirect](#).





## Key Ask 5 - Suicide Prevention

### Context

In 2021, SAC participated in a comprehensive consultation process to inform the Great Southern Regional Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan, which sought to provide a roadmap to implement and evaluate evidence-informed suicide prevention activities across the whole of the region. The Plan delivered on priority action 11.1 of the Western Australian Suicide Prevention Framework 2021-2025, which recommended the development of a WA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy prioritising culturally secure approaches to social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention, with dedicated regional streams. This activity was timely, noting that WA had the highest age-standardised rate of suicide among Aboriginal people between 2014 and 2018 (37.9 deaths per 100,000 people). This was considerably higher than the national average for Aboriginal people over the same period (23.7 deaths per 100,000).

Per the National Rural Health Alliance:

Every two days, at least one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander suicide takes place. This rate has increased in recent years. The situation is so severe that suicide is the fifth leading cause of death for Indigenous people, and the second leading cause for Indigenous men. By contrast, it is the thirteenth leading cause of death in the whole Australian population. The rate of self-harm-related hospitalisation among Indigenous people is also devastating – in 2018-19 it was 3.1 times the rate of the non-Indigenous population.[38]

In the Statistical Area of Albany (refer to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare's SA3 Statistical Areas), there were 14.6 deaths per 100,000 people over the 2018-2022 period, totalling 46 deaths.[39]

To inform the development of the Great Southern Regional Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan over 180 members of the local community were consulted, who collectively identified 9 key priority outcomes across three major themes:

#### 1. Prevention:

- Increase literacy surrounding mental health and wellbeing and suicide prevention.
- Decrease stigma associated with mental health issues and suicide.
- Increase ability to seek help for oneself or for someone else.
- Increase coping skills and ability to manage difficult life experiences.

#### 2. Support/Aftercare:

- Improve care and support for individuals in crisis.
- Improve care and support for those assisting individuals in crisis.
- Improve functioning following crisis.
- Improve response to suicidal behaviours.

#### 3. Postvention:

- Improve care and support for those affected by a suicide.[40]

[38] National Rural Health Alliance, 'Suicide in Rural and Remote Australia', July 2021, [nrlha-rural-suicide-factsheet-july2021.pdf](https://nrlha-rural-suicide-factsheet-july2021.pdf) ([ruralhealth.org.au](https://ruralhealth.org.au)).

[39] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Deaths by suicide, Australia', [Deaths by suicide, by local areas 2023](https://www.aihw.gov.au/deaths-by-suicide-by-local-areas-2023) ([aihw.gov.au](https://www.aihw.gov.au)).

[40] Jourdeine Consultancy, 'Great Southern: Regional Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan', 2021.



Subsequent to the development of the Plan, SAC received funding from the Mental Health Commission to employ 1.0 FTE Aboriginal Community Liaison Officer who is responsible for building relationships with the community, sharing information about suicide and raising awareness about the pathways for assistance. The Suicide Prevention Promotion Program creates a culturally safe environment for participants to address grief and loss, tell their stories, identify their feelings and seek to strengthen their cultural and spiritual identities.

Notwithstanding the significant positive impact of the existing Program, we have observed a serious gap in service delivery for case management services for people:

- a. Who are showing early signs of suicidal behaviour, experiencing suicidal crisis and/or who have recently been suicidal; and
- b. Dealing with grief and loss from suicide.

The funding for the existing program does not permit the provision of case management services, which puts significant pressure on the Community Liaison Officer when they are asked to provide those functions by community members. This has resulted in high staff turnover in the role; we have had 3 staff members since the commencement of funding in 2021, and the role is presently unfilled while we engage in another recruitment process.

The limited ability of the Officers to subsequently refer program participants to Aboriginal Community Controlled primary health care services with dedicated case management programs suitable to their needs, due to both the overwhelming demand for existing services and the absence of those services on a full-time basis in the Great Southern region, is a significant concern for the organisation, particularly when staff encounter clients who are high-risk and experiencing great suffering. This is further complicated when we consider the complex links between the experience of grief, loss, displacement and depression with perpetration of family and domestic violence.[41]

## Funding and Policy Environment

SAC's agreement for the provision of the Suicide Prevention Promotion Program was due to expire on 30 June 2024 however it has been extended by the Mental Health Commission for an additional term of two years, with a new expiry date of 30 June 2026. This comprises part of the State Government's \$260 million investment in mental health and alcohol and other drug services in the 2024-25 budget, including further investment in suicide prevention initiatives. This also comprises a key part of the State Government's progress against Outcome 14 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

*Outcome 14: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.*

*National target: Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.[42]*

[41] Victorian Government, 'MARAM Practice Guides: Foundation Knowledge Guide - Presentations of family violence in different relationships and communities', [Presentations of family violence in different relationships and communities](https://www.vic.gov.au) | [vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au) ([www.vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au)).

[42] Government of Western Australia, 'Closing the Gap: Implementation Plan 2023-2025 Western Australia', October 2023, [ctgseptember\\_0.pdf](https://www.wa.gov.au) ([www.wa.gov.au](https://www.wa.gov.au)).

At a national level, the Federal Government recognised the demand for wrap around, case management services for people with complex mental health needs in the 2024-25 Budget, allocating \$71.7 million over four years to primary health care services to commission the services of social workers, peer workers, counsellors and mental health nurses to provide ongoing wraparound care and coordination.[43] While we strongly support this investment in primary health care services it fails to address the reality of service delivery in regional and remote locations and for Aboriginal communities, which as a best practice prioritises wrap around service delivery for clients within the one organisation where possible in order to minimise the risk of client re-traumatisation from having to tell and re-tell their story.

## Next Steps

In light of the significant community demand for increased accessibility of culturally secure social and emotional wellbeing and client centric case management services for Aboriginal people experiencing suicidal ideations and/or grief and loss from suicide, SAC is seeking a funding commitment to deliver case management services to clients concurrent to its suicide prevention promotion activities.

SAC would employ 2.0 FTE Case Managers (1x male and 1x female) who would:

- Provide appropriate support to reduce the risk of an attempt or repeat attempt of suicide by drawing on links with hospital and health services;
- Provide appropriate support to lower the severity and duration of a suicidal crisis and/or attempt;
- Increase mental health literacy and teach skills to assess and manage crisis for at-risk individuals; and
- Assist people who are bereaved or affected to recover from trauma, major stressors, grief and loss.

In doing so, the proposed introduction of case management services would address the priority themes and actions identified in the Great Southern Regional Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan.[44]

SAC is additionally seeking a commitment to the expansion of the current Suicide Prevention Promotion Program beyond the 30 June 2026 date, aligned to the funding request to enable the provision of case management services.

[43] Mental Health Australia, 'Federal Budget Overview', May 2024, [mha federal budget overview 2024-2025.pdf](https://mhaustralia.org/federal-budget-overview-2024-2025.pdf) ([mhaustralia.org](https://mhaustralia.org)).

[44] Jouredine Consultancy, 'Great Southern: Regional Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Plan', 2021.

## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Mental Health Commission, to:

- a. Inject \$236,801 in new annual funding (totalling \$1.18 million over a five-year period) for SAC to employ 2.0 FTE Case Managers to deliver case management services to at-risk cohorts of clients;
- b. Extend the Suicide Prevention Promotion Program currently funded until 30 June 2026 in line with the 5-year funding period for the case management services; and
- c. Ensure any funding provided is flexible and adaptable to be adjusted in the forward budget years based on the projected costs of delivering services, informed by the most recent financial year's actual results.









## Key Ask 6 - Men's Program

### Context

In 2022 SAC received one-off grant funding from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to deliver Moorditj Men's Program; a pilot program to support and empower Noongar men in the South West of WA. The program was delivered across the Noongar Wagyl Kapi and Southern region, designed to build the social and emotional health and wellbeing of Noongar men by:

- Providing an opportunity for diversionary activities, skills acquisition and the achievement of productive outcomes including future training and employment;
- Providing opportunities for health promotion and illness prevention;
- Addressing risk of suicide and mental health issues through connection strategies aimed to achieve increased sense of belonging and resilience;
- Addressing the misuse of alcohol and other substances;
- Promotion safety factors within the home and community, development a community free from the fear and acts of violence; and
- Increasing levels of support for victims of violence.

SAC entered a partnership with Aboriginal Koort Kaarl Service Inc. to facilitate the pilot program, which successfully saw the employment of 1.0 FTE Men's Support Worker based in Katanning. In the October-November 2023 period alone, the Support Worker engaged with over 60 Aboriginal men through yarning sessions and individual consultations. The Support Worker identified a suite of challenges experienced by local men, including homelessness, physical and mental health, alcohol and drug abuse, relationship problems, lack of employment and training opportunities, lack of support services specifically for men, poor mental health, no transport and boredom. Overwhelmingly, the pilot program identified community need for more programs and supports specifically for men, which SAC is now not in a position to service given that the project funding was time-limited.

### Funding and Policy Environment

In a family and domestic violence context, the WA Department of Communities' Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy sets out a cross-government initiative for addressing family violence impacting Aboriginal women, children, families and communities. Focus Area 2 of that Strategy - Recognise and Support Men and Boys - indicates the appetite from the State Government for targeted programs designed to support men, boys and fathers to build strong communities and safe families.[45]

In a health context, the Department of Health's Western Australian Men's Health and Wellbeing Policy provides a roadmap for healthier Western Australian men and boys;[46] the Policy highlights Aboriginal men as a priority male population with a higher risk of men's health and wellbeing issues, particularly in relation to chronic conditions, requiring specific and targeted attention.

.....

[45] Department of Communities, Government of Western Australia, 'Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy: 2022 - 2032', [Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy 2022-2032 \(www.wa.gov.au\)](http://www.wa.gov.au).

[46] Department of Health, Government of Western Australia, 'Western Australian Men's Health and Wellbeing Policy: A roadmap for healthier Western Australian men and boys', 2019, [WA Men's Health and Wellbeing Policy](#).

At a national level, the 2024-2025 Federal Budget continued support for men’s health with \$6.1 million for Men’s Sheds and \$2.1 million for training for health professionals to better engage and treat men, including for mental and physical health issues.[47] Similar to WA’s Aboriginal Family Safety Strategy, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-25 of the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children includes a number of activities targeted specifically towards men. This includes:

- Establishment of Aboriginal Men’s Wellness Centres with programs including prosocial interventions, cultural healing, education on respectful relationships, health parenting, mentoring, living skills and alcohol and drug abuse;
- Expansion of community based, culturally informed men’s prevention and perpetrator accountability programs; and
- Establishment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men’s Advisory Body.[48]

Collectively, these policy frameworks and funding commitments represents a tangible interest from all relevant Governments in dedicated men’s programs to build the social, emotional and physical health and wellbeing of men.

**Next Steps**

SAC is seeking a funding commitment for the expansion of the Moorditj Men’s Program, with service delivery across the Great Southern, Wheatbelt and South West.

**Recommendation**

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Health, Mental Health Commission or Department of Communities, to:

- a. Inject \$305,868 in new annual funding (totalling \$1.5 million over a five-year period) for SAC to employ 3.0 FTE Men’s Support Workers across to deliver the Moorditj Men’s Program across the Great Southern, Wheatbelt and South West regions; and
- b. Ensure any funding provided is flexible and adaptable to be adjusted in the forward budget years based on the projected costs of delivering services, informed by the most recent financial year’s actual results.

.....

[47] Department of Health and Aged Care, Australian Government, ‘Budget 2024-25: A fit and healthy Australia’, [Here](#).  
[48] Department of Social Services, Australian Government, ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025: Under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032’, [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023-2025 \(dss.gov.au\)](#).







## Key Ask 7 - Kairli Cultural and Language Centre

### Context

Of the 7.5 million tourists visiting Western Australia annually, 82% seek an Aboriginal cultural experience when they visit, but only 26% achieve one, according to Tourism WA.[49] After a period of unprecedented challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, Western Australia re-opened to the world in 2022 and reaffirmed its status as the Western Gateway to the country, with 9.8 million visitors across the 2021-22 financial year.[50] In 2022-23, that number rose to 10.9 million visitors.[51] There continues to be growing demand from tourists travelling to Western Australia for cultural tourism experiences without capacity to fill this gap, which presents an enormous opportunity to capitalise on an untapped market for cultural tourism in the Great Southern region.[52]

In 2019, SAC purchased suitable land at the waterfront in Albany at a cost of \$945,000 on which it intends to build the Kairli Cultural and Language Centre: a vibrant hub of activity for tourists and locals seeking to experience the rich culture of the Noongar people. The project was officially proposed as the solution to the issues identified below at a SAC Board of Directors meeting in 2018:

- **Indigenous tourism:** Whilst Indigenous tourism has been identified as a major economic market performing in a growth cycle in Australia, Albany and the Great Southern region are yet to establish and take advantage of this industry growth opportunity;
- **SAC administration:** SAC administration requires purpose build space. The current leased SAC administration building is aging and lease arrangements are at a premium. SAC intends to expand services and program portfolio however is restricted due to space availability and configuration of the existing office building;
- **Physical space:** The resources and space available to promote and protect Noongar culture and traditions in Albany are lacking. There is no location where visitors can learn, experience and enjoy Noongar content; and
- **Noongar enterprise development:** There is a lack of Noongar people engaging in enterprise opportunities. Whilst there are many talented local artists that embrace cultural artwork as a connection to their culture, opportunities and pathways to expand into enterprise in this area is limited in the Great Southern. This is due to a lack of knowledge, skills, confidence, opportunity and support.

The proposed Centre is another step towards closing the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people; in Albany alone, an estimated 34 ongoing jobs will be created in the first year of the project (Stages 1 and 2), with between 50-65% of those being for Aboriginal people. Project modelling predicts that implementation of the proposed project will have an initial (first year) benefit of \$67.15 million for the Albany area. Based on the total first year cost of \$19.78 million, the initial Benefit Cost Ratio is 3.39. The 20 year accumulated net present value of the project is further predicted to be \$697.26 million.

.....

[49] Southern Aboriginal Corporation and Consulting Great Southern, 'Kairli Cultural and Language Centre: Business Case Summary', July 2019.

[50] Tourism Western Australia, 'Annual Report: 2021-2022', 2022, [tp+1616+\(2022\)+twa+annual+report+2022.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/tp+1616+(2022)+twa+annual+report+2022.pdf) ([parliament.wa.gov.au](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au)).

[51] Tourism Western Australian, 'Annual Report: 2022-2023', 2023, [TWA Annual Report 2022-23.pdf](https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au/TWA%20Annual%20Report%2022-23.pdf) ([tourism.wa.gov.au](https://www.tourism.wa.gov.au)),

[52] Southern Aboriginal Corporation and Consulting Great Southern, 'Kairli Cultural and Language Centre: Business Case Summary', July 2019.

SAC is well placed to develop this significant venture in the Great Southern, with demonstrated governance, over ten years of unqualified audit of financials, experience running business enterprises and a commitment to partnerships to provide specialist expertise in business units.

## Funding and Policy Environment

5 key themes underly the 17 socio-economic targets of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: economic prosperity, individual prosperity, community prosperity, environmental prosperity and working together.[53] The Kairli Cultural and Language Centre Benefit Realisation Plan is structured on the five underlying themes of the Closing the Gap strategic initiative, as follows:

<b>Economic Prosperity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increase in employment and participation opportunities and rates for Noongar people;</li> <li>• Increase the number of Noongar people participating in activities and work experience that build work readiness and contribute to the community;</li> <li>• Increase the number and viability of Indigenous enterprises;</li> <li>• Support Noongar people to engage in jobs relating to Indigenous tourism and mainstream industry, such as hospitality; and</li> <li>• Have a positive impact on economic activity, including Indigenous economic participation through employment and supplier-use outcomes.</li> </ul>
<b>Community Prosperity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve Indigenous and non-Indigenous connection to community and inclusion through culture, events and information sharing;</li> <li>• Contribute to the maintenance and strengthening of the Indigenous cultural expression and conversation, including recognition of Australia's shared history and valuable Indigenous heritage;</li> <li>• Support activities that increase the participation of Indigenous Australians in Australian society through healing and improved individual, community and organisational capability and leadership;</li> <li>• Promote the unique place Indigenous Australians and their cultures have in Australian society;</li> <li>• Increase community volunteering and participation;</li> <li>• Create a more attractive place to live, work and visit;</li> <li>• Encourage community cohesion and sense of identity; and</li> <li>• Enhance community facilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Individual Prosperity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve health and wellbeing, participation and connection, sense of belonging and sense of self-worth and resilience;</li> <li>• Enhance leadership capacity;</li> <li>• Develop entrepreneurial and growth mindset;</li> <li>• Reduce substance abuse, contact with the criminal justice system and violent and anti-social behaviour;</li> <li>• Create support and healing networks; and</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for learning, knowledge creation and improved educational attainment.</li> </ul>

[53] Australian Government, 'National Agreement on Closing the Gap: 7B. Socio-Economic Targets', [7B. Socio-Economic Targets | Closing the Gap](#).



<b>Environment Prosperity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve environmental awareness through connection to country; and</li> <li>• Improve environmental awareness through information and knowledge sharing of Australian flora and fauna.</li> </ul>
<b>Working Together</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Foster proactive partnerships with Government and non-government agencies as well as local community groups and individuals that have results based outcomes.</li> </ul>

At a state level, the proposed project represents a critical opportunity for the State Government to tangibly investment in achieving progress on its strategic priorities for the tourism sector; it is, for example, closely aligned to Tourism WA's Western Australia Visitor Economy Strategy 2033, which identifies facilitating the development of authentic Aboriginal cultural experiences and building the capacity for Aboriginal people to enter the tourism sector as key initiatives for the next 10 years.[54]

## Next Steps

SAC is seeking a funding commitment for Stages 1 and 2 of the Kairli Cultural and Language Centre project. **Stage 1** of the proposed project includes:

- Noongar Language Centre/School;
- Office space to house 30 employees, incorporating a small business incubator and:
  - Six offices
  - Shared meeting space
  - Three open plan office spaces
  - Two receptions
  - Two entrances
  - A counselling room
  - One board room
  - Staff toilets with shower
  - Separate public toilets
  - Kitchen/staff room
  - Storage, and
  - Contingency space;
- Small gallery and retail shop
- Outdoor activities and performance area; and
- Other amenities and features such as toilets, parking, picnic area, storage and interpretive signage.

.....

[54] Tourism Western Australia, 'Western Australia Visitor Economy Strategy 2033', SAC is well placed to develop this significant venture in the Great Southern, with demonstrated governance, over ten years of unqualified audit of financials, experience running business enterprises and a commitment to partnerships to provide specialist expertise in business units.

**Stage 2** includes:

- Expanded art gallery, cultural displays and cultural activities, incorporating:
  - Large display exhibition space (visual displays, interpretive centre, cultural artefacts)
  - Expanded retail (gift) shop
  - Café and restaurant (bush tucker – operated by Noongar people) with full commercial kitchen, and
  - Expanded Aboriginal enterprise incorporating three business incubators.

The Kairli Cultural and Language Centre, whether built in stages or as a whole, will provide a focal point for Aboriginal culture, training, tourism and enterprises in the Great Southern region. It will provide a significant opportunity for economic and Indigenous enterprise growth through operating a first-class cultural and language centre focused on delivering a unique experience based on Noongar and National Indigenous content.

## Recommendation

SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government to:

- a. Inject \$19.78 million in new funding for capital and operational costs to enable SAC to build and deliver Stages 1 and 2 of the Kairli Cultural and Language Centre; and
- b. Ensure any funding provided includes adequate indexation to assist SAC to absorb the impacts of inflation and increasing wage costs. Nationally, the Australian Services Union and Australian Council of Social Services recommend a minimum indexation rate of 4.6% for all funded social and community service contracts, as a matter of urgency.







## Key Ask 8 - Youth Program

### Context

Aboriginal children and young people experience disproportionate disadvantage compared to non-Aboriginal children and young people in Western Australia. In 2022, Aboriginal children and young people represented 7.3% of the total population of children and young people in WA, yet Aboriginal children:

- Comprised 59.3% of children and young people in the out of home care system at 30 June 2023;<sup>[55]</sup>
- Are around 45 times more likely than non-Aboriginal children to be held in you detention;
- Are less likely to be developmentally on track than non-Aboriginal children; and
- Have significantly lower school attendance than non-Aboriginal students.<sup>[56]</sup>

Per recent consultation by the Commissioner for Children and Young People into the views of WA children and young people on their wellbeing by education region, Aboriginal children and young people across the South West and Wheatbelt regions respectively expressed concerns about feeling healthy and connected to their community. In the South West:

- Just over two-fifths of Aboriginal students rated their health as very good or excellent which is a lower proportion than non-Aboriginal students;
- Aboriginal Year 4 to Year 12 students were less likely than non-Aboriginal students to eat breakfast and lunch every day;
- One-half of Aboriginal students reported a high life satisfaction and almost one-quarter reported low life satisfaction. The top three stressors reported by Aboriginal Year 9-12 students were school or study problems, mental health and wellbeing and problems with friends; and
- One in five Aboriginal secondary students had tried smoking and Aboriginal students were more likely to have had experiences with marijuana than non-Aboriginal students.<sup>[57]</sup>

Comparatively, in the Wheatbelt:

- One quarter of secondary students reported there had been a time in the previous 12 months when they had wanted or needed to see someone for their health but weren't able to;
- Two-thirds of students reported not seeing someone for their health due to feeling embarrassment or shame, while 31.7% reported they were unsure who to see or where to go;
- Almost one quarter of Aboriginal students rated their health as only fair or poor; and
- Aboriginal secondary students were much more likely to have tried smoking or drunk alcohol compared to non-Aboriginal students.<sup>[58]</sup>

.....

[55] Department of Communities, Government of Western Australia, 'Child Protection Activity Performance Information 2022-2023', 2023, Child Protection Activity Performance Information 2022-23 ([www.wa.gov.au](http://www.wa.gov.au)).

[56] Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Profile of Children and Young People in WA', 2024, [ccyp9274-profile-report-24-web.pdf](#).

[57] Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 by education region', November 2023, [ccyp-sos21-regional-report-nov2023-web.pdf](#).

[58] Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 by education region', November 2023, [ccyp-sos21-regional-report-nov2023-web.pdf](#).

When asked about mental health, students from the South West and Wheatbelt overwhelmingly identified the need for improved access to services and programs targeting mental health, positive relationships and self-empowerment:

*"I feel like schools should be addressing and furthermore discussing mental health disorders because they never do, and I really depended on myself to find out what's wrong with me, also the school should keep information confidential rather than telling other teachers, vice versa." Female, 16 year-old, Aboriginal, South West*

*"Sometimes I feel like I'm not good enough and just makes me sad and I have no one to talk to..." Female, 16 year-old, Aboriginal, South West*

*"I've actually struggled a lot with anxiety and stress but I don't know who to run to... I don't know what there will say, personally I think my best idea is just to keep my thoughts to myself because I get a lot of anxiety and stress a lot when I'm really open to people about my feelings." Female, 14 year-old, Aboriginal, Wheatbelt[59]*

In response to the complex experiences of Aboriginal children across its core service delivery regions, SAC commenced delivering its Aboriginal Youth Empowerment Project in November 2022 as a pilot project, funded by the Department of Social Services. The project funded 1.0 FTE Aboriginal Youth Support Officer to work with young people to identify their unique needs, empower their self-determination, support them to build lasting positive relationships and contribute to sustainable outcomes for the community. In the 14 months that the project was running, the Youth Support Officer built relationships and provided culturally safe one-on-one support to over 40 local Aboriginal youth between 12-18 years of age. An additional 150 Aboriginal youth benefited from attending over 35 workshops and other engagement activities. The community response to the program demonstrated its success as follows:

- 100% of service users indicated that the support they received through the program enabled them to better deal with issues and challenges they were facing;
- 100% of service users reported that they felt that the Support Officer listened to and understood their needs;
- 60% of service users reported a sizable change in their behaviours, skill set and self-determined decision making; and
- 40% of service users reported a moderate change in their behaviours, skill set and self-determined decision making.

## Funding and Policy Environment

In 2021, the Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan for Western Australia revealed that Outcome 4 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years), Outcome 6 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential) and Outcome 12 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not overrepresented in the child protection system) of the National Agreement were all considered by the

.....

[59] Commissioner for Children and Young People, 'Insights from the Speaking Out Survey 2021 by education region', November 2023, [ccyp-sos21-regional-report-nov2023-web.pdf](#).

State Government to be ‘highly aspirational’.[60] In 2024, the Closing the Gap targets to reduce the rates of Aboriginal children and young people in detention, overrepresented in the child protection system, reaching their full potential and thriving in their early years still appear to be severely at risk.

In the 2024-25 State Budget, the WA Government committed \$12 million for the Aboriginal Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program providing mental health support in five communities; however, the only youth specific program funded under the initiative was in the Kimberley, once again leaving youth across the Great Southern, Wheatbelt and South West at a disadvantage.[61]

Nationally, the Federal Government provided funding of \$5.9 million over the two years from 2024-2025 to establish interim arrangements for the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People to protect and promote the rights, interests and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. [62] This is a welcomed investment, noting the longstanding advocacy by the legal assistance sector in WA for a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in WA, complementary to the existing Commissioner for Children and Young People role.[63] In a youth programs context, we anticipate the National Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People will have a critical role in driving progress against the Outcomes and Targets of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

## Next Steps

The pilot project has proven that the cultural approach and engagement model implemented by SAC with our local Aboriginal youth works. SAC is seeking a funding commitment to continue the Aboriginal Youth Empowerment Project for a further three years, including expanding project reach via the introduction of a second Youth Officer and increasing the targeted age range of service delivery. We acknowledge that there is a gap in culturally appropriate supports for Aboriginal youth aged 18-22 years in relation to job readiness skills and wellbeing factors that influence further education, skill training completion and career outcomes.

.....

[60] Government of Western Australia, ‘Closing the Gap Jurisdictional Implementation Plan: Western Australia’, September 2021, [Implementation Plan – CtG 1.pdf \(www.wa.gov.au\)](#).

[61] Government of Western Australia, ‘WA Budget Overview: 2024-2025’, 2024, [2024-25 WA Budget Overview \(ourstatebudget.wa.gov.au\)](#).

[62] The Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare, ‘National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People’, 2024, [Federal Budget 2024-2025 Summary – Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare \(cfecfw.asn.au\)](#).

[63] Aboriginal Family Legal Service WA, ‘Why are the priority needs of Aboriginal children and young people being ignored? Call from the community legal sector for a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People in Western Australia’, January 2022, [Community Legal Sector calls for a dedicated Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People – Media Release 25.01.22 and Report’ – Aboriginal Family Legal Services \(afls.org.au\)](#).



## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Communities, to:

- a. Inject \$375,000 in new annual funding (totalling \$1.125 million over three years) to enable SAC to continue and grow the Aboriginal Youth Empowerment Project to support and empower self-determination of Aboriginal children and young people across SAC's core service delivery areas; and
- b. Ensure any funding provided includes adequate indexation to assist SAC to absorb the impacts of inflation and increasing wage costs. Nationally, the Australian Services Union and Australian Council of Social Services recommend a minimum indexation rate of 4.6% for all funded social and community service contracts, as a matter of urgency.







## Key Ask 9 - Rangers Program

### Context

The SAC Ranger program, currently funded by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (WA) employs, trains and builds the capacity of Indigenous Rangers to undertake a diversity of land management activities on reserves in the South Coast region of Western Australia. SAC Rangers work with regional catchment groups, local communities, South Coast Natural Resource Management, the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA), the City of Albany and other local governments to deliver environmental restoration, survey and monitoring of the *Environmental Protection and Biodiversity Act 1999* nominated species populations, interpretation of local culturally significant sites, and trails maintenance in the south coast region of WA. The program trains Rangers to develop practical skills including rehabilitation techniques, fencing, land surveying, fire suppression and first aid, and to gain traditional knowledge through consultation with Aboriginal Elders.

Key achievements of the program since its commencement in 2020 include:

- Employment of 4.0 FTE male and 1.0 FTE female Rangers;
- Development of a positive working relationship with Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions (DBCA) rangers from the Franklin district, which has seen our Rangers:
  - Conduct ringtail possum and pig point surveys;
  - Work on culturally significant country at Waychinicup National Park alongside DBCA rangers to check cameras and clear vegetation; and
  - Work with DBCA staff in the Denmark Walpole region to set up cameras, check for pests and native animals.
- Confirmation of SAC as the preferred contractor of the City of Albany for weed control and track maintenance and subsequent appointment as contractors to control weeds at Emu Point Flora reserve;
- Improved management of weeds, feral animals, soil, vegetation, fire and native plants and animals;
- On-Country cultural information sharing with Elders;
- Ranger completion of Certificate III in Conservation and Land Management, fire suppression training, camera trap training, chainsaw use training and Aboriginal heritage training; and
- Rehabilitation planting on the Albany Ring Road project alongside roadside rehabilitation specialists GHEMS.

The SAC Program comprises one part of the State Government's Aboriginal Ranger Program, which was established to help Aboriginal organisations manage country and protect the environment across the State. The investment, and broader growth in government programs supporting Indigenous land and sea management generally, is considered to:

*Reflect the synergy between caring for country and environmental issues, and the productivity of Indigenous-environment collaboration. Environmental issues have taken centre stage of policy agendas in response to widespread environmental change since the industrial revolution. Indigenous people have witnessed the effect of habitat destruction, weeds, feral animals, the over-allocation of water and climate change on*



*their country, and, often in partnership with government, have established regional and local environmental strategies to response to these threats.*

*The beneficial relationships held between Indigenous people and their country are encapsulated... health country, healthy people. If you look after the country, the country will look after you.[64]*

## Funding and Policy Environment

The WA Government's Aboriginal Ranger Program began in 2017 (Phase 1), with \$20 million invested into 30 ranger programs with 28 partner organisations. Key additional investment (Phase 2) included:

- \$50 million in 2021 to continue the project to 2025;
- \$16.5 million to further extend the project to June 2026; and
- Another \$16.5 million specifically to implement Round 8 of the program.

This brings the total Phase 2 investment to \$83 million over five years.[65]

In June 2024, the Minister for Environment, Hon Reece Whitby MLA, announced that SAC would receive \$1.8 million under Round 8 funding for continuation of the program until June 2026.

## Next Steps

SAC is seeking to expand the existing Aboriginal Ranger Program footprint into the Lower Great Southern region of WA through the growth of the SAC Land and Sea Management Program (SLSMP). Under the expanded SLSMP, SAC would employ an additional 1.0 FTE Ranger Coordinator, 9.0 FTE Male Rangers and 7.0 FTE Female Rangers by 2027/28. Rangers would work with Elders, land managers, agencies, training providers and catchment groups to care for country; provide cultural heritage management; marine, waterway and wetland protection; vegetable rehabilitation; biosecurity and feral species control; freshwater management; and knowledge sharing.

SAC facilitated co design for the expanded SLSMP model in January 2024 with Elders, existing Rangers, external stakeholders and SAC management. The concept received strong support, noting the benefits of the preservation and sharing of culture with the wider community and the economic benefits inherent in highlighting the social value of improved environmental and cultural protection outcomes. The vision for the SLSMP is as follows:

*Guided by our Elders we protect and conserve our land and culture. We provide career opportunities and inspiration for our youth and the Noongar community. We reach deep into the community inspiring school children, youth and families to enhance their knowledge and empower connection to country.*

*We work with purpose. We work together. We work with satisfaction and enjoyment. Our work is our connection, our community, our enjoyment and inspiration.*

[64] Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 'Caring for Country: The Benefits Associated with Caring for Country', 2011, [The Benefits Associated with Caring for Country - Literature Review \(aiatsis.gov.au\)](https://aiatsis.gov.au).

[65] Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions, 'Aboriginal Ranger Program', 2024, [Aboriginal Ranger Program | Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions \(dbca.wa.gov.au\)](https://dbca.wa.gov.au).

*Guided by our Elders we want to lead and to inspire our community to see work as empowering, a place to grow and develop, and a place where they can make a meaningful contribution.*

*We want to educate ourselves about our culture and language, about the sustainable management of our land, about the work of our partners managing and conserving the land, about the preservation of Noongar culture, and about the sharing of our stories.*

The proposed expansion is aligned with the:

- South West Land and Sea Council Strategic Plan Long-Term Goal: Improve outcomes for Noongar people through coordinate, culturally appropriate services with Noongar-led input and direction for improved social and economic outcomes.
- Wagyl Kaip Southern Noongar Nation AC Strategic Plan 2023–2026 Strategic Focus Area: Build relationships with other organisations to create and improve services and programs for WKSJ people, cultural, land and sea.
- City of Albany Strategic Community Plan Outcome 1.1: A diverse and inclusive community; Outcome 2.1: Sustainable management of natural areas, balancing conservation with responsible access and enjoyment.
- CDBCA Albany Coast Parks and Reserves Management Plan Strategic Objective: Conserve and protect the value of the land to the culture and heritage of Noongar people, and conserve and protect other cultural heritage.

## Recommendation

At a minimum, SAC is seeking a commitment from the incoming Government, via the Department of Biodiversity Conservation and Attractions, to:

- a. Inject \$1.1 million in new annual funding (totalling \$4.4 million over 4 years) for operational costs to enable SAC to expand the Aboriginal Ranger Program footprint into the Lower Great Southern region of WA through the growth of the SAC Land and Sea Management Program (SLSMP); and
- b. Ensure any funding provided includes adequate indexation to assist SAC to absorb the impacts of inflation and increasing wage costs. Nationally, the Australian Services Union and Australian Council of Social Services recommend a minimum indexation rate of 4.6% for all funded social and community service contracts, as a matter of urgency.



MOOC  
2018

BECAUSE  
OF HER,  
WE CAN!







## Southern Aboriginal Corporation Locations

### **Head Office**

27 Chester Pass Road  
ALBANY WA 6330

PO Box 5277  
ALBANY DC WA 6332

Phone: 08 9842 7777

Email: [reception@sacorp.com.au](mailto:reception@sacorp.com.au)

### **Central Albany Office**

3/90 Frederick Street  
ALBANY WA 6330

### **Rangers Office**

22 Locke Street  
ALBANY WA 6330

### **Bunbury**

16 Zoe Street  
BUNBURY WA 6230

### **Katanning**

42 Clive Street  
KATANNING WA 6317

### **Narrogin**

119 Federal Street  
NARROGIN WA 6312

