



# YUWAYA NGARRA-LI POLICY PAPER

**Making government finances make sense  
for communities**

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# ABOUT

The Dharriwaa Elders Group<sup>1</sup> is an association of Aboriginal Elders living in Walgett in remote north-west New South Wales, located on the river borders of Gamilaraay, Wayilwan, Yuwaalaraay and Ngayiimbaa countries.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group works to promote Aboriginal cultural values, protect Aboriginal cultural heritage and knowledge, support Elders' wellbeing, and improve community outcomes.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group works closely with other Aboriginal organisations and community members in Walgett to identify local concerns and opportunities to build systemic solutions.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li<sup>2</sup> is a long-term community-led partnership between the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the University of New South Wales (UNSW), who work together daily.

The purpose of Yuwaya Ngarra-li is for the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW to work in partnership to improve the wellbeing, social, built and physical environment and life pathways of Aboriginal people in Walgett, and in order to do this, build capacity and evidence-based initiatives.

1. <https://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/>

2. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/walgett-partnership>

The Dharriwaa Elders Group have identified the following aims for Yuwaya Ngarra-li's work in Walgett:

- 1 greater Aboriginal community control and capacity
- 2 increased numbers of Aboriginal young people in education, training, and employment
- 3 reduced numbers of Aboriginal people in contact with the criminal justice system
- 4 improved social determinants of health and wellbeing amongst Aboriginal people
- 5 increased sustainable management of water and country
- 6 redirection of funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Like many Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), the Dharriwaa Elders Group has for many years requested and advocated for more information and accountability from governments around resources allocated for their community.

Through this research we have learnt that details about what funding has been committed and where it is going is difficult to identify, even for those working in government.

Closing the Gap,<sup>3</sup> social procurement policies, place and outcomes-based frameworks outline how communities could and should be involved in decision making processes and priority setting.

Despite government commitments, ACCOs and their communities in Walgett and elsewhere have been largely and consistently overlooked in decision-making and priority setting, and are still not part of processes to make sure projects and services in their areas deliver quality outcomes.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group works to advance effective Aboriginal community control and capacity to create a “well Walgett”. A long running frustration has been with government approaches to engagement, resource allocation, contracting, and a resulting inability for

3. <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>

4. <https://nookstudios.com/>

5. <https://www.unsw.edu.au/news/2023/02/new-policy-paper--creating-better-futures-with-contracts>

people in the community to access data about what funds are being allocated and spent in Walgett, and on which priorities.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group has been leading research since 2021 with UNSW and Nook Studios<sup>4</sup> to understand government investment and services through procurement and grants contracts (*Creating Better Futures with Contracts* policy paper<sup>5</sup>), and now in this paper, through budgeting and spending.

The first policy paper identified there is no clear and consistent way for communities to access data about what governments are spending through procurement and grants in their local communities or regions.

There is no way for communities to track progress or delivery, access details of contracts, monitor whether expectations and outcomes are being met, or be part of the evaluation process or easily access final evaluations (even if they contributed to them).

This paper demonstrates that the same is true for budget allocations and government spending.

Moreover, despite commitments through Closing the Gap and evidence about the greater impact of Aboriginal community controlled led change for Aboriginal communities, priorities and resource allocation continues to happen far away from community control.



Figure 1: Dharriwaa Elders Group Elders and staff with UNSW Yuwaya Ngarra-li collaborators at the Elders Centre in Walgett.





## COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED BUDGETING AND COMMISSIONING

The experience of the Dharriwaa Elders' Group aligns with the findings of the 2024 Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap: "[The] persistent barriers to progressing the Agreement's Priority Reforms are the lack of power-sharing needed for joint decision-making, and the failure of governments to acknowledge and act on the reality that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for their communities."

However, it does not have to be this way. This policy paper also highlights positive examples in Australia and overseas of participatory budgeting or Indigenous-led commissioning (as a more holistic approach to allocating spending and making contracting decisions) as well as transparency and effective access to information about budgets or spending in place.

Through this work, the Dharriwaa Elders Group and its collaborators at UNSW through their Yuwaya Ngarra-li partnership would like to extend an initiation to the NSW Government to work together on a community-controlled budgeting and commissioning pilot to support children and young peoples' wellbeing in Walgett.

At its heart, a pilot could involve working collaboratively to share decision-making power around priorities and resources to support children and young peoples' wellbeing with local Aboriginal Community Controlled

Organisations (ACCOs) and other relevant community leaders and collaborators. This could enable that local group to determine priorities and allocate budget resources including overseeing relevant commissioning, with ongoing engagement with the local community and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Working this way would require commitment at Ministerial and senior leadership level within government to share power and decision-making, starting with the co-design of the process. It would require the centring of local priorities and timelines, and commitment to transparent and honest communications

and information sharing, amongst other things.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li welcomes genuine engagement from the NSW Government and other interested parties on design of such an initiative.

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Figure 2: Walgett town aerial view



# INTRODUCTION

## WHY ARE WE LOOKING AT BUDGETS?

The interest of the Dharriwaa Elders Group in accessing relevant, timely and understandable data about government budgets and spending in Walgett comes from real and pressing needs for information to inform community engagement and collaboration between agencies to improve lives in Walgett.

## WORKING TOWARDS A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR YOUNG PEOPLE

Since 2018, the Dharriwaa Elders Group has been leading work with colleagues at UNSW and in other agencies to improve outcomes for Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett, including reduced contact with the criminal justice system, improved wellbeing and other priorities.

That work involved a community process with relevant agencies to develop an Action Plan for Children and Young People in 2018, and establishment of a local working group (now known as the Holistic Working Group for Children and Young People) aiming to improve commitment, coordination and outcomes for Walgett's children and young people.

The group is comprised of participants from Dharriwaa Elders Group, Yuwaya Ngarra-li (UNSW advisors), Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Walgett Community College, Mission Australia, Department of Communities and Justice, Youth Justice, Courts, Police, Legal Aid, the Aboriginal Legal Service and Walgett Shire Council.

Over time, Yuwaya Ngarra-li developed the “Two Rivers Pathway to Change”<sup>6</sup> model that recognised that children and young people's wellbeing would be improved more by their access to support, culture and opportunities outside of the justice system rather than improvements within the justice system alone (as any contact with the justice system for young people increases their likelihood of further contact).

The model works to support community-based alternatives to the criminal justice system response (police, courts) to grow and better meet the needs of Walgett's children and young people.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group has had direct engagement with young people, such as providing important legal education to families, supports to ensure successful diversion through youth justice conferencing, and drawn attention to and supported agencies to change punitive practices towards young people (e.g.

over policing in public spaces, routinely calling on police for school behavioural issues).

Data access and analysis has been critical to the progress of the Holistic Working Group in Walgett including through the support of Dr Rebecca Reeve at UNSW in the Yuwaya Ngarra-li team.

Careful analysis of Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) Court data and Census data has enabled the group to track the impact of changes made to policing practice and support to young people over time – seeing an estimated reduction of Aboriginal young people (aged 10-17) from Walgett postcode area appearing in children's court from 11.4% in 2016 to 7.8% in 2021 (a reduction of 32%).<sup>7</sup>

During this time, the Holistic Working Group has also mapped services and responsibilities and identified local and systemic issues and needs.

6. See: Two Rivers Pathway to Change [www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-yssy-burton-clark/2024-02-yn\\_tworiversbriefingpaper.pdf](http://www.unsw.edu.au/content/dam/pdfs/research/2023-10-yssy-burton-clark/2024-02-yn_tworiversbriefingpaper.pdf)

7. NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, reference 21-20920



**There are a number of important lessons from this work that have animated this inquiry into budgets and our prior work on contracts:**

- 1 This is a place-based, community-led initiative that has been unable to access timely and accurate information about the allocation of resources which are needed for better outcomes for young people including which specific agencies are receiving the resources and for what purposes.

This has led to a need to piece together information and respond to regular calls for “service mapping” when this could be easy to produce if there was clear and accessible government information.

- 2 There is a mismatch between fragmented government funding for specific programs through separate departments and the reality, which is the need for a holistic and responsive approach to wellbeing for children, young people, and their families.

When the Dharriwaa Elders Group has engaged in discussions with mainstream agencies about a transition of programs to community control, they have learnt that the kinds of contracts that government provides for youth-focused programs would not enable the community-led, holistic and

collaborative work that is needed, due to their focus on specific outputs often disconnected from young peoples’ real needs.

This was also reflected during COVID when the Holistic Working Group tried to access flexible funds for a community-wide crisis response that focused on supporting children, young people and families via the Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ), however such funds were not available, even for DCJ-involved families.

- 3 There doesn’t appear to be any meaningful recourse for community members when government spending doesn’t serve community needs.

In 2021, Dharriwaa Elders Group staff started to take a more active role in supporting young people to successfully participate in and complete Youth Justice Conferencing processes.

In providing this support it became apparent to the Dharriwaa Elders Group that current contracts and funding to support conferencing weren’t translating to effective diversion without this additional, wrap-around support.

Often young people and their families weren’t receiving clear instructions from the relevant agencies responsible for supporting youth justice conferences about the process or what was in the plan that had to be completed by the young person to achieve diversion.

At their worst, the plans included requirements to attend activities that were not being held by agencies on nominated days – meaning that young people could end up in the criminal justice system because their plans were impossible to successfully complete. That is not a system that serves anyone.

- 4 Current systems make it hard for place-based leadership and ACCOs to access flexible resources when needs or opportunities shift.

When there are place-based structures for leadership across agencies and with community representation, there would be the potential for real and coordinated action to sustained issues or at times of crisis.

However, current budgeting systems are not set up to enable place-based leadership to access or shift resources as needs or opportunities shift.





One example of this is mentioned above, where the Holistic Working Group needed funds to support community-wide crisis responses focused on children and young people during COVID.

Another example is the inability within current systems to easily access or repurpose funds allocated for Walgett-based roles (often critical support roles) that were left unfilled over long stretches of time.

To maintain action and momentum and avoid wasting much needed funds, those resources could be usefully and impactfully reallocated to ACCOs grounded in and accountable to communities locally.

**These direct experiences and a growing appreciation of the impact of access to quality data analysis has directly led to this deeper research on government budgets and spending.**

A better set of budget allocations to support children and young people in Walgett needs to draw on the insights of ACCOs community engagement (particularly listening to children and young people) and groups like the Holistic Working Group.

This paper uses the experience of the Dharriwaa Elders Group in trying to find and make sense of information about government budget allocations and spending in Walgett.

The purpose is to convey why access to this information matters and how it can be made more accessible, to enable Aboriginal community control and leadership to achieve better outcomes, such as those laid out in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.



Figure 3 Young people in Walgett at the Dharriwaa Elders Group supported Kobie Dee Concert.



# PROJECT OVERVIEW

In 2021, the Dharriwaa Elders Group and UNSW in collaboration with Nook Studios began researching existing government contracts relevant to Walgett, NSW.

We sought to understand the potential and limitations of existing public contracting data, and the procurement and grant processes that community organisations need to navigate to find and apply for opportunities for funding (tenders and approaches to market).

The second phase of this project took place in 2022 and 2023. We set out to establish if it is possible to find information about government spending in Walgett through budgets and funding allocations.

This paper includes a summary of our attempts to understand budget processes, budget allocations, and direct and indirect funding allocated to Indigenous programs going into Walgett from Federal, State and Local Governments. We chose the 2021-2022 budget period.

Between 2023 - 2024 some new initiatives have emerged, which we have also included.

Aboriginal Land Council budgets and spending were not part of the scope for this phase of research.

**This work is intended to also benefit other communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations by identifying systemic problems and solutions.**

This phase involved:

- understanding budget and spending approaches and reporting at a Federal, NSW, and Local Government level
- analysing Federal and NSW budget papers to establish if it is possible to identify Indigenous programs and spending allocated to Walgett
- creating a process for budget analysis, drawing on government financial and budget experts, for example the International Budget Partnership
- reviewing Closing the Gap initiatives and agreements to change the way governments interact and engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- assessing existing open budget and participatory budgeting processes and drafting a community budget design approach to adapt and trial in Walgett to enhance local capabilities
- researching local and international digital systems that improve access to information, and exploring examples of community-led and participatory processes.

## FUTURE WORK

The aim of the next phase of Yuwaya Ngarra-li research and engagement in 2025/2026 is to:

- meet with relevant agencies to discuss how data, systems, and processes can be improved
- combine our initial work around children and young people and this project to produce a Walgett 'budget' that reflects allocations to categories that make sense to the community and provides a basis for future conversations between community, ACCOs and governments about changes needed to improve outcomes in Walgett.

The next stage of work for children and young people includes a holistic wellbeing service being developed between Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service, Dharriwaa Elders Group and Aboriginal Legal Service.





# CLOSING THE GAP

The Federal and NSW Governments have committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement).

The objective of the National Agreement is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to address the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

For the first time, the National Agreement has been developed in genuine partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (the Coalition of Peaks)<sup>8</sup>. NSW is also creating an Implementation Plan.

All parties to the National Agreement acknowledged the need for it to be a flexible, “living” document, working with the best evidence as it becomes available.

At the centre of the National Agreement are four Priority Reforms that focus on changing the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Priority Reforms aim to:

- 1 strengthen and establish formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- 2 build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector
- 3 transform government organisations so they work better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- 4 improve and share access to data and information to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities make informed decisions.

The National Agreement has 19 national socio-economic targets across 17 socio-economic outcome areas.

**A number of these relate to aspirations that the Dharriwaa Elders Group has for Aboriginal children and young people in Walgett.**

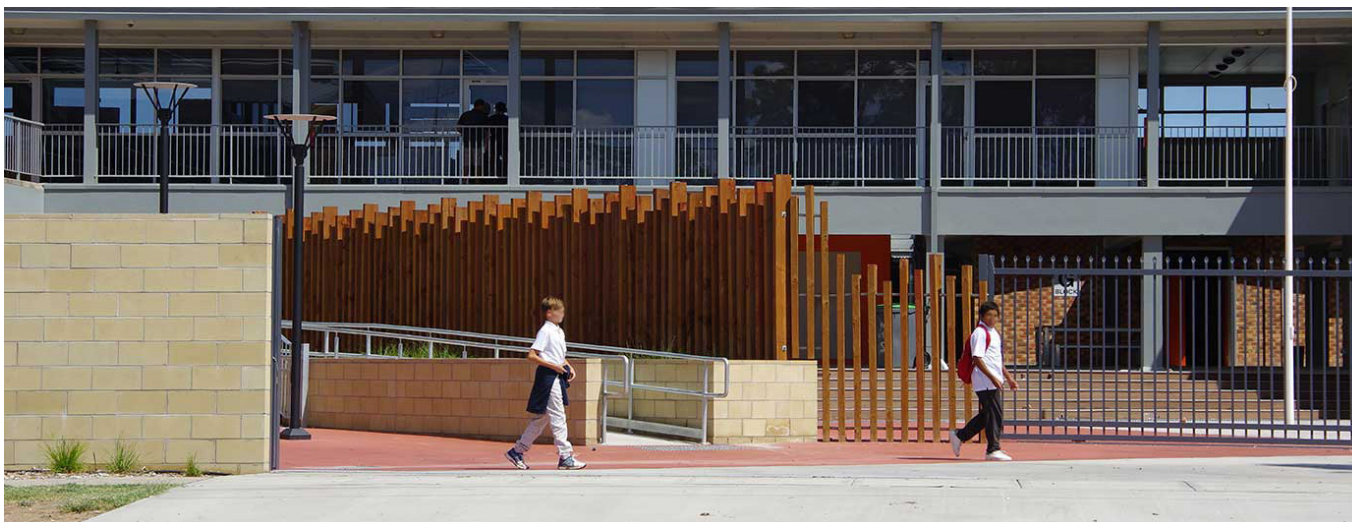


Figure 4: Students outside school in Walgett

8. See: [www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au/national-agreement-on-closing-the-gap](http://www.coalitionofpeaks.org.au/national-agreement-on-closing-the-gap)



These targets include that Aboriginal children and young people:

- are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
- are not overrepresented in the child protection system
- are engaged in employment or education and reach their full potential through further education pathways.

The National Agreement and budget announcements that governments have made in relation to their Closing the Gap commitments provide an important framework for communities like Walgett to advocate for the changes they urgently want to see locally.

However, for ACCOs like the Dharriwaa Elders Group, there is currently no way to find out the details of funding commitments associated with these targets in their community at any given time, or to track how they change over time.

Renewed commitments to Closing the Gap provide the opportunity to change this.

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**Investment in making budget information clearly understood and accessible at a community level will help governments properly track spending and be accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver what has been promised now, and is needed for the future.**

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# INDIGENOUS DATA GOVERNANCE

In May 2024, National Indigenous Australians Agency released a Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data,<sup>9</sup> a practical guide for agencies on how to build strong governance, improve, and transform systems and culture.

The Framework “recognises better outcomes are achieved if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in matters affecting them, including use of data to inform policy-making in government.” As outlined in a Co-Design Lessons Learned Report, it took 18 months to develop.

The Framework is a good step forward and links to useful resources about Indigenous Data Sovereignty Principles and initiatives that informed the work, including Maiam Nayri Wingara,<sup>10</sup> Kowa Collaboration,<sup>11</sup> and the Lowitja Institute.<sup>12</sup>

It aims to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people greater agency over how their data are governed within the Australian Public Service (APS) so government-held data better reflects their priorities and aspirations.

There are four guidelines:

1. **partner** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
2. **build** data-related capabilities
3. **provide** knowledge of data assets
4. **build** an inclusive data system.

The Framework includes some excellent and welcome proposed actions:

- working in partnership to better identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream data collection (reduce under-identification and misidentification, minimise collection bias)
- partnering in all phases of the data lifecycle following collection (access, analysis, interpretation, dissemination, reuse/review/retire)
- establish user-friendly technologies and infrastructure, and community focused data platforms that can enhance the capabilities of the community to access, interpret, use and maintain their own data - as well as training.

The summary of guideline four states that:

*“While partnerships are important, their cumulative success at a systemic level will require data systems to undergo structural transformation.*

*Australian Government agencies need to transform their data systems to support the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in data governance. Without adapting to different ways of doing business and transforming government organisations, improvements in the governance of Indigenous data are unlikely to be realised.*

*At present, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are marginalised by the Australian Government data system and the governance of Indigenous data. This is reflected in the mainstream production and use of data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that tends to be Blaming, Aggregate, Decontextualised, Deficit-based and has Restricted access (BADDR).*

*This is the result of ways the public sector has operated excluding the voices and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is critical that current data systems be reviewed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners to address barriers and ensuring data supports self-determination.”*

9. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/framework-governance-indigenous-data> for Governance of Indigenous Data

10. <https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/>

11. <https://www.kowacollaboration.com/>

12. <https://www.lowitja.org.au/tools/indigenous-data-sovereignty-readiness-assessment-and-evaluation-toolkit/>



## WHO THE FRAMEWORK APPLIES TO

The Framework states “it is not solely the role of Indigenous-specific programs to improve life outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, all agencies must work toward this goal.

That is why this Framework is also not limited to Australian Government agencies with Indigenous-specific data collections, but all datasets. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may not be the focus of a dataset, the contents and outcomes may be relevant and the dataset therefore contains Indigenous data.” (p. 9)

The Framework “as it currently stands only applies to APS agencies, it is also relevant to Indigenous data held by States, Territories, and Local Government.”

The Framework also acknowledges that:

- government-held data quality cannot be improved without embedding Indigenous leadership into its governance
- leadership is crucial for improving the relevance, accessibility, interpretability, and timeliness of Indigenous data in the APS

- the framework should be reviewed and updated to ensure it remains relevant and effective in addressing the complex and dynamic issues surrounding the governance of Indigenous data

An important part of the government data ecosystem missing from the framework are government contractors: private companies, charities, and academic organisations - all of whom collect, hold, share, and publish data about Indigenous communities in paper formats, spreadsheets, databases, and other mediums.

As we’ve explored earlier, public servants are not involved, in most cases contractors and grantees are delivering services, programs, works, and projects in Indigenous communities.

Information about locations, outcomes, and evaluations is incomplete, if captured at all, and often does not involve people who are meant to be benefiting.

Feedback loops, secure channels, and involvement of beneficiaries in outcome assessments of policy, project and program delivery is critical for the data collected to:

- not have contractor bias (to maintain the need for their services and business as usual approaches)
- to have the context and detail required to assess practices.

## CHALLENGES TO OVERCOME

Insights from the Binarri Binyja Yarrawoo Aboriginal Corporation case study in the Framework on page 32 succinctly outlines some of the challenges:

- data enables joint decision-making
- communities are keen to understand the impact of programs
- lack of resourcing is the biggest barrier to effective Indigenous Data Governance
- data requests have been difficult to progress at local, State/Territory and Federal governments
- a big reason why data requests are rejected is privacy; disaggregated data by Indigenous status can’t be accessed for smaller towns
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for funding agreements do not measure the right things, with a detrimental focus on outputs to the exclusion of longer term outcomes
- the push in government toward standardised KPIs (for better comparison between regions) is in tension with the need for place-based, locally informed, and Indigenous-led measures of success.



## DESIGNING FUTURE READY SYSTEMS

The Framework aims to help governments implement data governance policies to work more effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and support greater access to data and information at a regional level.

As we explore in this paper, regional level data is not enough to deliver insights and to help governments and communities understand place-based needs and impacts.

For meaningful transformation and to design fit for purpose and safe systems from the outset, a bottom up place-based design methodology is essential.

Specifically, designing systems that have an irreducible core to allow for the location granularity different communities and ACCOs want and need - as well as satisfy other audiences' needs for regional and national level views and insights.

## PRINCIPLES

The Framework highlights some useful data governance principles:

FAIR Guiding Principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) which focuses on increasing data sharing but do not address the tension for Indigenous people in also seeking greater control over and use of Indigenous knowledge for collective benefit.

CARE Principles (Collective Benefit, Authority to control, Responsibility, and Ethics) which reflects the important role data plays in advancing self-determination.

Others referenced are the Open Data Charter Principles - including Open by Default. The open data movement has improved this and the contemporary and more relevant principle is Open by Design.

The Open by Design aspects being additional layers for privacy considerations, safety, and systematic disclosure.

Adopted by many international and Australian state governments, Open by Design is “thinking of data as potentially being open throughout its lifecycle, or even before it is created. It’s about planning for open data from the moment you start thinking about collecting data.”<sup>12</sup>

The Framework provides a good place to start to ensure all levels of government have the guidance and training they need.

It should also apply to government contractors and partners to ensure appropriate data governance and management practices are in place, an understanding of rights to access and ownership, as well as systems for safe collection, application, and sharing of data over its entire lifecycle.

13. <https://data.govt.nz/blog/open-by-design/>





# WHY BUDGETS MATTER

A core function of governments is to effectively manage public resources. This includes allocating, tracking, and reporting on public finances such as revenues, investments, debts, budgets, and spending.

Budgets bring to life decisions about government policies, programs, and projects, how they are funded, and meant to be implemented and delivered, at an international, national, state, territory, and local level.

**Easy-to-understand budget information and the ability to accurately track spending are essential for good governance, transparency, and accountability.**

## BUDGET DESIGN

Budget papers in Australia are published and made publicly available on government websites. They show government priorities, set the tone and the scene for the next 1-5 years.

Despite their critical role, how budgets are formed and managed is not well understood by most people. Nor is how communities, the public or private and social sector influence budget decisions and allocations.

For something as high profile and integral to how governments are run, it is surprising to discover how difficult the process is to follow, and information is to find, connect, and comprehend - for even relatively data and budget literate people.

Australian government budget documents are technical and designed for experts using accounting standards and templates requiring accounting knowledge.

Due to how they are published and the formats used, they are hard for the public, media, and others to decrypt, interrogate and compare.

Scrutiny of financial performance on behalf of the public is managed by oversight organisations such as the Parliamentary Budget Office and Auditor General.

The Federal Parliamentary Education Office website, Parliamentary Library and Department of Finance have some useful information. The NSW Government offers a 'How to Read Budget Papers'. These are helpful but high level and don't tell the whole story such as who sets priorities and how across jurisdictions, and if and when the public is or can be involved.

**The way budgets are currently designed, without community participation and with data published in inaccessible formats, is not serving the interests of the Australian public.**

**Understanding budgets is especially important for Indigenous communities, for whom funding comes from various portfolios, programs, and via multiple agencies at the local, state and federal government levels.**

For example, the Dharriwaa Elders Group's work relates directly to agencies and ministries related to Indigenous policy, water and the environment, health, housing, local government, education, communities and justice, finance and treasury, regional development and emergency management and crisis response.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group takes a holistic approach to improving outcomes for children and young people. This work ranges across many agencies such as those named above. Information about the resourcing of agencies, areas, and investments, services and programs that shape the lives of young people need to be clear, identifiable, understandable, and accessible in order for that funding to be successful and accountable.



## ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Budgets are cyclical in nature and budget estimates rely on access to quality and credible information.

Once final budget papers are released, it is currently impossible to find what spending commitments are spent, where, by whom and how.

Neither the Federal or NSW Governments have consolidated information into one single public website or live data platform.

Individual departments and agency budgets and expenses are often published in annual reports (PDFs) and spreadsheets on their websites, making them difficult and time consuming to analyse and audit.

Information about revenues, whether budgets are increasing or decreasing in real terms, and what's actually been spent or who has underspent is disconnected and very difficult to understand or track.

It also seems impossible to compare current commitment with previous years' commitments or track changes over time. This is made even more difficult when government department names and responsibilities change with ministerial portfolio changes and elections.

## CLARITY AND INNOVATION

Financial data is essential public infrastructure that can be made more easily accessible and reusable to drive social development and innovation.

Budget transparency, open budgets and participatory budgeting are becoming more common internationally.

Citizens' budgets, once a novelty, are a growing trend. Innovation is happening at a faster pace in countries where budgets have not previously been publicly available, existing systems are not in place, and in places like Europe, Africa, and South America where strong investment in civic technology and digital transformation is happening.

Some recent Federal and NSW budget documents have become a little more community friendly and focused. These 'citizen style budgets' offer a helpful high-level 'snapshot in time' of spending promises.

However, these budget documents tend to be regionally focused and lack the detail to be able to attribute spending to specific locations including for 'place-based' initiatives.

These budgets still only really tell one side of the story: either new spending or cuts to budgets. They do not tend to provide detail of where funding has been spent and on what or provide continuity from past announcements or allocations.

## PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION

Progressive governments are increasingly under pressure to find ways to embed broader inclusive democratic practices into more decision-making processes, other than simply voting at election time.

Participatory budgeting was first developed in Brazil in 1989. There are now thousands of participatory budgets around the world.

Australia has been very slow to embrace and introduce community participation in budgeting and procurement. Some progress is happening at a local level in a few states.

For example, the State of Victoria's Local Government Act 2020 mandates local councils to adopt a community engagement policy that *"includes deliberative engagement practices that are capable of being applied to the development of the Community Vision, the Council Plan, the Financial Plan and the Asset Plan"* (section 55).<sup>14</sup>

**We feature further local and international examples at the end of this paper.**

14. See: <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/local-government-act-2020/019>



## A better future for First Nations people

### Meeting our commitments to implement the Uluru Statement and Close the Gap

Genuine partnership between government and First Nations people is central to implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

#### The Uluru Statement

Work is underway to deliver the Government's commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full. \$75.1 million will be provided to prepare for the delivery of a referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice to Parliament in the Constitution.

The foundation for establishing agreement-making and truth-telling will also be laid, through \$5.8 million to fund the first step in delivering the Government's \$277 million election commitment to establish an independent Makarrata Commission.

#### Closing the Gap

The Budget demonstrates the Government's commitment to drive progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Delivering on priority reforms, and providing increased funding to achieve the socio-economic targets, will result in improved outcomes for all First Nations people.

#### Working in partnership

The Budget will fund the establishment of new policy partnerships on Housing and Early Childhood Care and Development. This will be key to driving further progress towards Closing the Gap.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations will also receive funds to increase their capacity to deliver for First Nations people. The Government will provide more resourcing to these organisations working in justice, housing, health, community, arts and cultural heritage conservation.



**\$99 million**

for justice initiatives



**\$100 million**

for housing and essential infrastructure in NT homelands



**\$314.8 million**

for First Nations health infrastructure and training

## Health

New funding for the:

- **\$15.3 million** Key Health Worker Accommodation across Far West Local Health District.
- **\$10.0 million** Broken Hill Hospital Emergency Department.

Continued delivery of the:

- **\$30.0 million** Wentworth Health Service redevelopment.

## Transport

- **\$5.5 million** to continue sealing for the Silver City and Cobb Highways.

## Stronger Communities

- **\$13.3 million** for major upgrades to the Bourke Police Station.

## Planning and Environment

- **\$47.0 million** to improve critical water supply infrastructure for Wilcannia (state and federally funded).
- **\$45.5 million** to improve critical water infrastructure by replacing pumps along the Nyngan to Cobar pipeline (state and federally funded).
- **\$40.0 million** to deliver new and upgraded quality homes for First Nations people through the Aboriginal Housing Office.

## Regional NSW

Grants to boost local economies, including:

- At least **\$30.0 million** in digital connectivity improvements to move premises off satellite to fixed wireless under the Gig State Program and improve mobile coverage under the Mobile Connectivity Active Sharing partnerships.

- **\$4.0 million** for the Aboriginal Partnerships program to deliver employment, business development and economic prosperity in First Nations communities.
- **\$2.0 million** to support and strengthen regional communities and councils, including priority projects and partnerships.
- **\$1.9 million** for local amenities including change rooms, restrooms and the Aero Club Clubhouse.
- **\$757,494** to develop women's sporting facilities and community infrastructure in the Unincorporated Far West Region.
- **\$400,000** to upgrade James King Park and Junction Island Nature Reserve in Wentworth.
- **\$374,000** to install the Buronga Wetlands to Riverfront shared way.
- **\$284,377** to construct the Balranald Creative Community Learning Centre.

## Customer Service

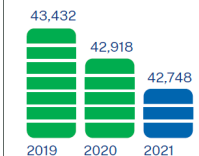
- **\$7.3 million** for the Mission-Critical Emergency Services Messaging Program.

## Local Government Areas

Balranald, Bourke, Brewarrina, Broken Hill, Central Darling, Cobar, Walgett and Wentworth



## Population



## 2020-21 Growth Rate

**-0.4%**



## Key Industries

Education & Training, Mining, Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing, Health Care & Social Assistance, Education & Training



Figure 5: Federal Government 2021 - 2022 Budget Paper.

Figure 6: NSW 2021 - 2022 Budget showing regional allocations.



# LINKING REVENUES TO BUDGETS

Budgets include income and revenue generated from taxes, fines, royalties, rates, and other sources of revenue such as from poker machines.

Aside from the useful data provided by Revenue NSW on fines (explored below), there is no way to easily find, present, and analyse place based, local revenue streams so communities understand what income their locality generates.

Beyond local council rates, project and company payments are made to governments from large industries for fees, licences, or royalties.

It is not possible to find what income natural resources, agriculture and extractive industries generate – such as water, mining, oil, gas, infrastructure, and renewable energy projects - and how these may or may not benefit communities.

Revenue NSW provides useful and accessible 'dashboards' with information about fines issued by police and courts which can be looked at by postcode – this is a leading example of practice within the NSW Government.

The dashboards<sup>15</sup> provide information at the postcode level about fines issued by age group and financial year, overdue fines and Work and Development Orders.

Organisations (such as Dharriwaa Elders Group) can use these dashboards to understand the fine burden in their local area and to track the impact of their work which includes supporting people to work off debt that isn't able to be legally challenged or written off for other reasons.

**Disentangling the relationship between place, revenues and budgets means reckoning with what money is coming out of a community into local council, state or federal government revenue and what is coming back through services and investments.**

**It also means asking who is bearing the cost of these revenue streams, particularly when they result from harmful practices such as over-policing or gambling.**

**Having to buy drinking water and no longer being able to source river foods has a direct relationship to revenues of the cotton and other agricultural industries.**

## POLICE INVESTMENT AND REVENUES

Walgett presents a striking case of how significant investment in policing and police institutions can contribute to a disproportionate fine burden on the community, reinforcing cycles of criminalisation and disadvantage.

In the past decade two of the most significant investments in infrastructure in Walgett have been a new \$16 million police station and the new \$7.5 million PCYC. At the same time, Walgett has experienced over-policing, including during the COVID response leading to high levels of fine debt amongst Aboriginal people.

Based on analysis of Revenue NSW data, the overdue fine burden in Walgett postcode area is more than \$1 million for a population of around 2,000 people, with a median weekly household income of \$1,359 (according to the 2021 Census).<sup>16</sup>

**Walgett was found to have the highest rate of COVID fines issued per capita in NSW to a total of 168 COVID fines totalling \$148,480 issued between July 2020 and October 2021.**

15. [www.nsw.gov.au/money-and-taxes/fines-and-fees/support-and-community-services/community-outreach](http://www.nsw.gov.au/money-and-taxes/fines-and-fees/support-and-community-services/community-outreach)

16. See: Dealing with Fines Briefing Paper - [www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali/fines/briefing-paper](http://www.dharriwaaeldersgroup.org.au/index.php/yuwayangarrali/fines/briefing-paper).



## ADMINISTRATION OF COVID FINES

Analysis of COVID fines practice found that “*fines were not issued evenly across Sydney and NSW... [instead] residents in some of the most disadvantaged communities in the state, particularly children and highly populous Aboriginal communities, were targeted heavily.*”<sup>17</sup>

The high issuing of COVID fines was at odds with comments made to the Local Emergency Management Committee and directly to community groups by Walgett Police. Walgett Police’s own advice to community groups was that most residents were following regulations.

**Court action against COVID fines taken by Redfern Legal Service, including drawing directly on Walgett experiences, led to the NSW Government withdrawing 33,121 fines that were too vague.**

While Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Dharriwaa Elders Group were commended for the community-led approach to COVID in Walgett, they were also left to deal with the social impacts of the tens of thousands of dollars’ worth of fines given to people who cannot afford to pay them, without extra appropriate public resourcing for this work.

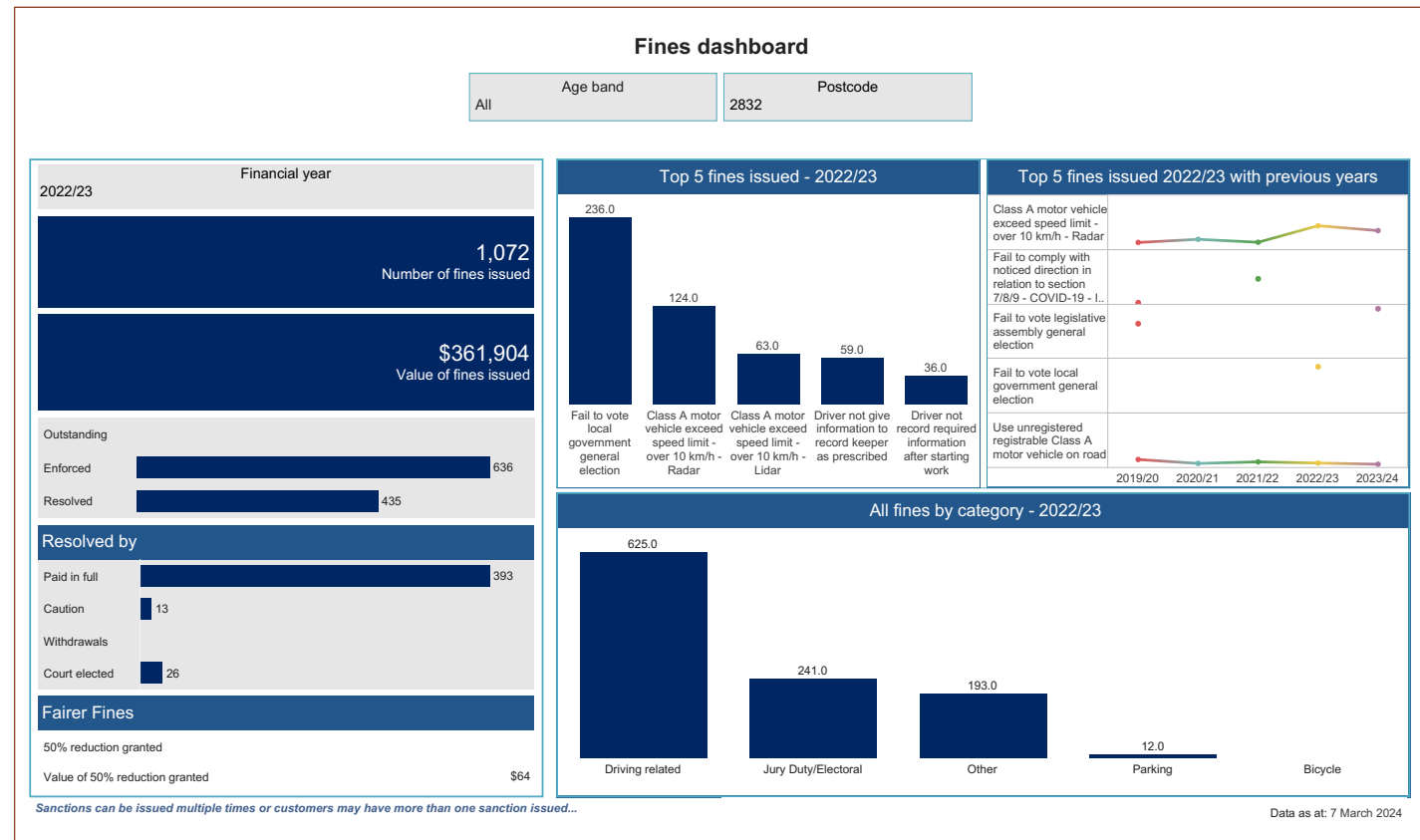


Figure 7: Screenshot from Revenue NSW Dashboard 25 March 2023 data as at 7 March 2024

See: [https://www.apps09.revenue.nsw.gov.au/customer\\_service/forms/dashboard/fine](https://www.apps09.revenue.nsw.gov.au/customer_service/forms/dashboard/fine)

17. Source: Luke McNamara, Jacky Gan, Samuel Mullins, Chloe Waine and Chelsi Williams, COVID-19 Criminalisation in NSW: A ‘Law and Order’ Response to a Public Health Crisis?, UNSW Centre for Crime, Law & Justice, November 2022, p.5.





## LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Another important dimension of the relationship between revenues and budgets in a particular place is about which level of government holds responsibility for ensuring basic human rights, such as access to drinkable water.

The limited resources and capability of remote local councils, where income from rates are lower than big towns and cities, is a real concern in regional NSW.

This can lead to lack of essential local services to communities such as Walgett in the areas of waste, recycling, water management, and transport.

Recently, when the NSW Government agreed to step in to support action on the quality of Walgett's drinking water, the relevant Minister, The Hon. Rose Jackson MLC explicitly recognised that years of access to poor quality drinking water in Walgett was due to state government and agencies being unwilling to act when the local council lacked the capability or financial base to do so:

“

***Over a number of years the people of Walgett, which is a disadvantaged, low-income community with a high percentage of Aboriginal people, were essentially unable to drink tap water. They had to spend money to drink bottled water or sweet, unhealthy alternatives.***

***When Labor was elected to government, I asked why that had happened and how long the town had been waiting to switch back to the much healthier, higher quality, cleaner and safer river water source.***

***The answer was that there had been water in that river for years but the switch back to river water had not happened because the various agencies responsible for making it happen did not really care.***

***To be clear, Walgett Shire Council is the local water utility service. It is primarily responsible for delivering drinking water to the community. But Walgett Shire Council, like a lot of our regional***

***councils, particularly those in Far West New South Wales, does not have a high rate base or a high population base, so it is not flush with funds.***

***Given that Walgett has demonstrated for years that it is not equipped with the capability, resources, skills or capacity to deliver that service, it is utterly unacceptable that the New South Wales Government would say to a town like Walgett that it is not the Government's problem but the problem of Walgett Shire Council.***

***It is the State Government's job to ensure that people in regional New South Wales have access to clean and safe drinking water.***

***Sometimes we partner with local water utilities to do that. We have great partnerships with local councils to deliver that service. But when a local council does not have the capacity to do that, we must step in.<sup>18</sup>***

”

The case of Walgett highlights the complexity of considering revenues and budget allocations in a remote place facing specific challenges with overlapping responsibilities of three levels of government.

18. Source: The Hon. Rose Jackson (Minister for Water, Minister for Housing, Minister for Homelessness, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Youth, and Minister for the North Coast), Ministerial Statement



**In order for communities to engage in an informed way with the development and delivery of policies and programs to address critical issues such as youth wellbeing, access to drinking water, and emergency response - their ACCOs need staff resources and access to accurate, timely, accessible and linked data about local revenues, government budget allocations, real spending, contract details, and evaluations.**



Figure 8: Vanessa Hickey from the Dharriwaa Elders Group at CAPO Meeting.



## COMMUNITY ADMINISTRATIVE DATA LINKAGE

Under Priority Reform Four of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australian governments agreed to “share available, disaggregated regional data and information with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities on Closing the Gap, subject to meeting privacy requirements”.

### Access to government data is a fundamental step towards Indigenous Data Governance.

It enables communities to build evidence, develop deeper understanding and insights and inform locally-led responses to issues that are a community priority. However, despite being a Closing the Gap priority, obtaining relevant data at the community level is a major challenge for ACCOs.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li are collaborating on a data linkage project focussed on children and young people in Walgett, led by the Dharriwaa Elders' Group in partnership with UNSW researchers.

The study has ethical approval from the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC) and support from the Dharriwaa Elders Group and the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service.

It aims to connect de-identified data from approximately 25 administrative datasets held by 6 different government agencies, through the Centre for Health Record Linkage (CHeReL)<sup>19</sup> (subject to ethics and data custodian approvals).

Analysis of the data will give ACCOs a deeper understanding of how children and young people interact with different services over time and how this affects them.

The project will:

- provide evidence of institutional pathways
- illustrate service use and gaps in services
- show the impact of the work to improve outcomes for children and young people.

This information can support community-led planning and advocacy to ensure young people get access to appropriate support and services.

Administrative data linkage studies also provide a way to estimate government spending and details of service use, in the absence of transparent information about how much funding is being allocated to which services in the community.

Previous research by researchers at UNSW has used a range of publicly available data to allocate unit costs to each service interaction.

For example:

- the annual Productivity Commission Report on Government Services (ROGS)<sup>20</sup> provides detailed average costs on a range of government services at the state level
- the Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority (IHACPA) hosts the National Hospital Cost Data Collection (NHCDC),<sup>21</sup> which provides detailed costs of hospital services at the state level
- the MBS Schedule<sup>22</sup> provides information about medical services costs subsidised by the Australian Government, at the individual service level
- other unit cost information can be obtained from annual reports of different government agencies.

By allocating unit costs to services used by individuals represented in linked administrative data it is possible to derive total costs (i.e. government expenditure) per person and over time.

19. [www.cherel.org.au/about-us](http://www.cherel.org.au/about-us)

20. [www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023](http://www.pc.gov.au/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2023)

21. [www.ihacpa.gov.au/health-care/costing/national-hospital-cost-data-collection](http://www.ihacpa.gov.au/health-care/costing/national-hospital-cost-data-collection)

22. [www.mbsonline.gov.au/](http://www.mbsonline.gov.au/)



These could be aggregated to estimate the total cost for a particular cohort or even a whole community (depending on how comprehensive the linked dataset is).

Some examples of how UNSW and other researchers have previously used linked data to understand the cost of government services (and cost savings achieved through positive interventions) include:

- lifecourse institutional costs of homelessness for vulnerable groups<sup>23</sup>
- evaluating the impact of hospital based drug and alcohol consultation liaison services<sup>24</sup>
- health care use and costs at the end of life<sup>25</sup>
- evaluation of the Community Restorative Centre's AOD and reintegration programs<sup>26</sup>
- exiting prison with complex support needs: the role of housing assistance.<sup>27</sup>

While these examples are not specific for a whole community, this would be possible using similar approaches with data from a range of agencies for

a whole area, aggregating up from individuals to the community level.

Data linkage studies are a resource intensive process. It is difficult for ACCOs to access data without research partners such as universities who have experience and resources to navigate the process and help to analyse the data.

Yuwaya Ngarra-li's Data Linkage Briefing Paper<sup>28</sup> details the process of developing the partnership's linked data study for holistic community-led research and evaluation that serves community priorities.

The aim of the paper is to share Yuwaya Ngarra-li's experiences and provide guidance to other communities if they are considering a data linkage project.

### Publicly available government linked data

A leading example of a publicly available linked data asset is PeopleWA.<sup>29</sup>

PeopleWA is a whole-of-government tool developed in 2022 by the WA Government and administered by the Office of Digital Government in collaboration with participating agencies.

WA has been linking data for over 25 years. The goal of the PeopleWA tool is to increase the scale and complexity of linkages, helping to better inform policy, research and service delivery.

Government agencies, researchers, and non-profit organisations with projects and activities intended to benefit the Western Australian public can apply to use the linked data asset for their research. New data sets are added to meet changing policy and research needs.

23. [www.apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2012-05/apo-nid31628.pdf](http://www.apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2012-05/apo-nid31628.pdf)

24. [www.jsatjournal.com/article/S0740-5472\(16\)30199-4/fulltext](http://www.jsatjournal.com/article/S0740-5472(16)30199-4/fulltext)

25. [www.bmcpalliatcare.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12904-017-0213-0](http://www.bmcpalliatcare.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12904-017-0213-0)

26. [www.crcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CRC-AOD-Evaluation-final-report-1Dec21.pdf](http://www.crcnsw.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/CRC-AOD-Evaluation-final-report-1Dec21.pdf)

27. [www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/361](http://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/final-reports/361)

28. Yuwaya Ngarra-li Briefing Paper: Data Linkage, Reeve R, McCausland R, MacGillivray P, Robinson V (2024), Yuwaya Ngarra-li Publications: [www.unsw.edu.au/walgett-partnership/research-evaluation/data-linkage-project](http://www.unsw.edu.au/walgett-partnership/research-evaluation/data-linkage-project)

29. <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/departments-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/office-of-digital-government/peoplewa>





Figure 9: Namoi Village in flood





# CONNECTING BUDGETS AND CONTRACTS

Government agencies have their own budgets and are allocated spending for capital assets, operations, staff salaries and labour hire.

A large part of the budget is spent via external suppliers and partners through contracts or purchase orders and arrangements such as investments, subsidies, grants and incentives.

Goods, services, programs, projects and works go through a competitive procurement or grant process, leading to contracts. In some instances, unsolicited proposals are an avenue for partnerships between governments and the private and social sectors. These are mostly with large businesses and charities.

When new budgets and forecasts are being created, governments often use past expenditure and approaches as a reference to work out how much things cost and apply this to new project or program business cases and budgets.

In our previous paper, Creating Better Futures with Contracts, we outlined the disconnect between the policy, budget, plans, and the lack of quality information about contracts, variations, delivery, outcomes, and evaluations. A barrier in NSW to access data about contracts is the reporting threshold of \$150,000.

The lack of reflection, learning, and evidence about costs, what has worked well and what hasn't, means that budgets and contracting approaches stay the same whether they deliver a good outcome or not.

Information about previous contract delivery details, actual costs, successes, effectiveness, failures, and benefits are needed for meaningful analysis by public servants required to make evidence based and informed decisions about future budgets and costs.

Information about previous contracts would also be a helpful resource for ACCOs and local enterprises when developing proposals and tenders.

## FUNDING ALLOCATIONS AND THRESHOLDS

Budget limits and indications of what funding is available for projects and tenders (approaches to market) is hard to find and assess.

The details of the amounts departments have budgeted and are prepared to pay is sometimes published with planned procurement notices but not easily accessible, connected to or mentioned in tender information.

Making this budget threshold information easier to find for people preparing tenders would increase

transparency, fairness, and improve engagement with ACCOs, social enterprises, small businesses - and help avoid wasted efforts.

## ESTABLISHING A CLEAR CONNECTION BETWEEN BUDGET AND CONTRACT CYCLES

What happens at the end of department 'budget' allocations and programs to deliver services is currently not clearly explained or easily found.

Access to information about when contracts are meant to end and what is planned next is equally hard to find. This is a source of stress for small, rural and remote communities, especially when it comes to support services for specific and often vulnerable cohorts – for example, the Dharriwaa Elders Group's work with Elders and Aboriginal children and young people.

**Rather than enabling accountability and servicing community and government needs, existing data systems and processes are creating a barrier to progress for Indigenous communities and working against the shared efforts by governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO) under Closing the Gap.**

## CURRENT STATE



Information about revenues is scarce or not publicly available in accessible formats

### Revenues



### Policies



### Programs/ Projects

Program information is very limited even if made available



### Budget

Budget details are published in inaccessible formats

No way to compare changes over time

Actual spending unable to be tracked publicly



### Plan

Plans are sometimes published with budget allocations

Not easily found, or connected to tender information.



### Source supplier/s

Most panels are closed

Processes usually favour large suppliers, not collaborations



### Approach to market (Tender)

Available on Federal and NSW platforms, Local not always

In its current state, not very usable

Available as open data for reuse



### Select supplier/s

Selection is a closed and opaque process with no community involvement



### Award (Notices)

Open data is available on platforms, Federal (over \$10,000) NSW (over \$150,000)



### Contract

Contract negotiations, terms and conditions are unavailable and unable to be monitored



### Manage

No way to provide feedback about how and where services are being delivered or not



### Deliver

Information lacks detail including place-based outcomes, final cost, value, and impact hard to determine



### Evaluate

If/when evaluations happen, details are not made available, happen too late to impact next budget or contract cycle

Information is not publicly available, if it is it's disconnected and in inaccessible formats

The public and communities currently have limited access to information about and little to no participation in budgets, policy delivery, plans, approaches to market and contracts awarded.

There is no way that communities can access information and track revenues, budgets, to spending, procurement, grants and contracting processes - or understand how this connects to places, Closing the Gap and wellbeing targets or outcomes for any level of government.



## FUTURE STATE

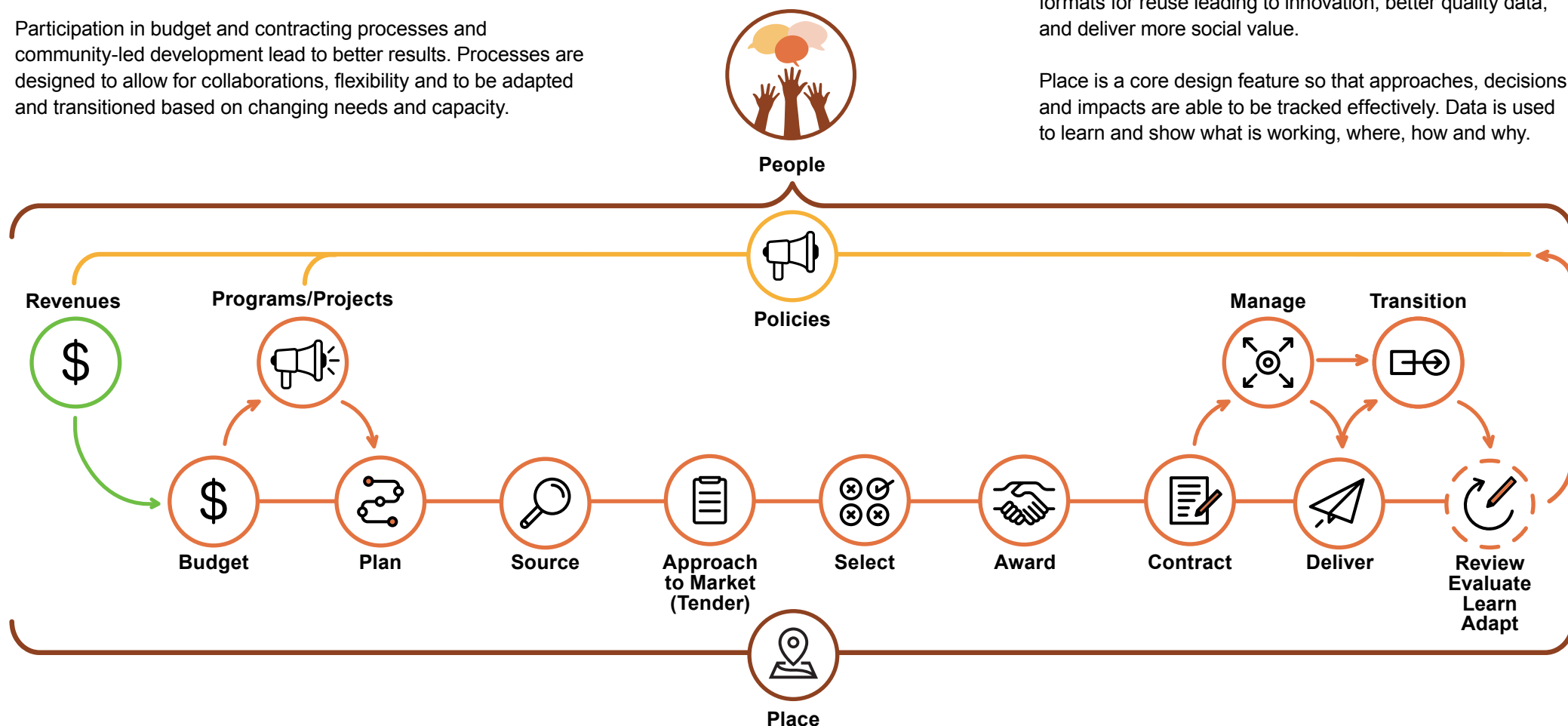
### DATA AND SYSTEMS PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY, TRANSPARENCY AND CLARITY.

Accurate, quality information is available in formats designed for and with communities.

Participation in budget and contracting processes and community-led development lead to better results. Processes are designed to allow for collaborations, flexibility and to be adapted and transitioned based on changing needs and capacity.

Data about revenues, budgets, programs and projects are open and accessible in human and machine readable formats for reuse leading to innovation, better quality data, and deliver more social value.

Place is a core design feature so that approaches, decisions and impacts are able to be tracked effectively. Data is used to learn and show what is working, where, how and why.





# RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

## HOW BUDGETS ARE PUBLISHED

Government and spending decisions are made both through annual budgets and also through “announcements” at other times.

Historically, this information has been shared with the public in formats that do not enable or encourage easy interpretation, data reuse or analysis.

Most budget papers or announcements are published as media releases and documents, often lengthy PDFs (known as ‘glossies’) and in some instances web pages (HTML), and spreadsheets.

More recently, governments have started producing budget summaries for a public audience, however these are high level without an ability to dig down to specific details or community level or connect one year’s budget to another to track past commitments or allocations.

Our research shows there is a lot more Australian governments could be doing to improve accountability.

**The aim of this project was to assess the publicly available information and data about Indigenous expenditure, budget allocations and spending in Walgett.**

This was motivated by the Dharriwaa Elders Group’s long term goal to support the redirection of government funding towards strengths-based, holistic, community-led initiatives and wanting access to information to understand whether or not resources are shifting.

We have used examples from our work to support the wellbeing of children and young people to illustrate how these issues play out in Walgett.

The research is from the perspective of an ACCO, working with university collaborators and external partners, such as Nook Studios, with data and financial transparency expertise.

As a starting point, this collaboration already represents more access to expertise and resources than many organisations and place-based initiatives have.

Even with that expertise, we found that it is currently not possible to easily access or understand budget allocations and spending by place.

This section is divided into four parts with some details of research and findings:







## 1. ACCESSING AND UNDERSTANDING BUDGET INFORMATION

### THE INFORMATION EXPERIENCE

To try to understand budget allocations or spending in Walgett for the 2021-2022 budget year, we examined over 3700 pages of documents from Federal and NSW Governments.

Local Government reports were only available up until 2021. This is an enormous volume of disconnected information to try to analyse.

Despite the volume, it still does not provide an adequate and accurate picture of expenditure and financial decisions that have been made at a national, state or local level.

Anyone external to government wanting to access and analyse government spending and commitments every year, would have to go through a similar experience.

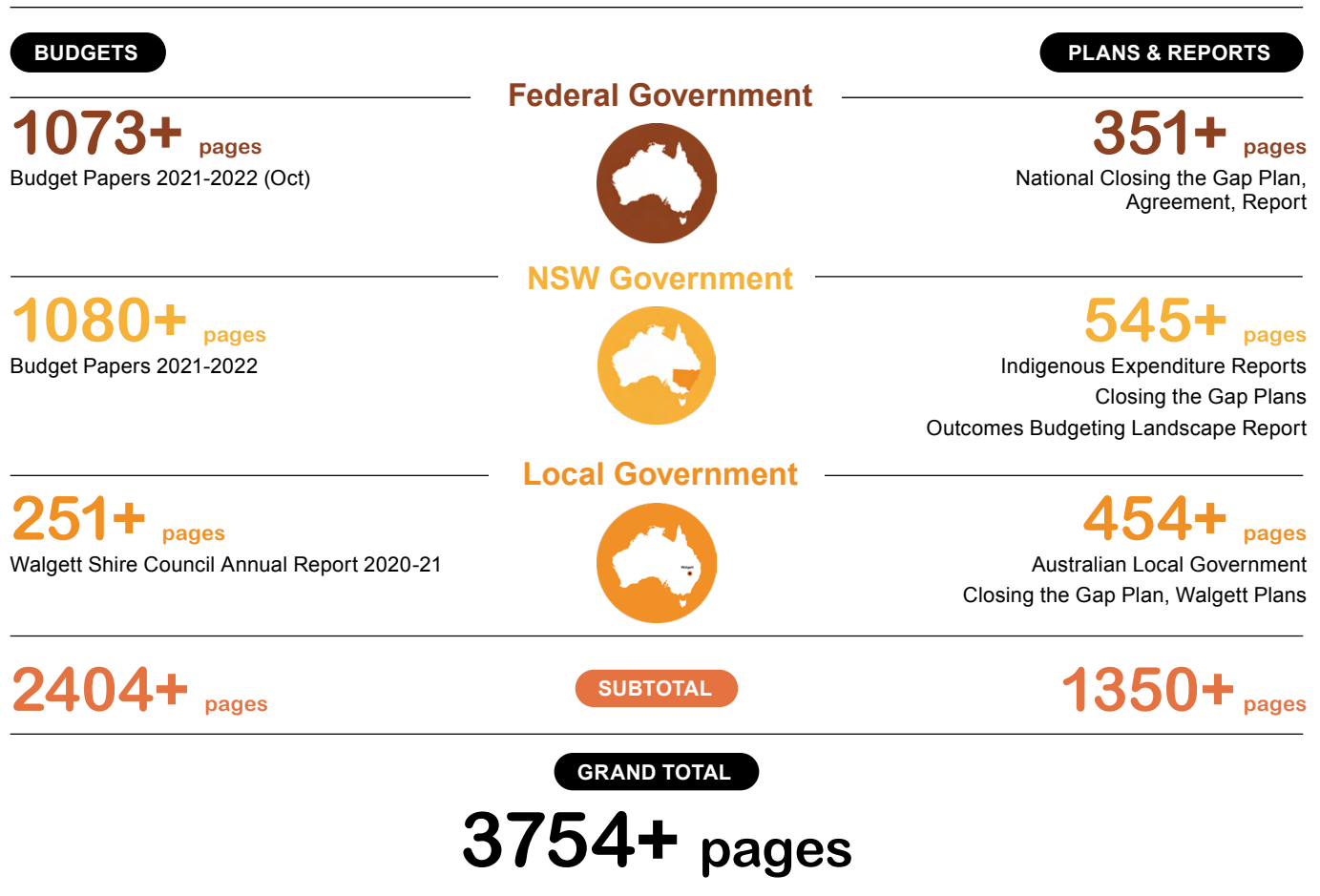


Figure 10: Number of documents related to the 2021-2022 budget reviewed. This large volume of information is required reading for anyone to understand and analyse budgets and Indigenous funding allocations.



## ATTEMPTS TO FIND FINANCIAL INFORMATION

At the NSW level, the Treasury Documents Library<sup>30</sup> is a comprehensive source of documents, mostly PDF downloads. Financial reporting includes the report of state finances, monthly statements, and a statement of uncommitted funds and links to the Treasury Library. The documents don't appear under the Library category or topics filter.

The Documents Library had 1071 documents at time of searching and is keyword searchable. There were no results for 'Indigenous' and only 1 for 'Aboriginal'.

Some NSW Budget information exists in Excel spreadsheets but only provides high level Cash Flow, Operating Statements, Balance Sheets Figures and does not contain the detailed subcategories contained in the Budget Papers, such as expenses/initiatives by cluster.

Background information is identified as 'open data' in Excel spreadsheets. This includes budgeted financial statements, historical fiscal indicators, and macro-economic indicators. It's not clear if APIs (application programming interfaces) are available to allow for faster processing of such data.

## CHALLENGES WITH TRACING CHANGES OVER TIME

While the Federal and NSW Governments publish a lot of information about their budgets, there is little accessibility from a community perspective to understand allocations, how they affect them or their area and to track spending or changing commitments over time.

Across the array of documents, there are often new or different numbers associated with similar or similar-sounding programs or initiatives. This makes it very challenging to trace new spending compared to old spending, analyse or identify changes in volume of funds or focus.

The inability to easily view and interrogate and compare budgets over time means it is difficult to determine what allocations are short-term funding agreements and 'pilot' programs that don't go through to long-run implementation or long term investments.

One to three year funding cycles don't allow for new community services to develop, learn and adapt to changing needs, and impacts the effectiveness of services and outcomes. This is further complicated by changes in government following elections and whenever ministerial portfolios change (machinery of government).

With the change of Federal Government over our research period, the initial set of PDFs reviewed were subsequently archived and the website states:

*"The following Australian Government Agencies' held their Portfolio Budget Statements on their websites at the time of release."*<sup>31</sup>

The links to previous years budget statements are available in PDFs online at The Australian Government Organisations Register (AGOR), however this is not linked to on the archive.budget.gov.au pages.

The upheaval of government administrative structure, systems and web services, impacts accountability and productivity. Any time governments or departments change, information becomes less accessible, finances harder to account for, and our economic history is lost.

The Federal Government has PDF versions of its budgets from 1901 to present day on the Budget Archive website. The NSW Government Budget Archive website has state budgets from 1989 to present day. It could include links to past department's individual budgets for each financial year to ensure accountability.

30. See: <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/documents-resources/documents-library>

31. See: <https://archive.budget.gov.au/2021-22/>



## 2. ANALYSING BUDGETS OR SPENDING BY PLACE

A priority for ACCOs is being able to access comprehensive budget allocations and spending happening in their location. This is a frequent request not only from organisations but also from community members trying to understand what's available in their area.

When communities have requested further investment in an area, government officials regularly ask community organisations to do “service mapping” themselves.

From previous discussions Dharriwaa Elders Group and Yuwaya Ngarra-li UNSW colleagues have had with public servants, Members of Parliament and relevant Ministers, we understand that the inability to understand spending by place is a constraint and concern within government as well.

Our research reinforced the difficulty of accessing accurate information about budget allocations and spending by place, even with good faith attempts to do this within government. An example of a public facing location service is the [NSW Data Analytics Centre My Budget mapping tool](https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/my-budget)<sup>32</sup> that shows a limited amount of data.

**Getting a clear and accurate picture of location and community level expenditure or place based allocations is currently challenging due to a number of factors outlined below.**

### UNDERSTANDING ADMINISTRATIVE BOUNDARIES

Many types of administrative boundaries exist in NSW and Australia. They can vary significantly in terms of size, area, location, naming protocols, population, function, and departmental jurisdiction.

These boundaries also overlap in many ways and have changed in recent years.

This makes the process of pinpointing government spending to specific geographic locations, to determine whether it was general government expenditure and/or specific Indigenous expenditure extremely hard.

Walgett, as is the case with many towns across Australia, sits within multiple government, administrative, and electoral boundaries.

Types of administrative boundaries include:

- postcodes
- suburbs
- Local Government Areas (LGAs)

- regional areas (eg. “Far West” as designated by the NSW Government, “North Western” as designated by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, “Murdi Paaki” in terms of Aboriginal Regional Alliances)
- towns (eg. used by the Clontarf Foundation a not for profit funded in part by NSW Government, mentioned in the Budget Overview)
- electoral boundaries (Parkes for federal and Barwon for state)
- Language and Nations groups used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- NSW Local Aboriginal Land Council (“LALC”) boundaries
- Local Health Districts (LHDs) used by NSW Health
- Enrolment Areas used by Education NSW
- Police Area Commands and Police Districts used by NSW Police
- Catchment Areas used by the NSW Planning and Environment, Water
- Australian Bureau of Statistics boundaries.

32. <https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/my-budget>



For the type of analysis required by a community such as Walgett, data at a very granular level is required.

The Walgett Shire Council covers an area of 22,336 km<sup>2</sup> and borders Queensland. It includes five postcodes:



Community perspectives and identity around place can differ from official geographic boundaries.

For example, Aboriginal people in Walgett and the nearby villages of Gingie and Namoi identify themselves as a community distinct from nearby towns such as Lightning Ridge, which is 75kms and 50 minutes drive away. However, people from outside the area regularly conflate the Walgett Local Government Area with Walgett town.

The postcode of Walgett also includes small non-Aboriginal farming villages and non-Aboriginal rural properties and so doesn't accurately capture information the Dharriwaa Elders Group is often seeking about Walgett's Aboriginal community. As explored further below, government data gathering such as the Census, does not always manage to effectively engage community members and may contain serious inaccuracies while influencing budget decisions and allocations.

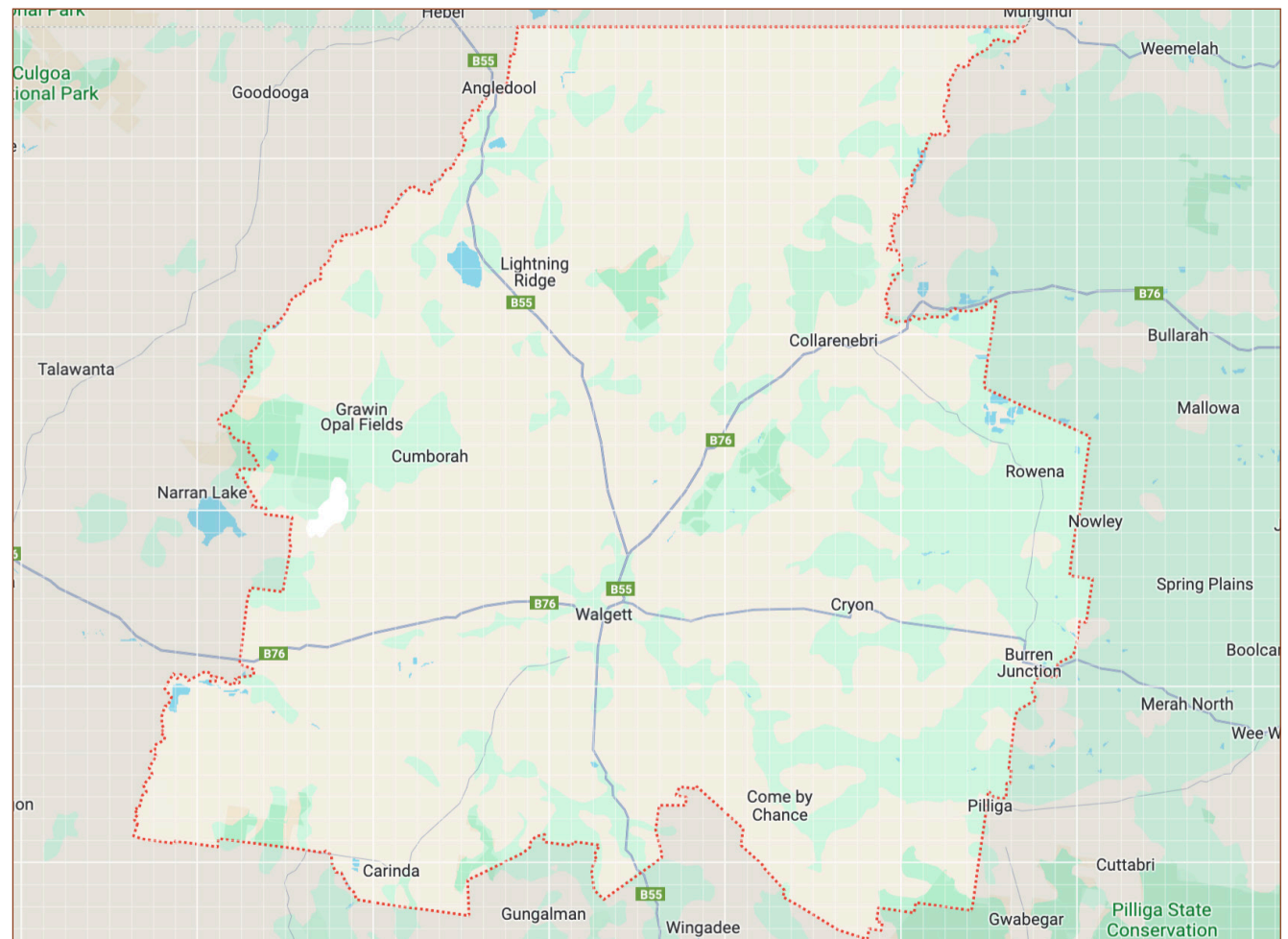


Figure 11: Google map showing the outline of the Walgett Local Government Area





## NSW'S MY BUDGET

Governments are attempting to link spending to place through piloting new approaches, such as the NSW “My Budget”.<sup>33</sup> The website presented 2022-2023 information in an interactive map and charts; Mapping the budget, Where the money goes, Where the money comes from.

Location search results for Walgett using the My Budget website showed no results.

Produced by the NSW Data Analytics Centre, the My Budget website was a step forward. That said, it was a confusing user experience. Not all budget paper information appeared and it didn’t state which boundaries were used (we assume Local Government Areas).

In terms of accessibility and usability, the pop up information lacked detail and links to further information. If you highlighted a type of spend you couldn’t navigate back to seeing everything. It would have been helpful to show a list and have a way to filter the information based on other data fields.

With the change of government in 2023, the web service appeared as archived. The map has since reappeared showing only the 2023-2024 budget information and data visualisations with small text that are hard to read.

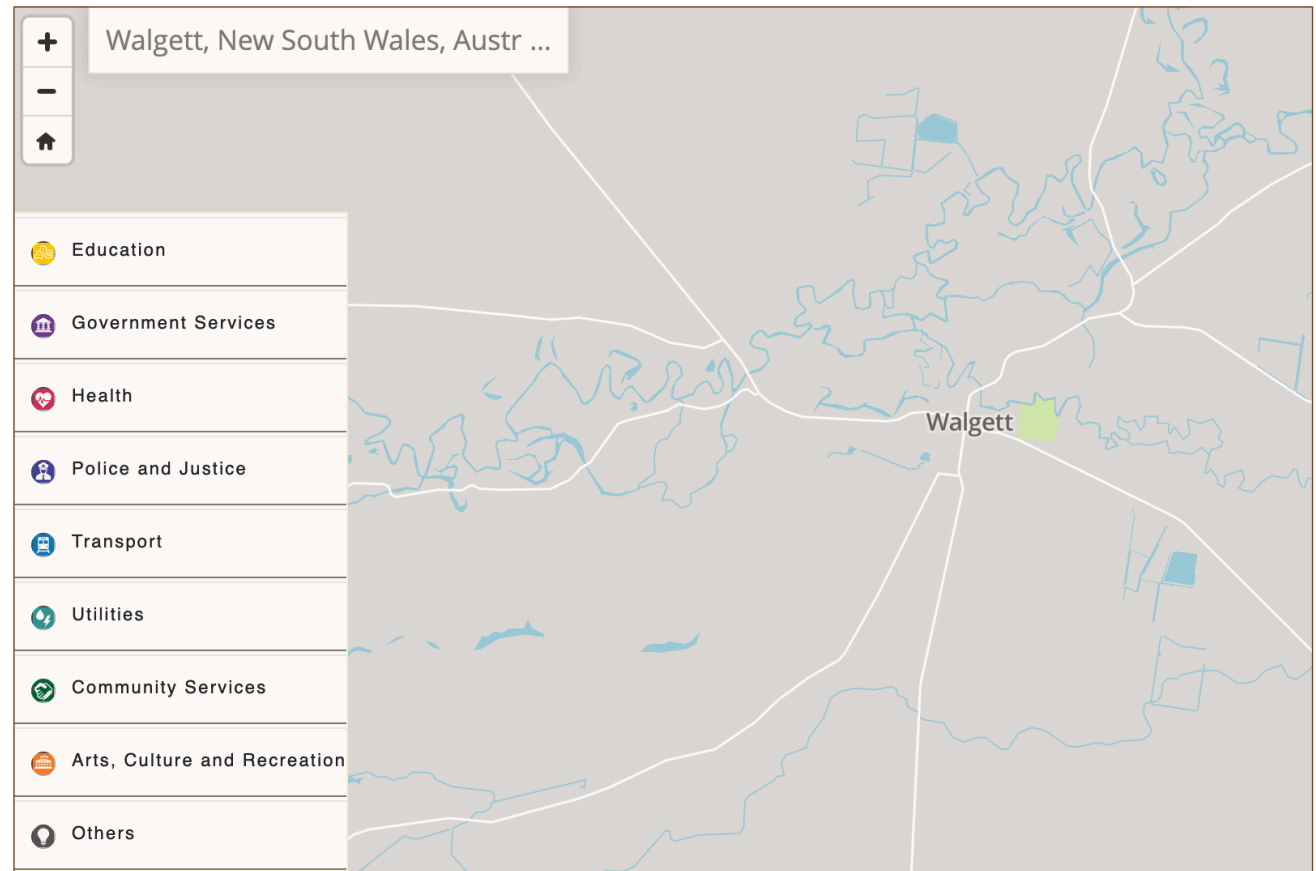


Figure 12: My Budget map showing Walgett, Source: [www.budget.nsw.gov.au/my-budget](http://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/my-budget)

33. See: <https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/my-budget>



## NSW GEOGRAPHIC ESTIMATES

The Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report 2021 - 2022 (CIER)<sup>34</sup> is the NSW Government's exercise to understand its 'Indigenous Expenditure'.

NSW Treasury attempts to make some geographic estimates of spending, while acknowledging that expenditure disbursements based on geographic or administrative boundaries are not yet available.

The maps in the report are helpful. They show that there is potential for a transparent, dynamic, and accountable system to present the data in an interactive format.

The map in figure 14 shows the share of expenditure estimated attributable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by service location 2020 -2021. Walgett LGA is in the 50%-75% range.

To be useful and meaningful this could link the amount of expenditure, the description of what it is for, the department responsible for the spending, and actuals, overages, and underspend.

**Map 3: Share of expenditure attributable to First Nations people by service location – 2020–21**

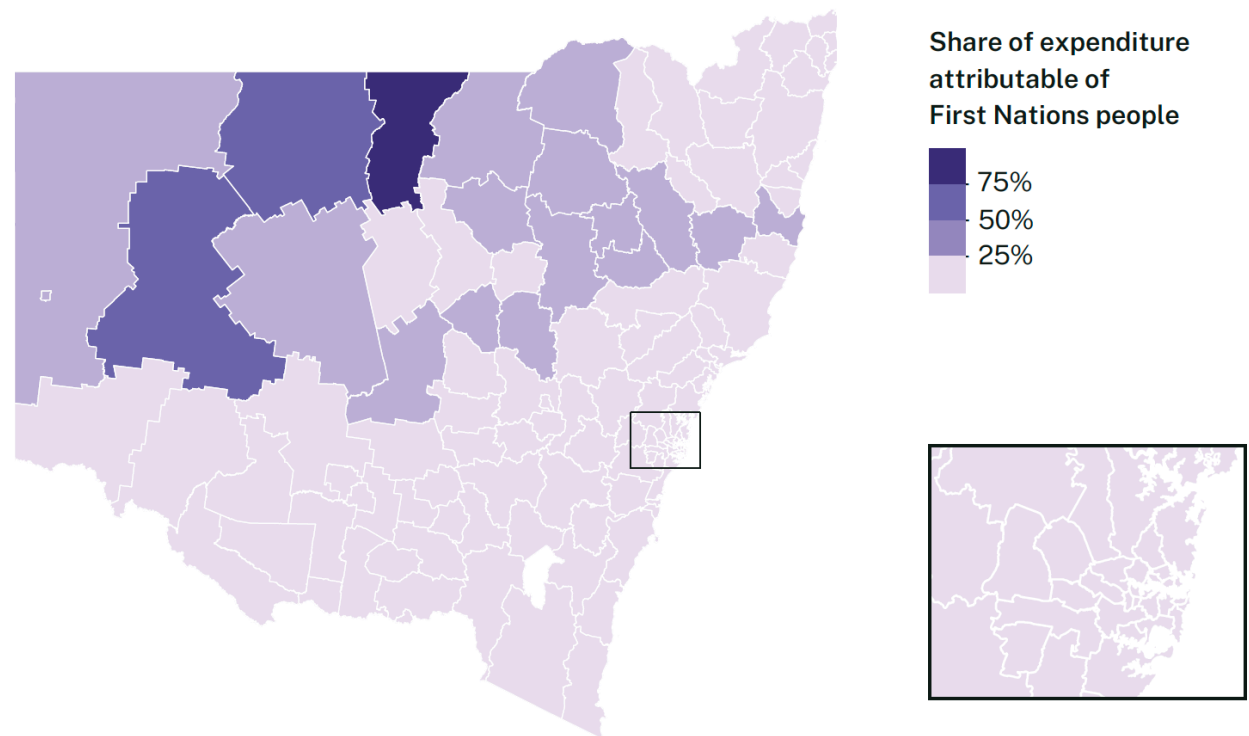


Figure 13: Share of expenditure attributable to First Nations people by service location - 2020 - 2021 (CIER p. 49)

34. Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report 2021 - 2022 (CIER): <https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-10/20221021-comprehensive-indigenous-expenditure-report.pdf>



### 3. UNDERSTANDING 'INDIGENOUS EXPENDITURE'

Where and how the billions of dollars identified as Indigenous expenditure are spent every year is extremely hard to find at all levels of government. This is despite efforts to improve processes such as outcomes budgeting and tracking Closing the Gap outcomes.

Up until recently, there have been no specific budget papers or reports that seek to understand investments associated with Closing the Gap or Indigenous expenditure.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) is tasked to lead and coordinate the development and implementation of Closing the Gap targets. During our research phase there was no specific sub-paper for Indigenous initiatives and it was not clear from the NIAA website the degree to which they contribute to the Federal Budget.

#### NSW GOVERNMENT EFFORTS AND CHALLENGES

In the 2020 - 2021 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcome Budgeting Landscape Report, NSW Treasury made a recommendation for the lack of a specific budget paper to be rectified at the NSW level by developing specific reports on Indigenous expenditure.

Subsequently, the NSW Government released an Interim Indigenous Expenditure Report (IIER)<sup>35</sup> in November 2021 and the Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report (CIER) in September 2022. The IIER was not mentioned in any budget websites or papers. This changed in 2022-2023 when Indigenous Expenditure was included with a high level breakdown of spending areas in the 'Budget Overview' under the title Empowering First Nations communities.<sup>36</sup> Interestingly, the IER documents are still not able to be found through the NSW Treasury documents library.

#### The Indigenous Expenditure reports summarise the challenges and impetus:

***"The NSW Government financial reporting system (Prime) does not have capability to attribute government spending to discrete Indigenous-specific programs and services." (IIER p.11)***

***"Collecting and reporting quantitative and qualitative data on Indigenous-specific expenditure is necessary to develop an evidence base for decision-making on issues that impact First Nations communities.***

***It also enables the NSW Government to have a holistic understanding of the current quantum and themes of its investment in Indigenous-specific programs and services, which can inform resource allocation and strategic policy development.***

***Indigenous-specific expenditure data has not historically been collected and reported centrally within NSW Government, therefore no stringent reporting***

***frameworks have been established and there is varying capability and limited resources within Clusters and their agencies to report this information.***

***This Report identified that each Cluster and their respective agencies manage, collect and report on Indigenous-specific program and services differently and to varying degrees of granularity.***

***Some Clusters report on expenditure as large programs encompassing a number of smaller functions, while others disaggregate this information more granularly.***

***This demonstrates the need for the NSW Government to invest in the development of reporting frameworks and designated resources to collect, monitor and report on Indigenous-related expenditure across each NSW Cluster agency." (IIER p.12)***

35. See: Interim Indigenous Expenditure Report (IIER): [https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/20220323\\_indigenous\\_expenditure\\_report\\_accessible.pdf](https://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-03/20220323_indigenous_expenditure_report_accessible.pdf)

36. See: NSW Budget Overview 2022-23, pages 26-27: [https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/20220620\\_01\\_2022-23-Budget-Paper-Overview-Glossy.pdf](https://www.budget.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-06/20220620_01_2022-23-Budget-Paper-Overview-Glossy.pdf)



***“Estimating the First Nations’ proportion of NSW Government expenditure, especially for non-targeted services, is a complex and technical exercise, with unavoidable scope for error.” (CIER p.23)***

Despite these significant challenges in the government’s own systems, the Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report says NSW Treasury developed “a data-driven model” to quantify expenditure apportioned to First Nations peoples over four fiscal years (2017–18 to 2020–21).

The method was piloted on three NSW Government clusters (Education, Health, and Stronger Communities), covering 12 discrete service areas representing approximately 65 percent of non-targeted expenditure on First Nations communities. The report states expenditure disbursements based on geographic or administrative boundaries is not yet available but is being developed by the NSW Government. (CIER p.87)

Significant improvement was made between the Interim and Comprehensive Report, with the Comprehensive Report providing estimates at an LGA level (as shared in the section above). That said, only three NSW policy clusters, out of a possible ten, reported at an LGA level in the Comprehensive Report. Compared to historical reporting standards this is very useful.

However, this exercise is still limited as the dollar value of services attributable to LGAs is provided mainly in ranges and still doesn’t account for differences within LGAs. For example, Health services for Walgett LGA were calculated to be between \$0-\$25million which does not provide any real insight for local organisations. (CIER p. 48)

## CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND OUT-OF-HOME CARE

A significant gap in current analysis of expenditure is around criminal justice. The NSW Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report notes that the NSW Police are the fourth largest agency in the General Government Sector but their data was unable to be included due to “unresolved issues around the best way to attribute expenditure to First Nations people” (CIER p.63).

Analysis of criminal justice and child protection related spending and impacts highlights the fact that “Indigenous expenditure” cannot be seen as necessarily a positive contribution to Aboriginal wellbeing or Closing the Gap.

For example, the report notes data released by the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research showing that in the past ten years the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people charged by police in NSW has increased by more than 67 percent while for non-Indigenous Australians

the increase has been just 8 percent. Importantly “these increases have been observed against a decline in crime rates over the same period” (CIER p.63).

The report’s analysis of Prisons expenditure shows the flow on effect of policing practices: “The NSW Government is estimated to spend \$660 million on First Nations people within the Prisons COFOG-A group in 2020–21. This also represents a disproportionately high 29 percent of the \$2.3 billion of NSW Government spend, when compared with the 3.4 percent population share overall.” (CIER, p.60).

Similarly, there is disproportionate spending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in child protection and out-of-home care, 42 percent despite their 3.4 percent share of the New South Wales population (CIER p.27).

The targeting of Aboriginal children for removal, including at birth, and the lifelong and community impacts of these practices were examined in depth in the 2019 NSW [Family is Culture | Independent Review of Aboriginal Children and Young People in Out-of-Home Care](https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-is-culture/independent-review/media/independent-review-of-aboriginal-children-young-people-in-oohc.html).<sup>37</sup>

**These areas point to the importance of critically engaging with the question of who is benefitting from so-called ‘Indigenous expenditure’.**

37. <https://dcj.nsw.gov.au/children-and-families/family-is-culture/independent-review/media/independent-review-of-aboriginal-children-young-people-in-oohc.html>





## FURTHER COMPLEXITIES WITH DATA CAPTURE

Estimating attributable spending relies on other data, such as Census data regarding people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

NSW's Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report 2021-22 itself acknowledges "the limitations identified in First Nations data collection and quality". However, this may be largely referring to the financial data within the NSW public service as the sentence goes on to say "and the need for better coordinated responsibilities around the collection and reporting of First Nations data across the public sector". (CIER p. 8)

The Walgett community has experienced the challenges of official data collection not matching community reality.

In the 2021 Census, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) recorded only 5,253 people in the Walgett LGA (which includes Lightning Ridge), a drop of 854 people compared to the 2016 Census.

The recorded Aboriginal population in the Walgett LGA accounts for 21.2% of the population compared to a NSW average of 3.4%.

25.6% of respondents in the Walgett LGA 2021 Census did not disclose their heritage compared to an average of only 4.8% respondents across the state.

For the Walgett postcode 2832 area, the 2021 Census recorded 2,149 people (21.7% Aboriginal, 45.1% non-Indigenous and 33.3% not stated). This is a reduction in both the estimated size of the population and proportion of Aboriginal people compared to 2016 Census data (2,568 people: 37.7% Aboriginal, 48.3% non-Indigenous and 14.0% not stated).

The Dharriwaa Elders Group and others in the Walgett community have been concerned that the methods used to capture Census data and the impact of COVID-19 on effective local data collection resulted in under-counting of Aboriginal people in Walgett.

This followed strong participation of community members in the 2016 Census after trusted local Aboriginal community members were employed by the ABS, which was not repeated in 2021.

The ABS has been engaging with the Dharriwaa Elders Group and has agreed to issue a note with Walgett Census data that they understand that it is likely an undercounting of Aboriginal people resident in the area.

Inaccurate Census data can impact the ability to assess expenditure per capita and therefore the validity of calculations of Indigenous expenditure.

This inaccurate data can have wide ranging implications if it is the basis for government policy and spending allocation.

The Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report itself highlights the broader challenges around decision making and engagement, particularly "the importance of working in a genuine partnership with First Nations people in the co-design and co-development of policies to improve outcomes for their communities". (CIER p. 8)



“

Working with our university partners helped us understand a lot about Walgett with data, they've given us a lot of information that we never knew [about] youth. Where it's going and how it's been.

That was a very special thing for us to get that data so that we continue to see where we're going and what we can do to try and help our youth in different ways, help them get through and help them with their fines if they've got any.

— Lewis Beale, Dharriwaa Elders Group member

”



## IDENTIFYING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

The Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report states that 28 new Aboriginal programs and services were to be announced in the 2022-2023 budget, “designed to assist the NSW Government in meeting its commitments under the National Agreement.” (CIER p.11).

According to the Report, there were an existing 129 programs and services for Aboriginal communities in NSW, meaning from 2022 there would be a total of 157. A list including what type they are, where they are being delivered, and by who (agencies and organisations) would be very helpful.

When we requested more information, NSW Treasury advised a list of all programs exists in a spreadsheet format and can be shared, but it is not public. We have emailed and requested this list several times.

Public access to program information in an open format is essential for accountability. A list would be especially useful for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to identify funding opportunities, what program there are, which agency is responsible for them, budget allocations, and how and when funds are being spent.

## New South Wales Government 2021-2022

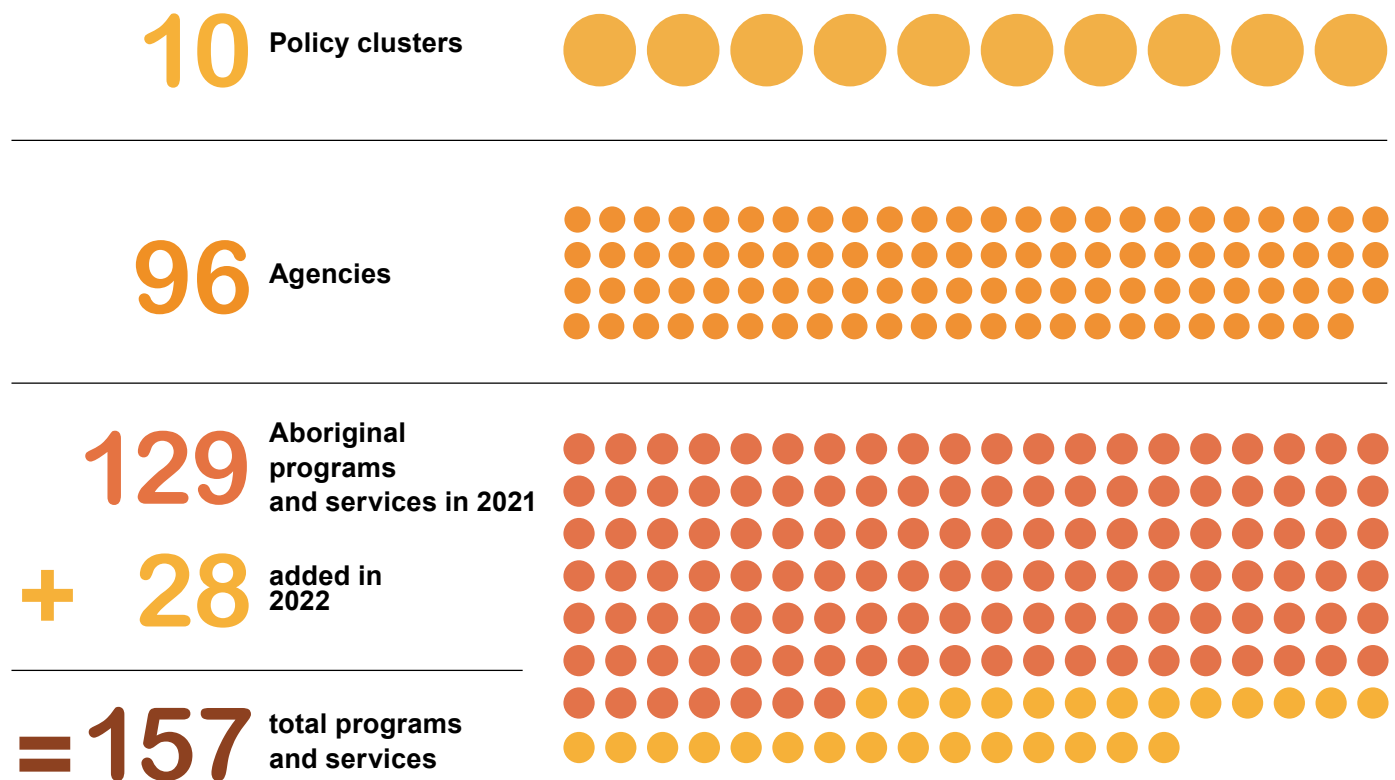


Figure 14: Image showing the number of NSW Government agencies in 2021 - 2022 and the total number of programs and services in NSW for Aboriginal communities.



## WALGETT DATA AND SERVICE MAPPING

The Comprehensive Indigenous Expenditure Report refers to a service mapping pilot for Walgett:

***“NSW Treasury and Regional NSW collaborated to develop a method to promote service mapping capabilities for First Nations communities.***

***The intention is for this capability to be piloted in the remote NSW town of Walgett. If successful, the pilot will be rolled out to additional First Nations communities in New South Wales.” (CIER, p.82)***

The Dharriwaa Elders Group participated in a meeting about the service mapping pilot in May 2022 with NSW Treasury Strategic and Aboriginal Outcomes Team.

After that meeting the NSW Treasury officials provided the Dharriwaa Elders Group with a 22 page printed and scanned version of a spreadsheet with the data behind the Interim Indigenous Expenditure Report.

Whilst helpful, the type in the document is very small and difficult to read. The spreadsheet doesn't include an explanation page to confirm exactly what the data is and whether the \$ amounts are thousands or millions (as in the state budget).

We have assumed the \$ are thousands.

The summary top sheet has a list of 13 expenditure lines for spending in Walgett between 2019-2020 and 2023-2024.

It seems to show the following five departments budget sums:

- Communities and Justice
- Customer Service
- Education
- Office of Sport
- Ministry of Health

The total amount for 2021-2022 is \$5.436 million. For 2022-2023 the amount is \$3.685 million for Education and Health spending, neither of which appears in the NSW My Budget map.

It is also curious to note none of the descriptions match any procurement or grant contracts we found during the research for Creating Better Futures with Contracts, our search period being prior to December 2021.

The amount of \$4.920 million for 2020-2021 is also well

under the amount we found via our contracts research.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group requested access to the information captured during the NSW Treasury 'service mapping' exercise for Walgett that they contributed to in 2022 and 2023, nothing has been shared thus far.

NSW Treasury has since provided the Dharriwaa Elders Group with further spreadsheets in response to the Creating Better Futures with Contracts report. These two spreadsheets include Walgett Shire Council Area targeted Indigenous Expenditure and contract disclosures.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group along with other local organisations would also like to see the results of the service mapping pilot they participated in to inform their work and validate the findings.





## NSW INDIGENOUS EXPENDITURE REPORT 2023-24

A new 2023-24 NSW Indigenous Expenditure Report (IER 2023-24) was released in June 2024. This third IER is the first report under the new government elected in 2023.<sup>38</sup>

***The NSW Government is also “developing a First Nations budget model, designed to provide a holistic, First Nations-led approach to the process, assessment, evidence and reporting for funding and investment decisions impacting First Nations communities.”***

***The NSW Treasurer announced the government is “committed to providing regular information about where the NSW government is spending money to help ‘close the gap’”. Also that “First Nations citizens - and all citizens - should have more of the information they need to make better decisions.”***<sup>39</sup>

The media release<sup>39</sup> mentions that First Nations Impact Assessments were piloted as part of the 2024-25 budget process and that findings from the pilot will be used to inform the final design of a First Nations budget model. The budget model is being designed in partnership with Treasury, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and the NSW Coalition of Peak Organisations, who are working on developing next steps.

### NEW AND UPDATED INFORMATION

In 2023–24, the NSW Government budgeted an estimated \$1.2 billion on First Nations specific (targeted) services and programs.

This represents a relatively small proportion (1.0 percent) of NSW Government expenditure. This is equivalent to expenditure of around \$3,402 per First Nations person. (IER 2023-24, p. 23)

For First Nations specific (targeted) services and programs in 2023-24, the largest expenditure areas were:

- \$301.8 million for housing and community amenities
- \$237.8 million for education
- \$226.3 million for social protection.

Of this, the majority (60.7 percent) went to NSW Government service providers and around 30.9 percent was directed to ACCOs.

Around 11.5 percent of programs had a completed evaluation, and a further 57.7 percent had an evaluation planned, in development or underway.

It estimated in 2021-22 that the NSW Government spent \$5.8 billion on First Nations people across the 18 non-targeted service areas analysed. This represents around 4.9 percent of total NSW Government expenditure.

The IER 2024 report quantifies the First Nations share of general (or non-targeted) expenditure, using 2021–22 data. This being the most recent full year of data available to calculate the proportion that can be attributed to First Nations ‘service users’.

### DATA CONNECTOR SERVICE

A welcome new initiative is the NSW Data Connector Service. Established in 2023, it is part of a joint program of work between the NSW Government and NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO).

Data Connectors are individuals who are embedded within NSW Government portfolios to provide a single point of contact for First Nations communities and organisations to request access to government-held data to inform decisions and future plans. The work also includes the creation of a data map for communities to find where relevant data and information is kept.

38. 2023-24 NSW Indigenous Expenditure Report: [www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2023-24-nsw-indigenous-expenditure-report-202405\\_v2.pdf](http://www.treasury.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-05/2023-24-nsw-indigenous-expenditure-report-202405_v2.pdf)

39. [www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/nsw-leads-australia-first-nations-expenditure-reporting](http://www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/nsw-leads-australia-first-nations-expenditure-reporting)



## INVESTING IN NEW APPROACHES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

The IER states that a large driver of non-targeted expenditure for First Nations people relates to the over-representation of First Nations people in the criminal justice, out-of-home care (OOHC) and child protection systems, and that interaction with these systems can perpetuate cycles of intergenerational disadvantage. (IER 2023-24, p.7)

“First Nations children placed under OOHC are over 16 times more likely to be placed in youth justice supervision than the rest of the population, and 68 percent more likely to appear in Children’s Courts.” (IER 2023-24, p.35)

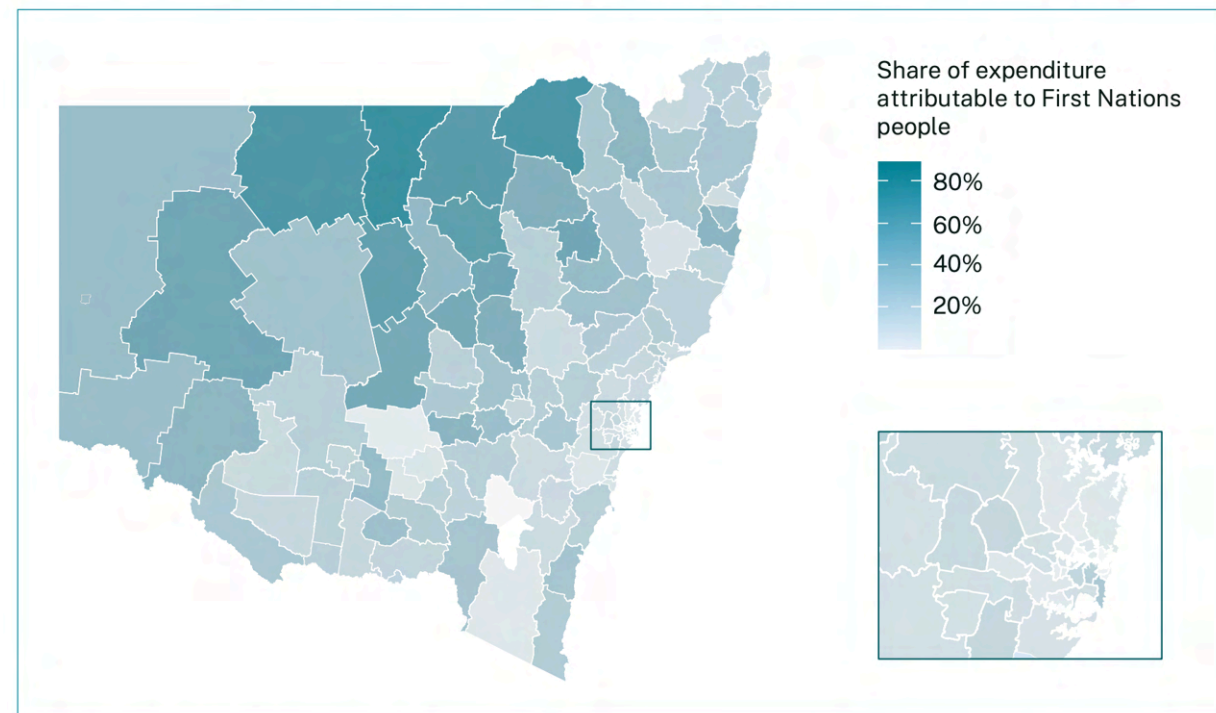
Treasury estimates that if the First Nations’ share of spending on justice, OOHC and child protection in New South Wales matched the First Nations population share, there would be avoided costs of around \$1.8 billion per year.

The proportion of expenditure on First Nations children in the Walgett LGA is estimated to be 92 percent. (IER 2023-24, p.61)

Importantly for ACCOs, the report recognises that: “evidence shows that First Nations people are more likely to engage and receive culturally appropriate services if they are designed and delivered by and for First Nations people. This presents an opportunity for the government to work in partnership with First Nations people to identify where funding could be reasonably redirected to First Nations led service providers.” (IER 2023-24, p.7)

**Figure 28: The proportion of child protection and OOHC expenditure attributed to First Nations people is highest in central northern and western New South Wales**

NSW Government general expenditure, child protection and OOHC, by LGA, First Nations attributable, 2021–22



Source: ABS ERP 2023; NSW Treasury 2024.

Figure 15: Map showing the proportion of child protection and out-of-home care expenditure attributed to First Nations people in NSW.



## CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE REPORTS

The IER seeks to empower First Nations communities by:

- sharing data and information on government expenditure on First Nations communities and programs
- quantifying the proportion of government investment that goes to ACCOs
- identifying areas of government expenditure where First Nations people are over-or-under-represented
- identifying First Nations programs funded by the government that have and have not been evaluated.

The 2023-24 report builds on the IIER published in 2022, with updated data for service areas and includes new service areas: Family Support, Police, Access to Justice, Criminal Courts, Vocational Education, Training Services.

Treasury intends to work on embedding an annual reporting process with agencies for the collection of non-targeted expenditure data, and expand the scope of this report over time to include all service areas across government. As well as to refine the methodology for existing service areas.

In the meantime, including a list of the remaining service areas that are not reported would provide helpful context to the reader of what First Nations shares might be missing.

Treasury states their reporting processes now ensure that all NSW Government portfolios annually provide data regarding their First Nations specific programs and services.

This reporting captures:

- actual and projected expenditure
- program or service type and purpose
- the service delivery provider and type
- information related to program evaluations
- geographical disaggregation of data (where available).

A great step forward, the IER is still a static PDF document and overwhelming. Establishing a consistent set of visual design patterns for reporting will improve the information experience for communities and provide the foundation for an online interactive version.

For clarity, a full list of the targeted programs including the time period they cover, which department (was and) is currently responsible, procurement and grant processes, supplier and contract details, and delivery locations, would be a valuable asset for communities and agencies.

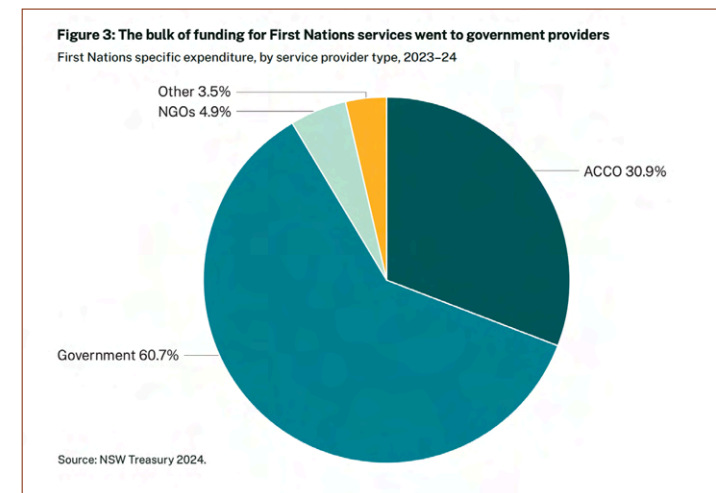
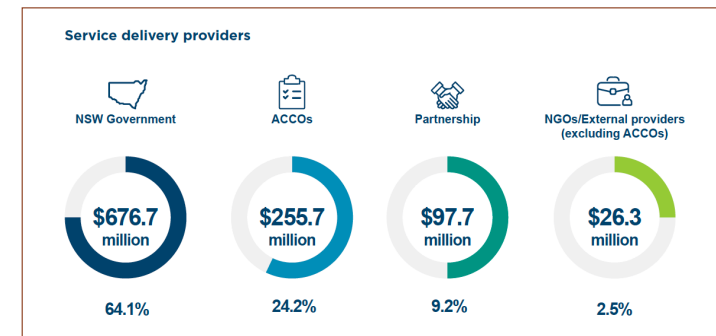


Figure 16 (top): The graph from the first IER published in 2022. Although the percentages are not correctly reflected in the graph, as a design pattern it is clear and useful.

Figure 17 (bottom): The second graph from the IER 2023-24 tells part of the same story in a different way with less detail.



## WALGETT SHIRE COUNCIL

While the main focus of our research was on Federal and NSW State budgets, we did examine what information is available at the local council level.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group has heard anecdotally that the council does receive revenue from governments to achieve outcomes for its Aboriginal residents. Either this is not the case or if it is the case, there is no accountability or way the Walgett LGA Aboriginal communities can find this subsidy or direct funding, or ways in which it has been expended.

The Walgett Shire Council Annual Reports provide some detail on programs and funds allocated or spent. Specific line items expenses are occasionally included (eg. revenue received for the maintenance of Aboriginal community water and sewerage systems) but mostly there are general statements on the existence of programs and deliveries.

The website states “Council is required within 5 months after the end of each year a report as to its achievements with respect to the objectives and performance targets set out in its Management Plan for that year.”<sup>41</sup> It doesn’t state whether this is financial or calendar year. The reports do not include a date they were prepared or published on the website.

The Annual Report available during our research phase was the financial year 2020-21 (PDF, 231 pages).<sup>41</sup>

This 2020-21 report references ‘Aboriginal’ 28 times and ‘Indigenous’ four times. Only one of the Aboriginal references can be identified as being related to spending specifically for Aboriginal people or an Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) – the Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (\$5,000) – and the purpose of that spending is not stated.

Funds for initiatives such as Aboriginal heritage preservation are in the Annual Report, however, are not explicitly categorised as Aboriginal expenditure. The council has an Aboriginal Services section which sits under the Corporate Services division. The resources allocated to Aboriginal Services are not clear.

The council formulates a Long Term Financial Plan (PDF, 16 pages)<sup>42</sup> each year which is their budget plus forward estimates and plans, and previous year actuals. The 2020-2021 plan is a pure accounting document that does not contain any reference to specific Aboriginal initiatives or programs.

**We couldn’t find reference to Closing the Gap in the Annual Report or Long Term Financial Plan, or anywhere else on their website at the time of research phase.**

The Walgett Shire Council developed the 2020-2025 Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (PDF, 50 pages)<sup>43</sup> which seems more about local recognition and respect of Aboriginal culture and community than Closing the Gap style initiatives.

The Council developed a Crime Prevention and Community Safety Plan 2016-2020 (PDF, 43 pages)<sup>44</sup> that incorporated goals and initiatives more aligned to Closing the Gap measures around employment, opportunity, safety, etc. Funding sources are discussed but little else is provided in respect of implementation, including service fulfilment.

There did not appear to be any Council policy for tenders or contracts on their website nor mention of an Aboriginal Procurement Policy. The website has been updated since we commenced research and content has been moved. The 2021-2022 financial plan was published some time mid 2023 (PDF, 216 pages). The procurement contract register has not been updated since June 2021.<sup>45</sup> The message ‘Register of Open Access Information Not Made Publicly Available’ appears on another page.<sup>46</sup>

41. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Annual-reports](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Annual-reports)

43. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Innovate-Reconciliation-Action-Plan-2020-2025](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Innovate-Reconciliation-Action-Plan-2020-2025)

45. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Access-to-information/Government-Contracts-Register](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Access-to-information/Government-Contracts-Register)

42. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Long-term-financial-plan](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Long-term-financial-plan)

44. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Crime-prevention-community-safety-plan-2016-2020](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Council-documents/Crime-prevention-community-safety-plan-2016-2020)

46. [www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Register-of-Open-Access-Information-Not-Made-Publicly-Available](http://www.walgett.nsw.gov.au/Council/Register-of-Open-Access-Information-Not-Made-Publicly-Available)





## 4. PARTICIPATING IN BUDGETS AND PROCUREMENT

### PARTICIPATORY BUDGETING

Since the start of participatory budgeting in Brazil in 1989 the process has continued to deliver positive outcomes for governments and communities across the world, as a result of the open knowledge sharing by its founders and other organisations.

There are now thousands of international examples of participatory budgeting. They are inherently place-based, so the majority are at a city or local government level. People Powered,<sup>47</sup> the Participatory Budgeting Project,<sup>48</sup> and Go Vocal<sup>49</sup> have guides and examples from around the world.

Australia has been slow to catch on. Information about previous NSW 'my community project'<sup>50</sup> examples no longer exist. Other states and territories are introducing deliberative and participatory practices.

As mentioned earlier, the Victorian Government's mandate for deliberative processes at a local government level has increased participation in the development of local plans and budgets. That said, there is a shortage of experienced independent practitioners to facilitate local processes.

With proper resourcing and training, this is a space that could be filled by ACCOs and local social enterprises.

### Indigenous participation

Many Indigenous communities already practice collaborative decision making. However, examples of local Indigenous community-led and participatory procurement and budgeting projects are very hard to find.

There is currently no central place for practical stories about innovative approaches, successes, lessons learnt to be shared to inspire and guide others. This loss of knowledge transfer is wasteful, and holds local innovation back.

**How a participatory budgeting process can be adapted for community-led initiatives and local Aboriginal communities is an area Yuwaya Ngarra-li will be exploring in a future phase of this work.**

With children and young people at the heart of the process, we will test and improve on a budget design structure and approach to map local priorities to outcomes we devised as part of this project.

### OPEN GOVERNMENT

#### Open Government Partnership fiscal openness

In 2011, government leaders and civil society advocates came together to create a unique partnership—to promote transparent, participatory, inclusive and accountable governance.

The Open Government Partnership<sup>51</sup> (OGP) is now a global organisation and network of reformers inside and outside of government working together to transform how governments serve their citizens.

The OGP includes 75 countries and 104 local governments – representing more than two billion people – and thousands of civil society, community, civic technology, and private sector organisations.

*"Every year, governments collect and spend billions of taxpayer funds to pay for public services like education and healthcare. The public has a right to know how that money is allocated and how it is spent."*

47. [www.peoplepowered.org](http://www.peoplepowered.org)

48. [www.participatorybudgeting.org/](http://www.participatorybudgeting.org/)

49. <https://www.govocal.com/guides/beginners-guide-to-participatory-budgeting>

50. [www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/my-community-project/](http://www.nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/projects-and-initiatives/my-community-project/)

51. [www.opengovpartnership.org/](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/)



*OGP members have made their budgets increasingly transparent, yet more work remains for governments to proactively increase civic participation and oversight.”<sup>52</sup>*

The Fiscal Openness theme encompasses transparency, public participation, and legislative oversight throughout the budget and fiscal cycle. It has been a consistently popular policy area among OGP members.

The OGP open gov guide<sup>53</sup> has an excellent summary of fiscal transparency and open budgets and links to inspiring examples.

Open Contracting<sup>54</sup> is another popular policy area that has a large global community of reformers and innovators delivering public benefit by improving procurement and grant information and processes.

### Open Government in Australia

The Australian Government became a country member of the Open Government Partnership in 2015 under Malcolm Turnbull, then lapsed under Scott Morrison. Australia's involvement in the OGP was revitalised in 2023<sup>55</sup> by the Attorney General Mark Dreyfus. The OGP and the Australian National Action Plans and commitments<sup>56</sup> are still not widely known locally.

Up to now, there has been very little engagement due to lack of government funding, lack of culture of openness and willingness to collaborate on implementation of commitments with external organisations, as happens in other countries.

Collaboration is a key ingredient to making open government credible and scale successfully. We would like to see the Australian Government commit to resourcing this initiative properly and include Indigenous Australians.

Internationally the OGP is a dynamic, diverse and vibrant community of thousands of governments, public servants, advocates, civil society, civic technologists, philanthropic, private and social sector organisations, and social enterprises. Australia could benefit greatly from being a more active member.

### Open Government in NSW

The NSW Government made a commitment to Open Government in a directive issued by Premier Barry O'Farrell as part of the ICT Strategy in 2012. During this time an Open Government Community of Practice was established. Free events were held for people from departments, businesses, and civil society who were working on open data and other open initiatives to present projects and meet each other.

This provided an invaluable way for people to share ideas, knowledge and innovations. The community of practice no longer exists as there is unfortunately no sustainable funding for these kinds of initiatives. Without a dedicated internal team and resourcing, public servants are expected to dedicate their personal time to run them.

The former NSW Information Commissioner Elizabeth Tydd (who is now the Australian Freedom of Information Commissioner) has been very active and is a member of the Federal Government's Open Government Partnership (OGP) Multi Stakeholder Group.

It would be good to see the current NSW Government engage more.

**Revitalising Open Government in NSW would provide a valuable platform for knowledge sharing and innovation. It could bring people from government, ACCOs, social enterprises, philanthropy, and large and small business together to share initiatives, experiences, and find new ways to collaborate.**

52. See: [www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/fiscal-openness-open-budgets/](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/fiscal-openness-open-budgets/)  
53. See: [www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/fiscal-openness-open-budgets/](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/fiscal-openness-open-budgets/)  
54. See: [www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/anti-corruption-open-contracting/](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/open-gov-guide/anti-corruption-open-contracting/)

55. See: [www.ag.gov.au/integrity/australias-open-government-partnership](http://www.ag.gov.au/integrity/australias-open-government-partnership)  
56. [www.ag.gov.au/integrity/publications/australias-third-national-action-plan-2024-2025](http://www.ag.gov.au/integrity/publications/australias-third-national-action-plan-2024-2025)



# HOW AUSTRALIA COMPARES

## OECD DIGITAL GOVERNMENT INDEX

The Digital Government Index measures maturity along six dimensions.<sup>57</sup>

### Australia's rating

In 2024 Australia ranked 5th in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development<sup>58</sup> (OECD) Digital Government Index (DGI) compared to 38 participating countries from January 2020 to October 2022.

Australia's digital capabilities are world leading in some areas. Yet lagging in others.

We are well known for digital transformation policies and digitising 'transactional services'.

We are well behind other countries in Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America in investing in quality open data, fostering use of technologies such as open source, and designing 'information' services suited to community engagement and communications.

#### 1. Digital by design:

measures how digital government policies are designed to enable the public sector to use digital tools and data in a coherent way when formulating policies or transforming public services.

#### 2. Data-driven:

measures government's advancements in developing the governance and enablers needed for data access, sharing and re-use across the public sector.

#### 3. Government as a platform:

measures the deployment of common building blocks such as guidelines, tools, data, digital identity and software to equip teams to advance a coherent transformation of government processes and services across the public sector.

#### 4. Open by default:

measures openness beyond the release of open data, including efforts to foster the use of technologies and data to communicate and engage with different actors.

#### 5. User-driven:

measures governments' capacity to place user needs at the core of the design and delivery of public policies and services.

#### 6. Proactiveness:

measures governments' capacity to anticipate the needs of users and service providers to deliver government services proactively.

The OECD 'Going Digital Toolkit'<sup>59</sup> offers interactive visualisations to show how Australia scores and compares to other countries.

57. [www.dta.gov.au/blogs/top-5-digital-government-australias-debut-oecd-digital-government-index](http://www.dta.gov.au/blogs/top-5-digital-government-australias-debut-oecd-digital-government-index)

58. [www.oecd.org/governance/the-oecd-digital-government-policy-framework-f64fed2a-en.htm](http://www.oecd.org/governance/the-oecd-digital-government-policy-framework-f64fed2a-en.htm)

59. <https://goingdigital.oecd.org/>



## INTERNATIONAL OPEN BUDGET SURVEY

The Australian Federal Government is benchmarked internationally by the International Budget Partnership.<sup>60</sup>

The Open Budget Survey (OBS) is an independent, comparative, and fact-based research instrument, providing recommendations to improve governance.

The OBS uses an internationally accepted criteria to assess:

- public access to central government budget information
- opportunities for the public to participate in the national budget process
- and the role of budget oversight institutions, such as legislatures and national audit offices, in the budget process.

Open budgets have proven to lead to lower deficits, better budget priorities, improved efficiency, higher tax morale, and increased revenue.<sup>61</sup>

OGP countries are leading the way in presenting information and participatory processes.

Four insights from leading OGP countries are:

- simply publishing data isn't enough - transparency portals must be user-friendly
- to be useful data must be interoperable using standardised formats that allow data sets to be linked and published across various platforms
- fiscal information should be accessible to everyone using plain, clear language
- citizens should be proactively engaged to foster trust.

Estonia has over 20 years of budget and expenditure open data in a public interactive online portal. Finland holds national dialogues, the UK has a Citizens' Economic Council, in the Dominican Republic local communities hold public hearings to propose investments they would like to see in their communities. The government posts on a website which requests made it into the national budget.

Civic technology, which is not well recognised or funded in Australia, is well supported in Europe, Africa, Asia, South America, the US, and Canada.

BudgIT<sup>62</sup> in Nigeria is a leading African example that presents budget, procurement, and audit data.

## AUSTRALIA'S 2023 OPEN BUDGET SURVEY SCORES

### PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Score **37/100** for participation Rank **6/120**

Australia's score and ranking has remained unchanged since 2021. The next four countries ranking above Australia have 'limited participation', besides South Korea which is the only country that scores 'adequate participation'.

### Top 5 ranking countries

South Korea, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Dominican Republic and Georgia

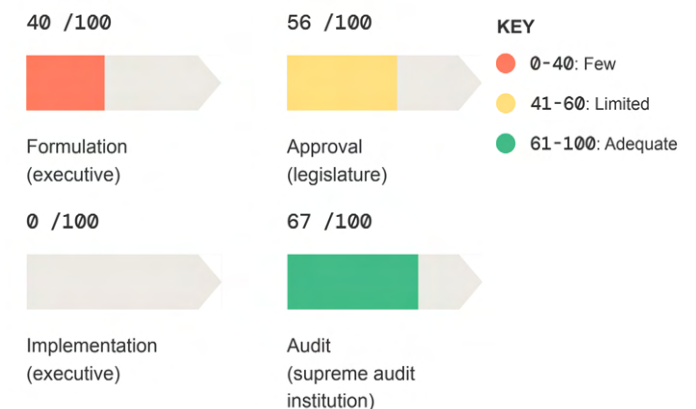


Figure 18: Extract of Australia's 2023 score for public participation.

60. <http://www.internationalbudget.org>

61. [www.internationalbudget.org/countries/](http://www.internationalbudget.org/countries/)

62. [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/open-government-partnership\\_4-lessons-on-fiscal-openness-activity-7204401074982518785-ROBV?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/open-government-partnership_4-lessons-on-fiscal-openness-activity-7204401074982518785-ROBV?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop)





# LEADING INTERNATIONAL EXAMPLES

## GERMANY

Germany is leading in visualising and accessing information. The German Federal Budget is by far the standout international example of digital innovation in visualising and making budget and spending information accessible.

“Federal Budget Digital” tool [Bundeshaushalt-digital](https://budgit.org/)<sup>63</sup> allows people to interact with the federal budget and download data.

Its features include:

- a visual representation of the budget data from 2018 - current year
- expenses and revenues as well as target and actual values are available
- a year by year comparison can be done
- a large number of other filter options are also available.

The results are presented as interactive graphics. Graphics can be added to a personal dashboard on the homepage.

### Your editable dashboard

On this dashboard you can save your own compilation of visualized representations of the household data. Go to the "Bend Federal Budget Digital" and add the desired graphics to your dashboard.

Digital budget

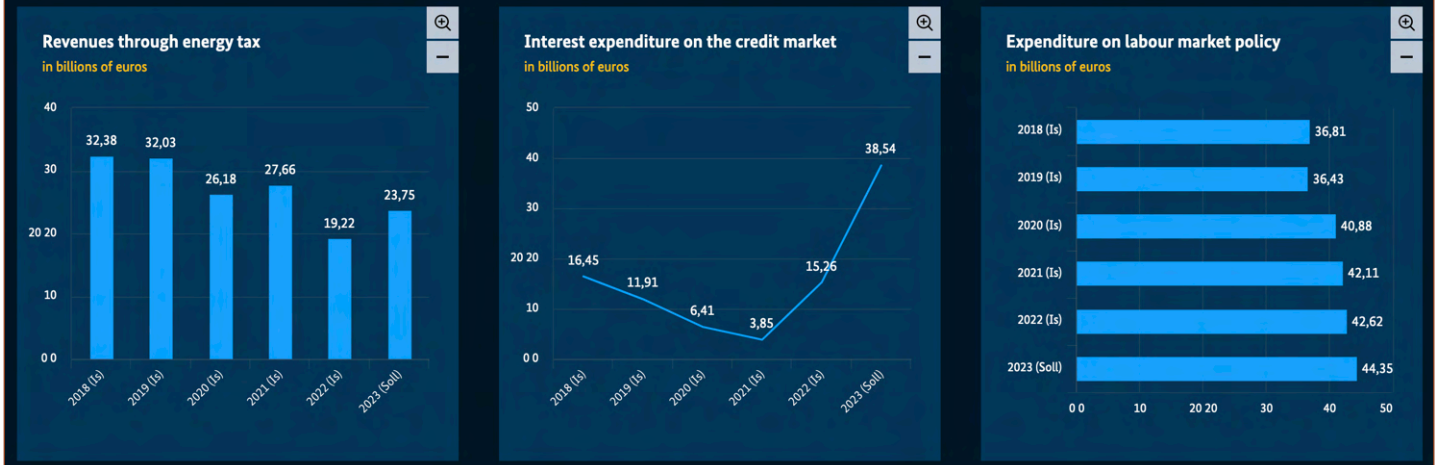


Figure 19: The German Federal Budget digital budget dashboard.

63. <https://budgit.org/>



The Digital Budget has budget and expenditure data for all Federal Departments and a range of ways to visualise and analyse the data.

Information is downloadable and the website features accessible explainer videos using audio, images and sign language.

The German Government also has the added advantage of the names of ministries not changing with machinery of government changes such as elections and ministers moving portfolios.



Figure 20: German Digital Budget showing breakdown of figures for all federal ministries.  
See: [www.bundeshaushalt.de/DE/Bundeshaushalt-digital/bundeshaushalt-digital.html](http://www.bundeshaushalt.de/DE/Bundeshaushalt-digital/bundeshaushalt-digital.html)



## CANADA

A world leading example of community-led, participatory and agile procurement innovation is with Indigenous communities in Canada.

In 2016, the Canadian Government signed an Memorandum of Understanding and starting working on “A new approach: Co-development of a new fiscal relationship between Canada and First Nations”.<sup>64</sup>

Canada has more coastline than any other country in the world. As a maritime nation, a main aim was to help First Nations communities protect the oceans and fishing grounds under the Oceans Protection Plan.<sup>65</sup>

Local hunters, fishing vessels and community members were getting lost at sea. Locals also wanted ways to report illegal fishing and environmental emergencies in their waters and on their coastlines.

The Canadian Government worked with 13 Indigenous Nations and other coastal communities to develop an emergency response system.<sup>66</sup> respecting local knowledge. Over the course of 5 years around \$30 million of funding was committed to the project. The product design process that started in 2016 and was still being continuously improved and developed in 2023.

### Procurement process

The 13 Indigenous communities were involved in the procurement process and approach, and were the ultimate decision makers in choosing the successful supplier, and the design of the product and system requirements.

A geospatial based system was needed to manage and share marine safety alerts with local coast guards and to help First Nations communities to protect traditional hunting and fishing grounds.

The Transport Department had the capabilities to develop spatial systems themselves. At the time the project started there was distrust of the government. First Nations communities didn't want their data held by the government so an external data storage system was required.

Several agencies were involved. A cross functional digital government team was created and an internal agile coach helped guide the development.

A procurement specialist was assigned to the team to help navigate the legalities and contracting. A free flow of information was needed than existing procurement policy processes allowed for.

The way the contract was written was also iterative and original. People came together with ideas, not statements of works. First Nations communities became involved in the contract development.

### Design process

Each Nation had a different skills level. For the product to be viable it needed to meet all of their needs.

‘Dragon’s Den’ style bidding showcases were held. Potential suppliers visited each Indigenous community to establish a relationship and develop trust that they could deliver what the communities needed.

The community visits included ceremonies and meeting Elders, along with members of the government team. Some vendors did not proceed to the next stage. Some small and large companies banded together.

A “don’t tell us, show us you can do it” approach was taken.

A selection of teams were given \$100,000 in research and development funding. The intent was to use real data and information to create a workable interface the communities could interact with.

64. See: [www.bundeshaushalt.de/DE/Home/home.html](http://www.bundeshaushalt.de/DE/Home/home.html)

65. [www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1516389497863/1613148302012](http://www.sac-isc.gc.ca/eng/1516389497863/1613148302012)

66. <https://tc.canada.ca/en/campaigns/oceans-protection-plan>





Each supplier/vendor team pitched their prototype for people to use the software app and decide which was the best fit.

In the supplier mix was some big companies with existing spatial products. The winning team was a collaboration between Fujitsu and a smaller open source mapping company Map Gears. They pitched a bespoke, made for purpose product, rather than an existing off the shelf product.

The software, known as Enhanced Maritime Situational Awareness (EMSA), uses an Automated Identification System (AIS) to help coast guards identify where vessels are in case of emergencies, and to assist with search and rescue missions.

The participatory approach enabled communities to design a product that was fit for their purpose and prioritised their concerns and objectives. The product has continuously improved over time.

A [video](#)<sup>67</sup> explains the process and its impact.

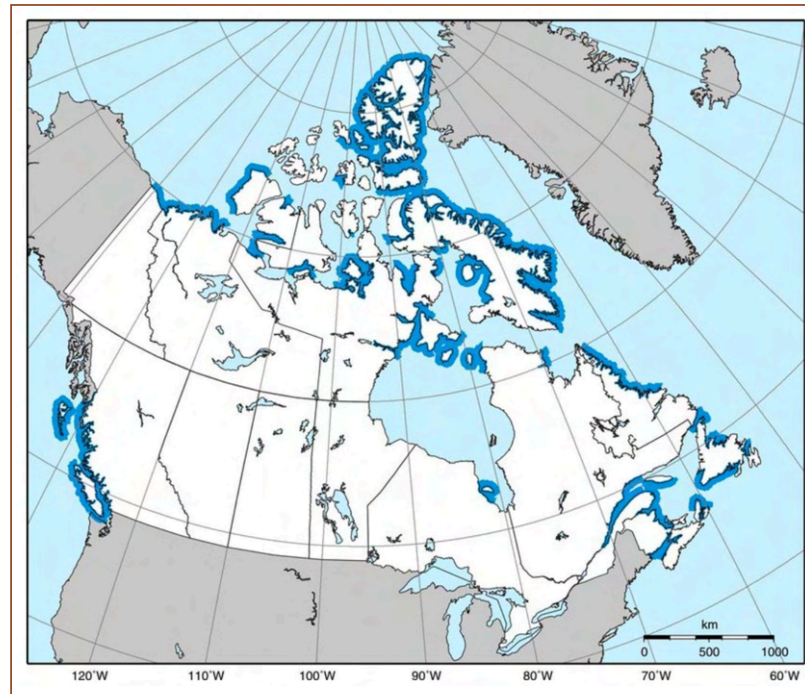
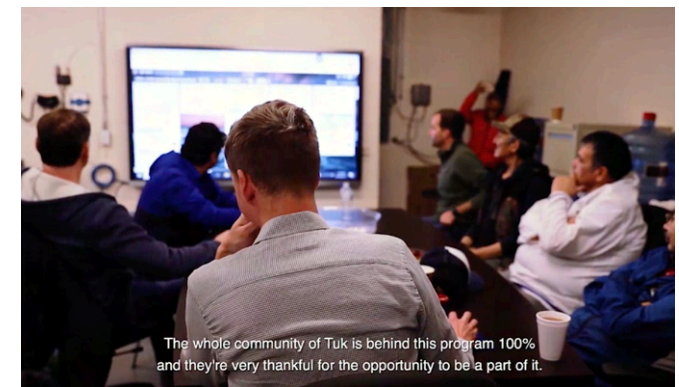
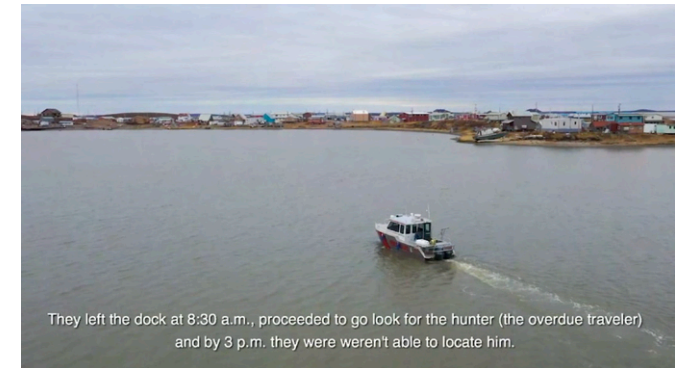


Figure 21: Canadian Coastline

Source: [www.researchgate.net/figure/Canadian-coastlines-blue-susceptible-to-local-waves-triggered-by-subaerial-or-submarine\\_fig18\\_259657012](http://www.researchgate.net/figure/Canadian-coastlines-blue-susceptible-to-local-waves-triggered-by-subaerial-or-submarine_fig18_259657012)



Figures 22-23: Images from a Canadian Government video about the development of the product.

Links: [www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/index-eng.html](http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/index-eng.html)

67. [www.tc.canada.ca/en/initiatives/oceans-protection-plan/report-canadians-investing-our-coasts-through-oceans-protection-plan](http://www.tc.canada.ca/en/initiatives/oceans-protection-plan/report-canadians-investing-our-coasts-through-oceans-protection-plan)





## ORBviz INTERACTIVE BUDGETS

Orbviz<sup>68</sup> is a New Zealand company with two products, Orbviz Rates Calculator and Orbiz Bubbles, transforming information to increase community engagement.

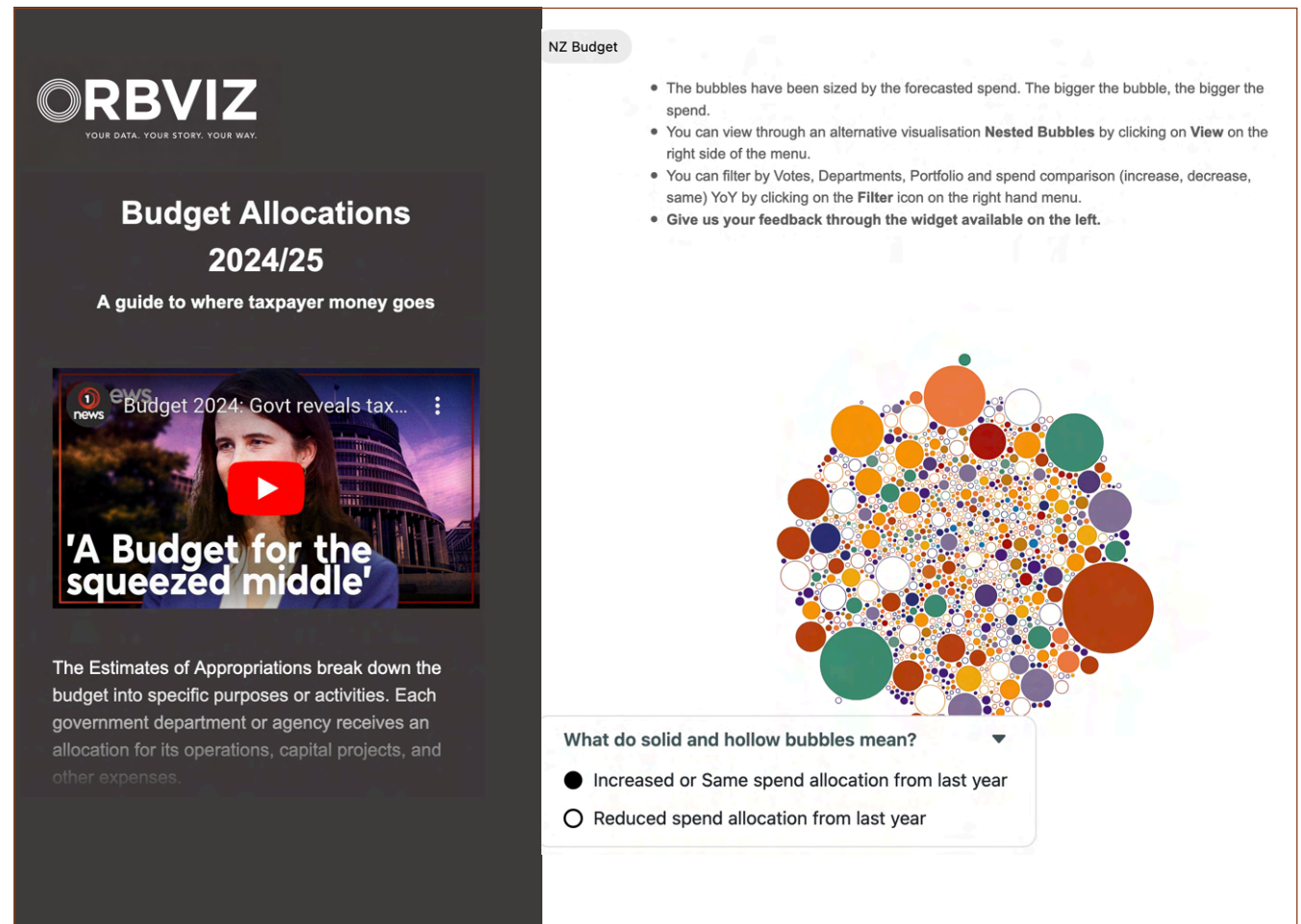
Orbviz Rates raises awareness for local expenditure and allows people to explore how their rates are spent.

Orbiz Bubbles allows governments to upload excel spreadsheets and PDFs turning data into interactive online graphs and bubble stories, overcoming the barrier of people having to read hundreds and sometimes thousands of budgets lines in a static document.

Local councils wanting to enhance engagement and gather more feedback have had great success, especially when displaying the tool on large interactive screens in council and community spaces. The tool allows people to share the report and tracks engagement.

Christchurch City Council's objective was to transparently show where money was being allocated and to engage the community more effectively around annual and long-term planning. In 2024 they received an increase in engagement and nearly 7000 submissions were made.

The Orbviz team has used the NZ Government's Budget data to show what's possible at a national level.



68. <https://www.orbviz.com/>



## Water

You can use the filter at the top to move between annual budgets, or click on activity to see how each of the projects are affected.

Current Budget 2024/25

Wastewater	74,486,394
Water Supply	68,732,479
Stormwater	37,185,014
Flood Protection	30,068,596

350,000,000  
300,000,000  
250,000,000  
200,000,000  
150,000,000  
100,000,000

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HOME



WHAT'S WITH THE BUBBLES?



TRANSPORT & WASTE



WATER



PARKS & HERITAGE

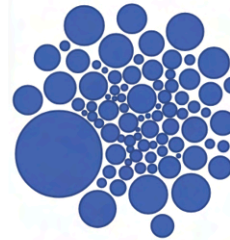


PEOPLE & COMMUNITIES



CORPORATE SERVICES

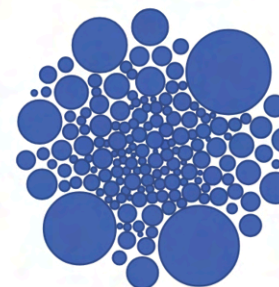
Flood Protection



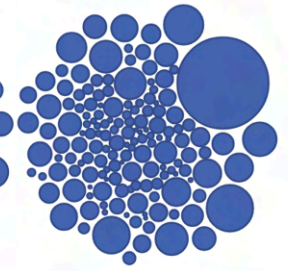
Stormwater



Wastewater



Water Supply



Filter by Primary Ward

All

ORB VIZ



# LEADING AUSTRALIAN EXAMPLES

## IPSWICH QUEENSLAND

The Ipswich City Council is on a journey to be the most open and transparent council in Australia.

In 2018, the entire council was sacked by the Queensland Government.<sup>69</sup> Queensland Crime and Corruption Commissions (CCC) investigations into the council saw 15 people, including two former mayors, charged with criminal offences including fraud and extortion. Former Qld Government open data champion Teresa Hardy became Mayor in 2020 and was reelected in 2024.

The Ipswich City Council has a Transparency and Integrity Hub.<sup>70</sup> Shape Your Ipswich Community Engagement<sup>71</sup> platform, and live streaming and publications of council meetings, workshops, and briefings. The Hub is an online platform that provides the community with access to Council's finances, so they can see how ratepayers' money is being spent and why.

Information available on hub includes:

- budgets
- expenditure
- contracts over \$10,000
- monthly procurement by contracts awarded and categories
- select projects and programs

- revenues and expenses against budget
- councillor expenses.

Updated monthly, information is packaged into stories

that provide a narrative around data to ensure it is easily understood.

Raw data can be explored with visualisations generated by the opengov.com<sup>72</sup> platform.

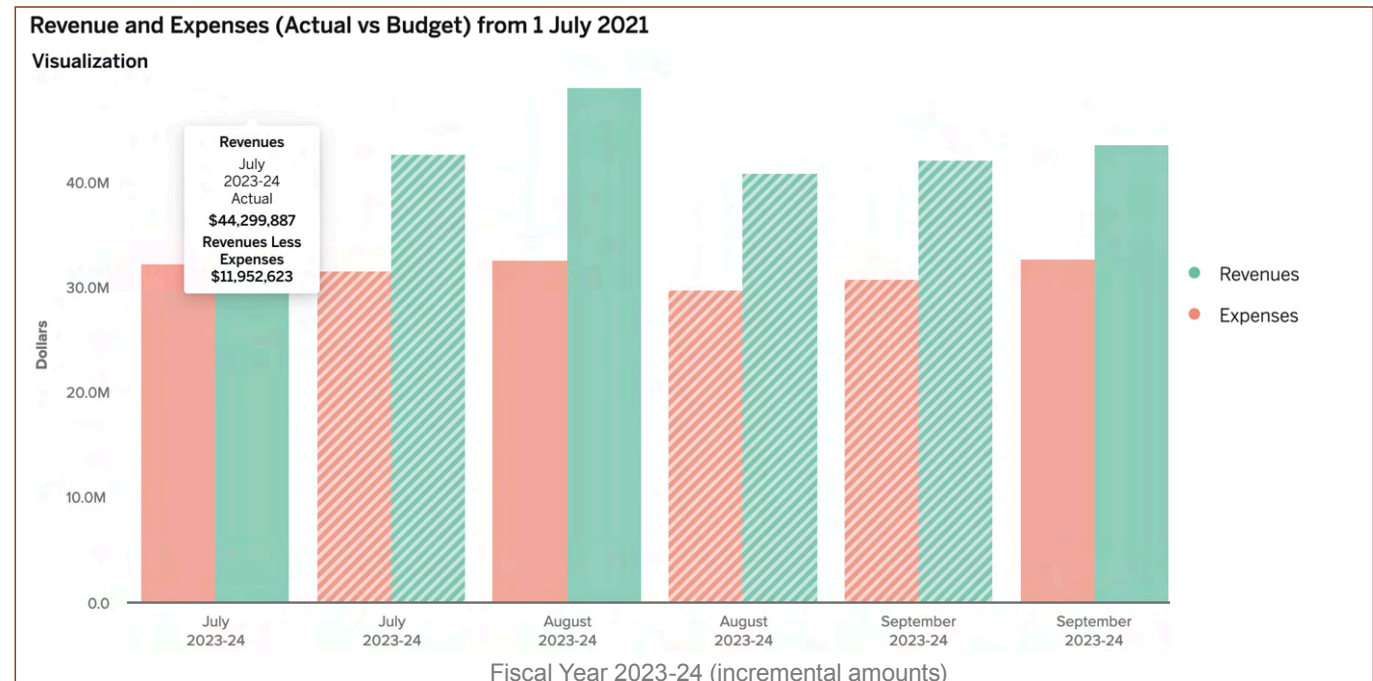


Figure 24: Example of the opengov.com stories platform showing visualisation of revenues and budgets (2022 - 2023)  
See: <https://stories.opengov.com/ipswichqld/published/gJilUmLmj>

69. See: How the Oceans Protection Plan is improving marine safety in Tuktoyaktuk | : [www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPpe7f2xbOc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OPpe7f2xbOc)

70. See: [www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/new-mayor-teresa-hardy-signals-fresh-start-for-ipswich-council/12146912](https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-04-14/new-mayor-teresa-hardy-signals-fresh-start-for-ipswich-council/12146912)

71. See: [www.open.ipswich.qld.gov.au/](https://www.open.ipswich.qld.gov.au/)

72. See: [www.shapeyouripswich.com.au/](https://www.shapeyouripswich.com.au/)





Reports Stories

•• Ipswich City Council Revenue and Expenses Budget 2021-2022

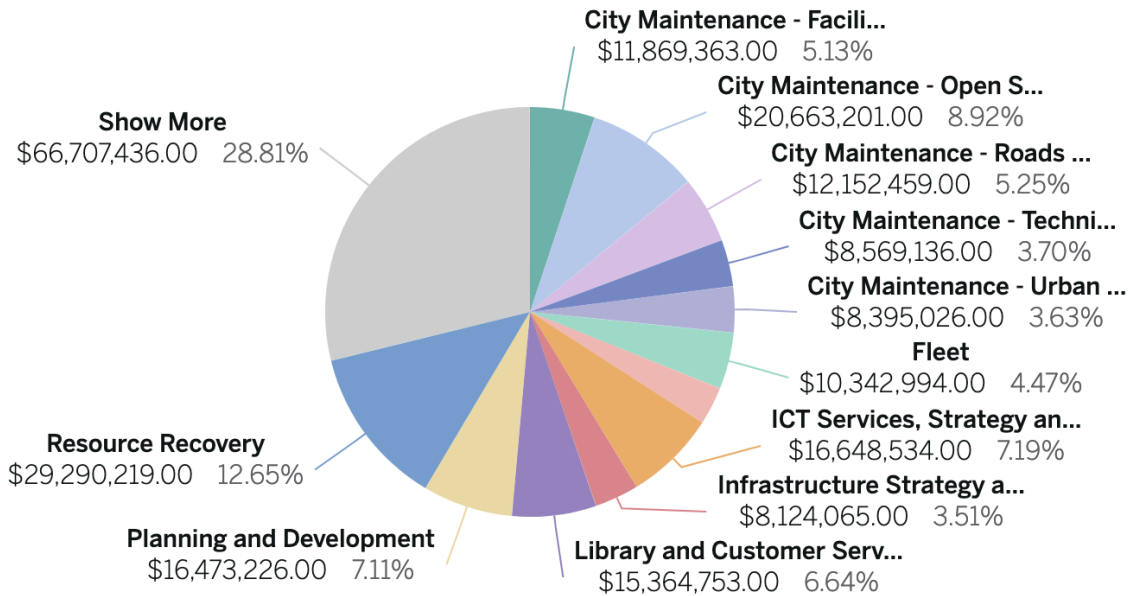
•• Ipswich City Council Budget by Service Category 2021-2022

•• Quarterly Revenue and Expenses against the Budget 2020-2021

•• Actual Revenue and Expenses up to 30 June 2021

• Revenue and Expenses (Actual vs Budget) from 1 July 2021

•• Ipswich City Council Revenue and Expenses Budget 2020-2021



Data

Summary

Details

Dept	Financial Year	Service Category	Expenses / Revenue	Nat Acc	Nat Acc Description	Total (\$)
CS	2022	Workplace Health and Safety	Expenses	120108	Other services exp	1,000.00
CS	2022	Workplace Health and Safety	Expenses	120101	Advertising promotion exp	6,500.00
CS	2022	Workplace Health and Safety	Expenses	110121	*Labour charged in	595,932.00
CS	2022	Workplace Health and Safety	Expenses	190101	Internal Trading Expense	15,000.00
CS	2022	Workplace Health and Safety	Expenses	110110	Remuneration Vehicle Usage	14,070.00

Figure 25: Example of Ipswich Council Budget by Service Category report 2021 - 2022

See: <https://ipswichqld.opengov.com/data/#/56032/query=929A989DBD77F0E-78BE32EB6BEE5F5BA&embed=n>





## TENDERTRACE AUSTRALIA

There are several companies and individuals accessing and reusing open data via APIs or data scraped from government procurement websites. Some are freely available and others are commercial subscription based services.

Tendertrace<sup>73</sup> is an Australian startup that collects and publishes federal, state, and territory government department procurement data into one single platform in an easy to use interface.

It is a powerful research tool and a great example of local innovation in use of data visualisations and machine learning.

Tendertrace is a paid service. They have provided access to us to assist our research and advocacy.

Since using the platform for our Creating Better Futures with Contracts paper in 2022, Tendertrace has added Federal Government grants data, and continues to improve the product and grow its capability based on market needs and data availability.

Search, comparison analysis and directories include:

- types of method
- suppliers
- buyers
- panels
- categories
- upcoming, active, soon to expire contracts
- awarded contracts
- time frame.

Additional functionality includes the ability to show department spending, whether a department tendering used an open or closed panel and whether it was a limited or open tender.

There are market insights reporting and the ability to create custom reports based on an individual search eg. Search term 'Walgett'. Full export of data sets is available and people can create contract watch lists.

Tendertrace are developing a transparency score to encourage better data quality. This is currently a rating system using a sample of data.

Tendertrace's current user base is:

- suppliers looking for market intelligence, upcoming tenders
- governments looking for ways to find out about suppliers and what's happening across their own government and other jurisdictions
- parliamentary support services
- media to track trends in public sector spending.

### Place-based Reporting

From a community perspective the useful search functionality is the ability to keyword search to find a place, find current contract start and expiry dates, who suppliers are and amounts awarded.

Noting the limitations of contract data is that it does not always have accurate location information. This means that significant regional or state wide contracts relevant to a place are hard to find.

**This Walgett Insights Report<sup>74</sup> is an example of what can be achieved with the Tendertrace platform, allowing people with a link to interact with the data.**

73. See: [www.opengov.com/](http://www.opengov.com/)

74. [www.tendertrace.com/](http://www.tendertrace.com/)



DATA

LEADERBOARD

NETWORK

INSIGHTS

Found 104 notices spanning 26 buyers and 38 suppliers with a total awarded value of \$93,960,526 where TENDER contains "walgett"

SAVE SEARCH

Gov	Notice	Type	Buyer	Supplier	Expiry	Amount	
FED	<div>Food and Water for Life: co-creation and eval...</div> <div>GA143418</div> <div>Health and Medical Research</div> <div>walgett</div>	Grant	NATIONAL HEALTH AND MEDICAL RESEARCH COUNCIL (NHMRC)	THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES	December 2025	\$1,169,419	
FED	<div>Indigenous Capital</div> <div>GA354839</div> <div>Indigenous Health</div> <div>walgett</div>	Grant	DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE	WALGETT ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE LTD.	June 2025	\$308,000	
FED	<div>Indigenous Capital</div> <div>GA305305</div> <div>Indigenous Health</div> <div>walgett</div>	Grant	DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND AGED CARE	WALGETT ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE LTD.	June 2025	\$5,539,600	
FED	<div>Support and improve lives of Walgett &amp; Gular...</div> <div>GA289153</div> <div>Indigenous Education</div> <div>walgett</div>	Grant	NATIONAL INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AGENCY	MACKILLOP FAMILY SERVICES	December 2024	\$541,200	
NSW	<div>Transport for NSW (Transport Infrastructure ...</div> <div>RMS.19.0000302746.1823-0177</div> <div>Public Utilities and Public Sector Related ...</div> <div>walgett</div>	Contract	TRANSPORT FOR NSW (TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS)	BORAL CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS GROUP LTD	December 2024	\$415,269	
NSW	<div>Transport for NSW (Transport Infrastructure ...</div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>	Contract	TRANSPORT FOR NSW (TRANSPORT	HUMES	December 2024	\$1,071,201	

Figure 26: Tendertrace Data search using keyword 'Walgett' lists Notices, Type, Buyer, Suppliers, Amounts awarded, Contract Expiry Dates (between 16 September 2013 and 19 February 2024)

### Market Share

The total value of the 104 contracts awarded by public entities based on the search criteria was \$93,960,526. With the majority of spending commitments being made by the Federal Government across 74 contracts.

Market share by entity

Metric

Amount

Grouping

Government

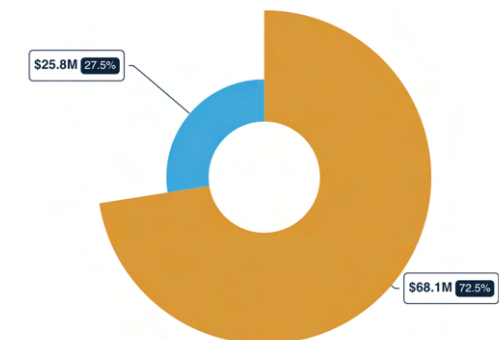


Figure 27: Tendertrace Market Share search using keyword 'Walgett' shows 104 grant and contract Notices for a value of \$93,960,526 between (16 September 2013 and 19 February 2024).



Buyers Categories Suppliers Keywords Government ? ↓ ↗ ≡						
<input type="checkbox"/>	Supplier	# Notices	Value	Avg	% Notices	% Value
<input type="checkbox"/>	WALGETT ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICE LTD.	28	\$51.41M	\$1.84M	27%	55%
<input type="checkbox"/>	WALGETT SHIRE COUNCIL	25	\$10.82M	\$0.43M	24%	12%
<input type="checkbox"/>	PENSAR CIVIL PTY LTD	1	\$7.31M	\$7.31M	1%	8%
<input type="checkbox"/>	OCHRE HEALTH PTY LIMITED	2	\$3.13M	\$1.57M	2%	4%
<input type="checkbox"/>	MACKILLOP FAMILY SERVICES	3	\$1.91M	\$0.64M	3%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	MAAS CONSTRUCTIONS DUBBO	2	\$1.78M	\$0.89M	2%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	REGIONAL ENTERPRISE DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTE LTD	1	\$1.71M	\$1.71M	1%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	MISSION AUSTRALIA	2	\$1.55M	\$0.78M	2%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	HUMES	2	\$1.30M	\$0.65M	2%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES	2	\$1.26M	\$0.63M	2%	2%
<input type="checkbox"/>	DHARRIWAA ELDERS GROUP	1	\$1.19M	\$1.19M	1%	2%

Figure 28: Tendertrace Supplier data search using keyword 'Walgett' shows a list of Suppliers (between 16 September 2013 and 19 February 2024).



## SEER DATA PLATFORM

Another example of a locally developed product is Seer Data and Analytics<sup>75</sup> platform that provides ‘data access, analysis, and sharing for community-led decisions’.

Funded in partnership between governments and philanthropy, Seer are the data sharing intermediary for Stronger Places, Stronger People at Department of Social Services, Connected Beginnings at Department of Education, and the Department of Premier and Cabinet in Tasmania.

The platform uses over 20 open data sources,<sup>76</sup> including Federal Government grants, Department of Social Services payment, Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) Annual Information Statements (AIS).

In 2023 they started scaling the product making it available to more communities. People can upload their own data, create Closing the Gap dashboards, and reports. They offer a free version and paid versions, which have more data sharing and analysis features.

An example is the Wonnarua dashboard<sup>77</sup> which covers each of the Closing the Gap targets to help track outcomes for First Nations people on Wonnarua country. Data from different sources has been pulled together to visualise current progress towards the targets.

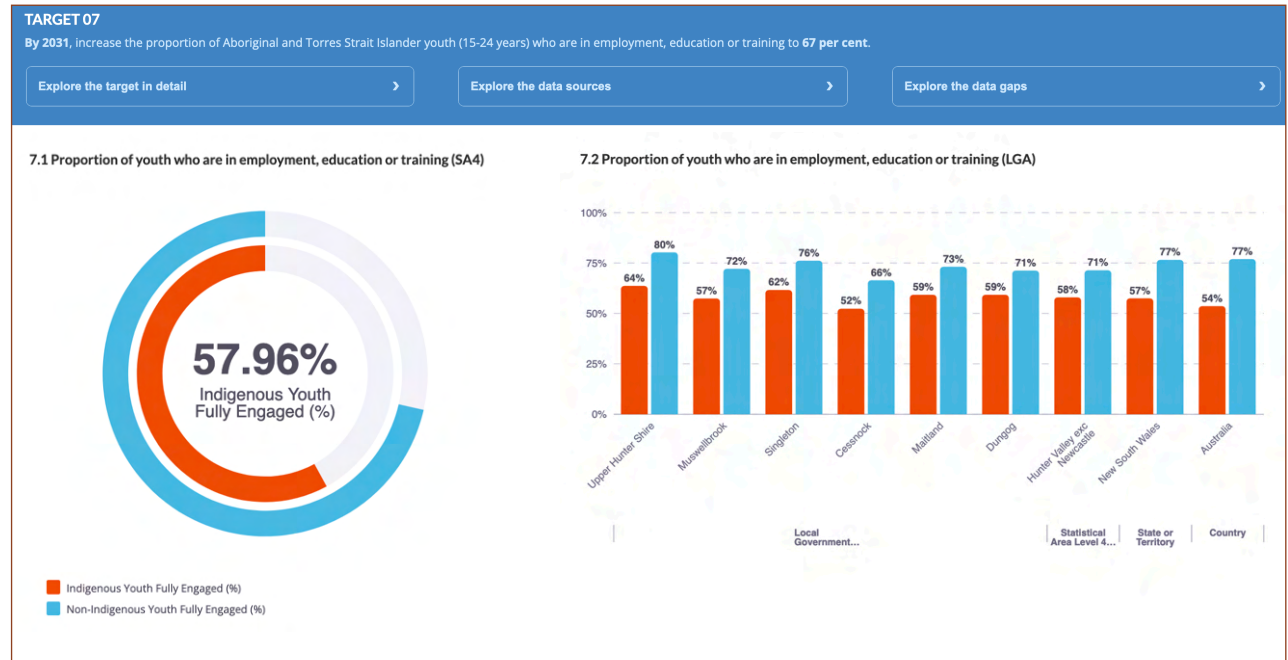


Figure 29: Economic Indicators dashboard showing youth employment figures.

See: <https://seerplatform.com/dashboards/585/7deb45a9-ec5d-4ab1-8340-e1130fe08c49fbc5ba14-dace-48dd-815e-fdeed60795b7>

75. <https://app.tendertrace.com/open/gmiyXjFbRqqMap12ixiBOW262ZWh6ojysj1>

76. <https://seerdata.ai/>

77. <https://seerdata.ai/open-data-sources/>





# EMERGING INITIATIVES

There are a number of other emerging initiatives and practices that share government data.

These are excellent steps towards more accessible data but reflect some of the same problems as existing systems in that they:

- are designed for experts - not communities
- require prior knowledge of terminology and processes
- are not providing connected and holistic place-based data that is easily accessible to all communities
- have interaction and usability issues.

## GRANT CONNECT

The Federal Government has continued to work on its grants platform<sup>78</sup> making information more discoverable. A feature includes being able to look up grants by place and exporting a spreadsheet with details of awards.

Limitations are it doesn't allow for comparing grants over time, provide accurate locations, and details of evaluations and outcomes. A quirk is the case sensitivity of the search. For example searching for a place using the keyword 'walgett' leads to no results, whereas searching for 'Walgett' using a capital 'W' presents results. Providing instructions on the page for new users would be helpful.

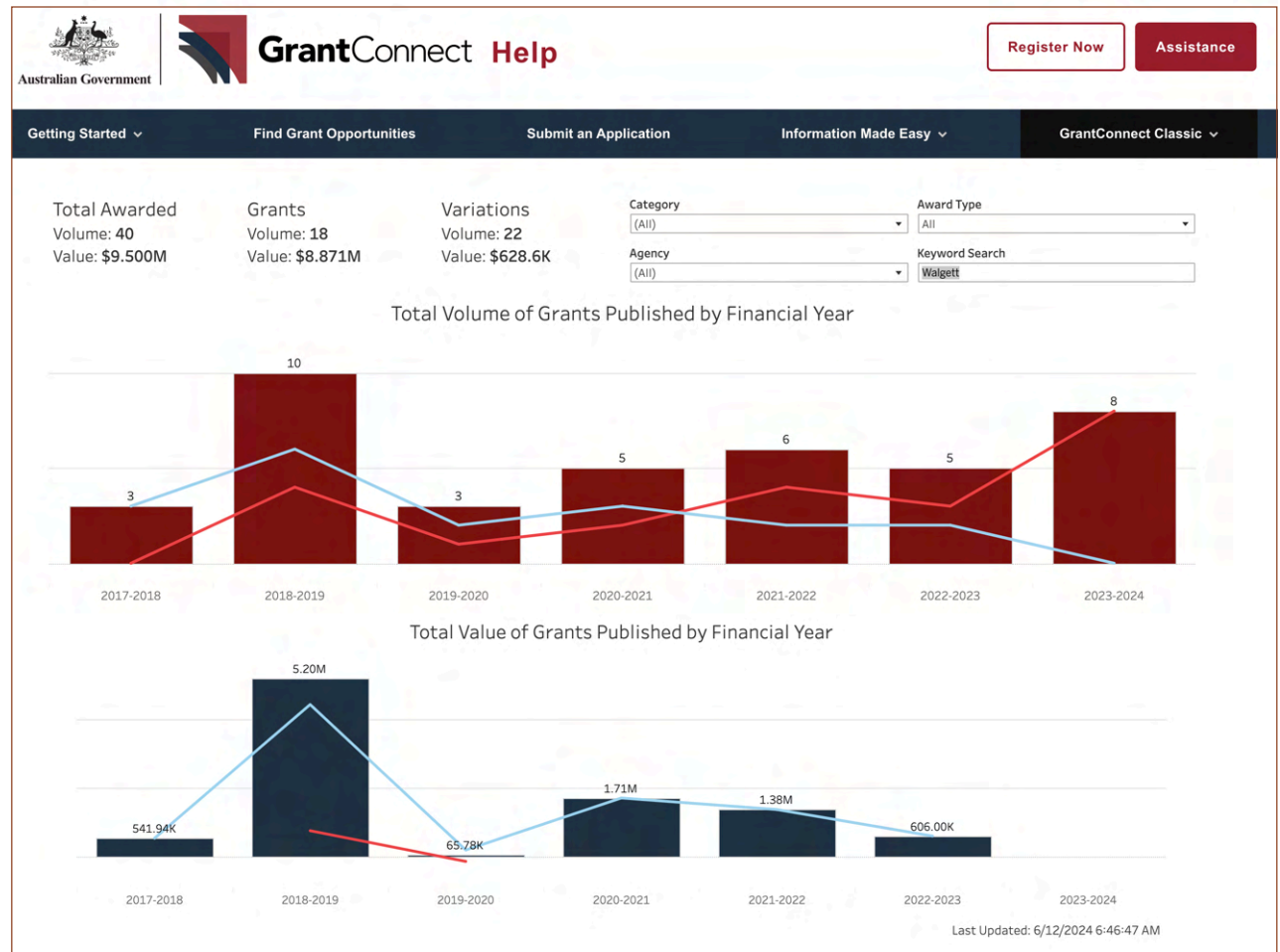


Figure 30: Grants.gov.au grants search for Walgett at 12 June 2024

78. <https://seerdata.ai/first-nations-2>



## NATIONAL INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS AGENCY | GRANTS

In May 2024, the NIAA published a web page<sup>79</sup> which has a downloadable list of Indigenous programs and grants. The pre 2018 grants spreadsheet includes a few grants only as far back as 2013.

The NIAA was established in 2019. Whilst helpful, the spreadsheet doesn't clarify which agencies were responsible for the programs, awarding and management of grants, and whether any evaluations were done.

The data includes:

- Grant Reference
- Internal Reference ID
- PBS Program Name (which seem to be categories)
- Grant Program (summary in a few words or a sentence)
- Start Date
- End Date
- Value
- Grant Activity
- Recipient Name
- Suburb, Town/City, State/Territory, Postcode, Country
- Delivery State/Territory, Country.

Location data is limited to state/territory. Some recipient names do include a place or language name. Universities and foundations etc do not. Interestingly, there are two ID numbers: Grant Reference and Internal Reference ID. Which presumably means they are linked to budgets and contracts, and if not, could be.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this website may contain images and voices of deceased people.

Home > Resource Centre > Indigenous grants pre 2018

Listen

Friday, 31 May 2024

Report

# Indigenous grants pre 2018

**Publication author(s):**  
National Indigenous Australians Agency

**Publication abstract:**  
This document outlines all Indigenous grants prior to 2018

Attachment	
Indigenous grants - pre 2018	XLSX 61.72 KB

Figure 31: The National Indigenous Australians Agency Indigenous grants pre 2018 website.

79. See: <https://help.grants.gov.au/getting-started-with-grantconnect/information-made-easy/awards-by-financial-year/>



## DIGITAL ATLAS OF AUSTRALIA

Geoscience Australia is responsible for the development and delivery of the Digital Atlas of Australia<sup>80</sup>, a new initiative funded under the Data and Digital Government Strategy.<sup>81</sup>

The Digital Atlas allows people to explore, analyse and visualise data on Australia's geography, people, economy, and environment.

According to the website, Geoscience Australia are working with partners across government to connect data and create and acquire national datasets that were not publicly available before.

The intention is to enhance the Australian Public Service's ability to deliver better informed place-based policies, programs, and services.

The Digital Atlas catalogue currently has 181 data sets.<sup>82</sup> more are being added regularly. Story Maps<sup>83</sup> provide further information about different data themes. Their purpose is to organise and structure data into specific groups and topics to help people navigate data sets.

The administrative boundaries map has the potential to be the go-to place to show and explain boundaries.

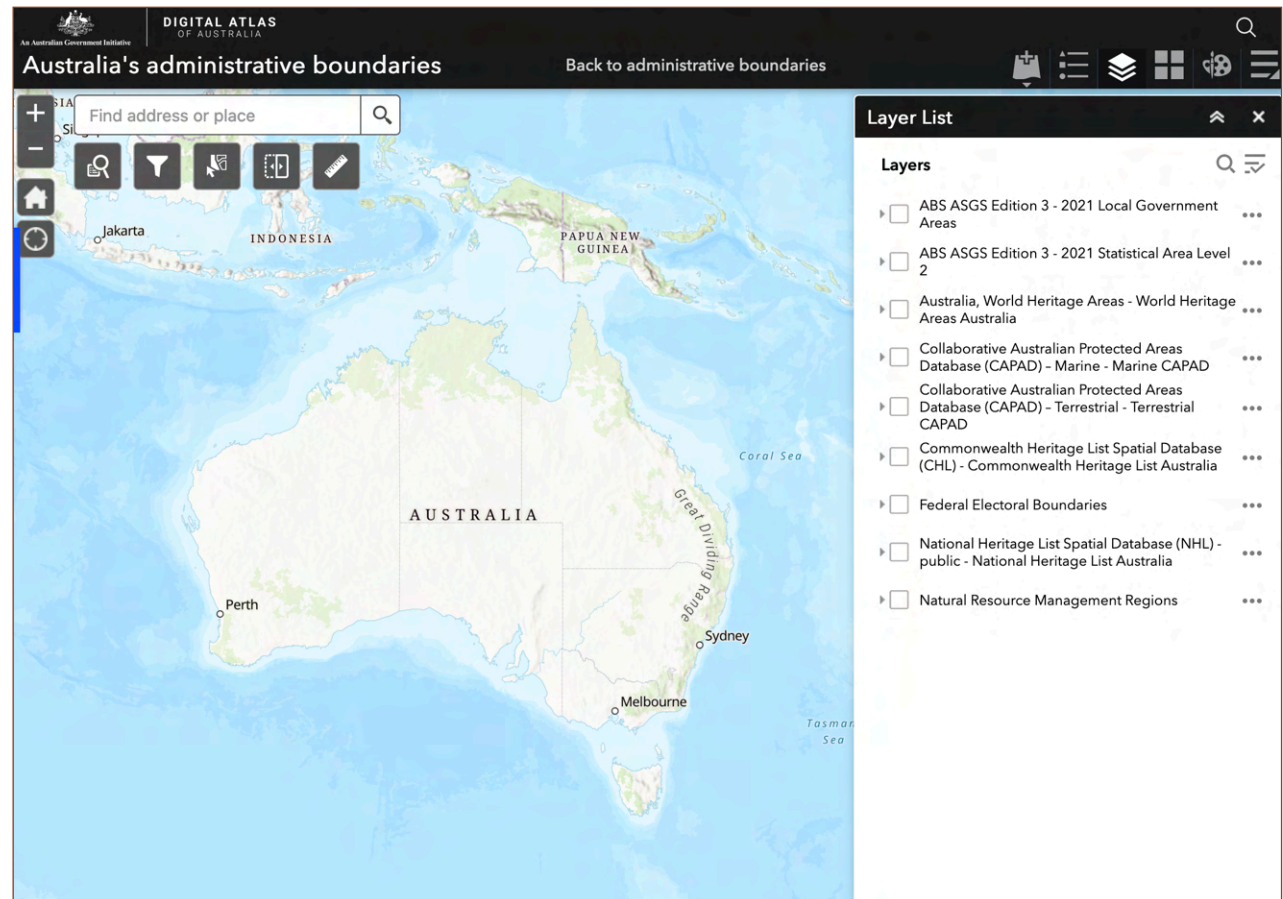


Figure 32: The Australian Administrative Boundaries map showing nine data sets as layers.

Source: <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/digitalatlas::australias-administrative-boundaries/explore>

80. <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-grants-pre-2018>

81. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/>

82. <https://www.dataanddigital.gov.au/>

83. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/search>



## DIGITAL ATLAS | DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SERVICES DATA

The Federal Government's Department of Social Services is the first department to publish 'policy' data on the Digital Atlas platform.

Launched in May 2024, 'Understanding Income Support Payment Recipients'<sup>84</sup> is the first in a series of data sets the department plans to publish. Future data sets include their grants data.

The department's data team is on a mission to put data in the hands of communities. Accuracy of search for place and boundary names, and adding location data for service delivery and grants, are two of the major data quality challenges they need to overcome.

The team is working on getting data into good shape with a program that includes requesting service providers add location data to past records. An area of focus is the 'head office' problem. This is an extremely important piece of work. As we noted earlier, contract data, especially for large organisations, does not specify where services are being delivered, making the tracking of services and accurate analysis of program outcomes impossible to do.

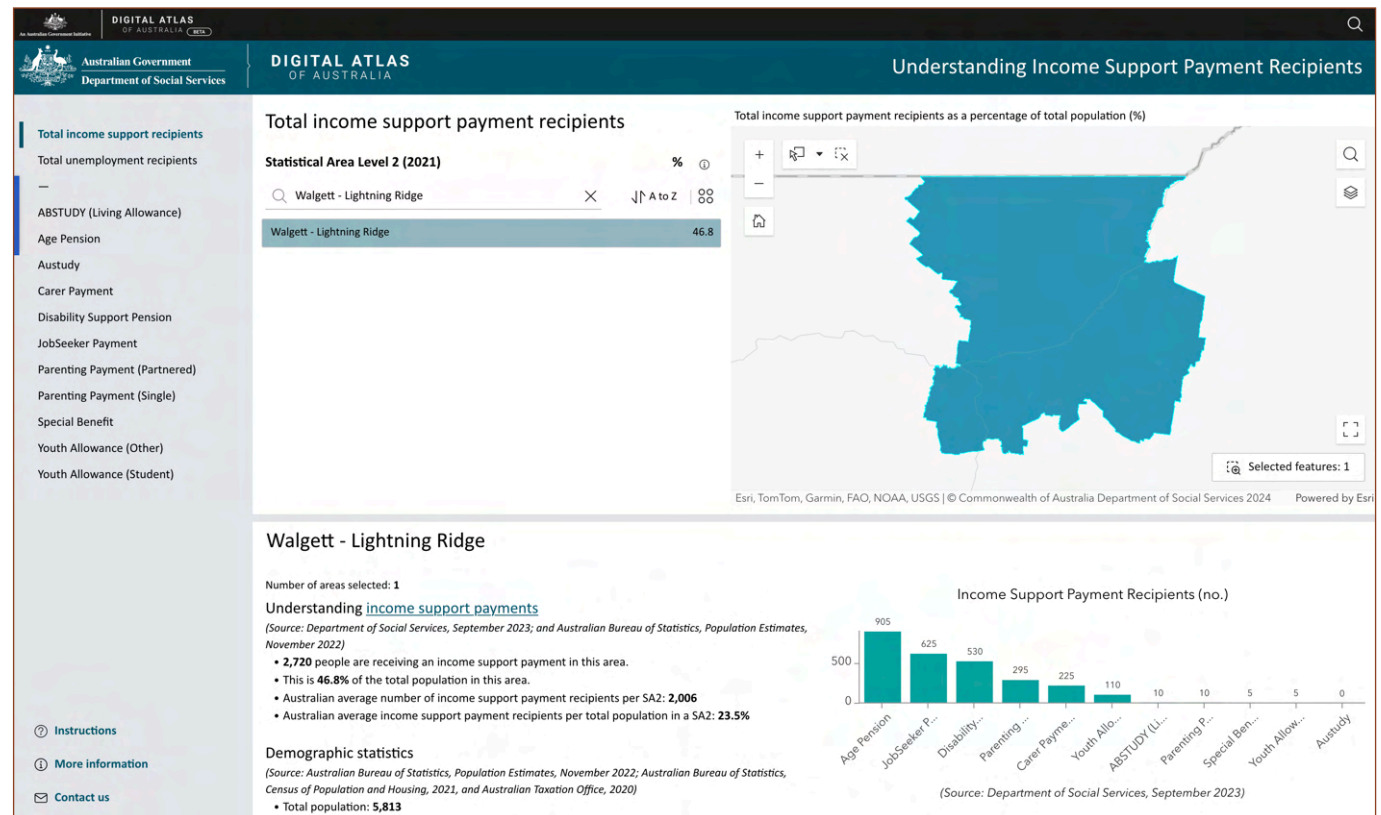


Figure 33: The Digital Atlas Department of Social Services map showing 'Total income support payment recipients' data using the search term 'Walgett'.

84. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/88a8c85ffb9f48f6ae68637cdaa02ac7/explore>





The Department of Social Services Entrenched Disadvantage Package (EDP)<sup>85</sup> includes a new strategy to partner with philanthropy through the Investment Dialogue on Australia's Children— enabling the government to coordinate efforts and direct funding where it's needed most.

The website states “Place-based partnerships will see the development of co-designed solutions that address community needs and aspirations, including support for local initiatives that drive better outcomes in education and employment, child and maternal health, youth justice, and participation.”

The Digital Atlas is a good step forward and a promising initiative. Its success with communities will rely on being easy to use and understand. This can be achieved by meaningful participation with communities, especially Indigenous communities to validate the accuracy of the data and contribute to its design so that maps and language used are suited to non-technical audiences.

A community-first design approach to designing this and other services will ensure government agencies better understand data needs, improve interaction design, and design interfaces and accessible contextual content for multiple audiences across Australia.

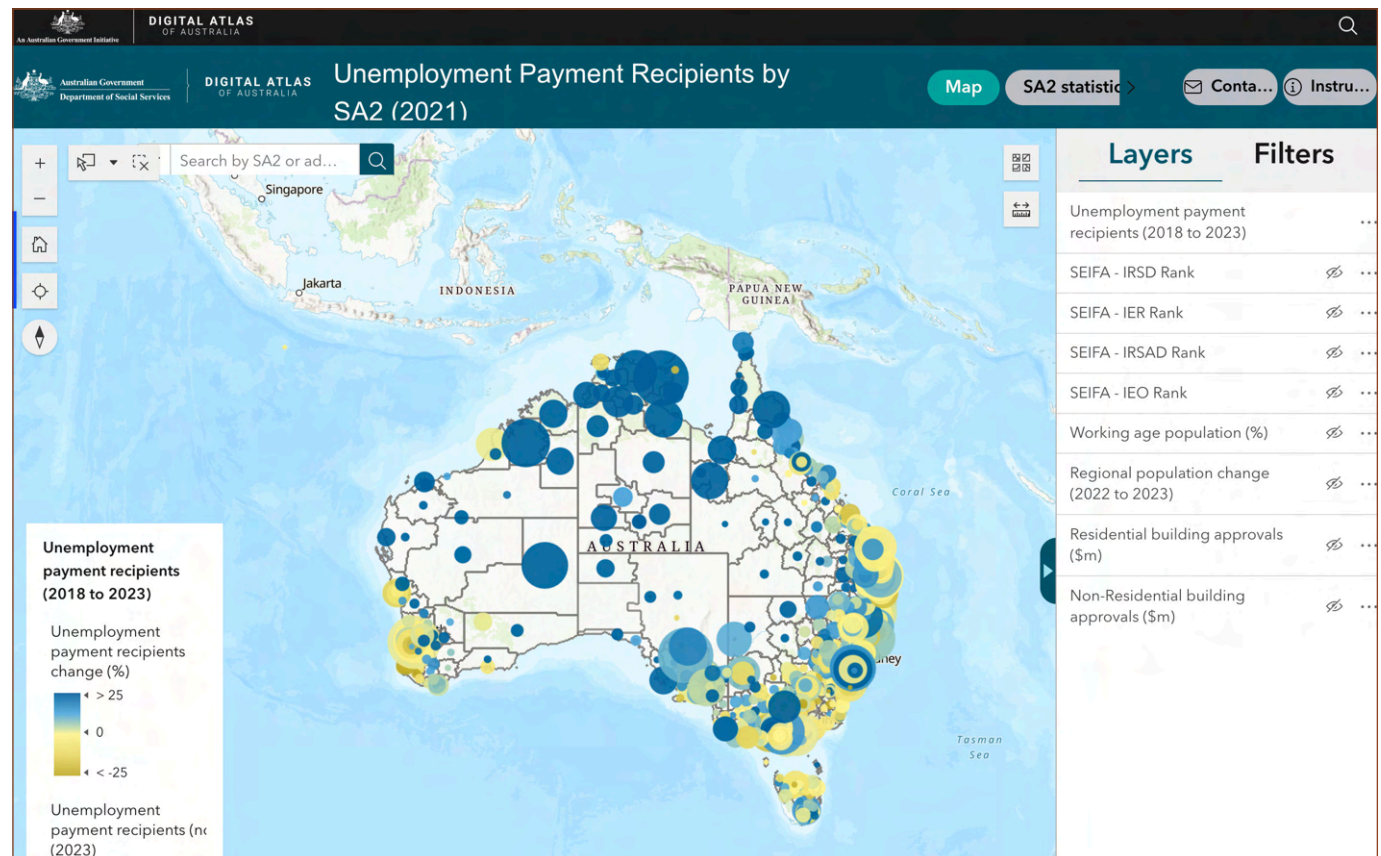


Figure 34: The Digital Atlas of Australia Department of Social Services Unemployment Payment Recipients by SA2 (2021) map

Source: <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/575086e4f8b7483e9bf0e9b0d893bdfe/explore>

85. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/dd94c540f7464fd184283ffa26bb9e37/explore>



## DIGITAL ATLAS | INFRASTRUCTURE MAP

The infrastructure map<sup>86</sup> data sets are a mix of local services such as waste facilities, ambulances, police and petrol stations, gas pipelines, power stations, and energy transmission lines and substations.

An increasing area of interest for communities is clarity about energy infrastructure. This includes investments, costs, providers, and who is responsible for maintenance.

Energy affordability is a national problem, which is amplified in remote communities leading to poverty and other social issues such as safety. For instance, some electricity bills for Walgett residents in small households are frequently over \$1,600 a quarter, despite having solar, and new efficient appliances installed. Lack of understanding about how the current grid operates is one of the challenges communities face.

There is potential for this data to assist communities by more accurately mapping local energy systems. It could be a valuable asset in supporting local and regional energy transition planning. It would also allow communities to have more informed discussions about energy requirements, investments, and the design of future large or small scale infrastructure.

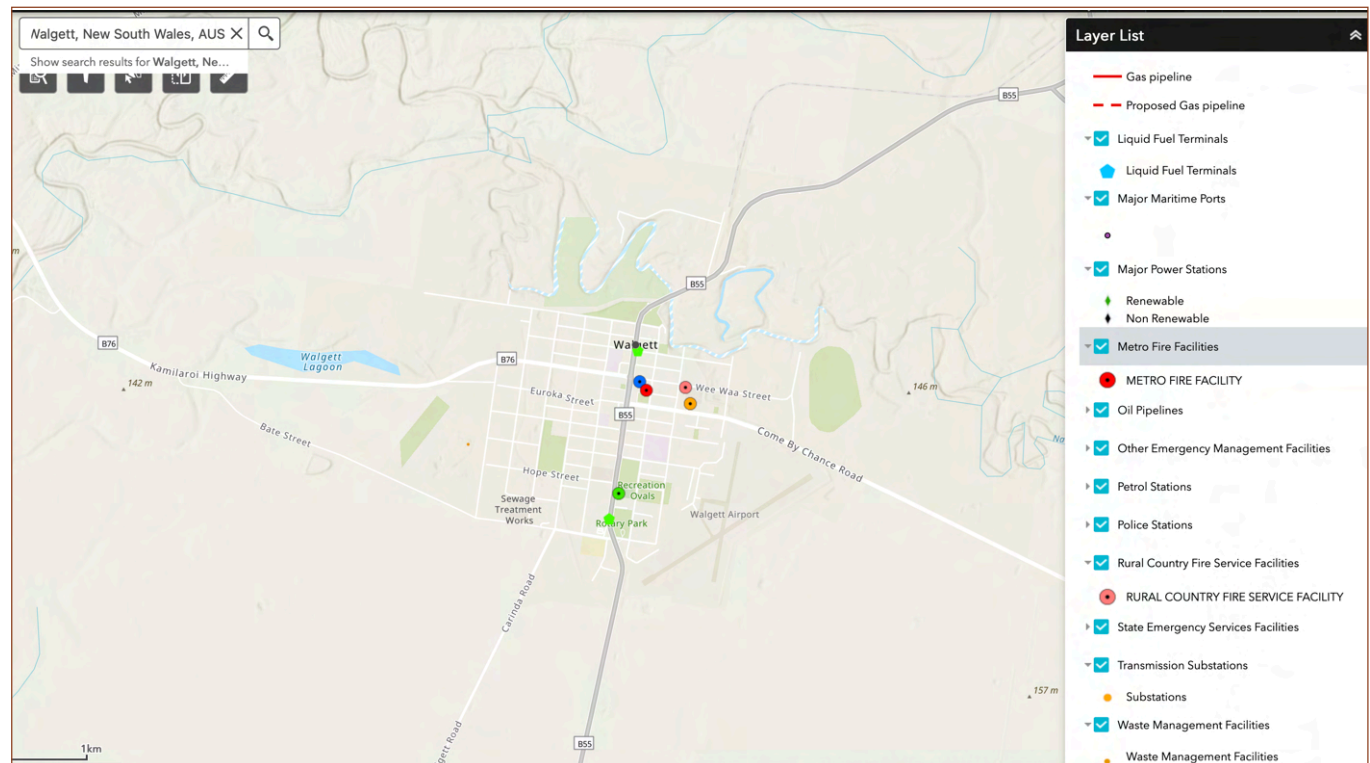


Figure 35: The Digital Atlas of Australia infrastructure map using the location search, Walgett.  
Source: <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/7e3c360b5f6e4514936b6fd105ac63cd/explore>

86. <https://www.dss.gov.au/publications-articles-corporate-publications-budget-and-additional-estimates-statements/entrenched-disadvantage-package?HTML>



## NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY (NEMA) DATA DASHBOARD

The NEMA map<sup>87</sup> is another new initiative and a good first attempt to link location information with funding data. The website includes general data, information on hazard impact (cyclone, bushfire and flood), and relief and recovery support.

NEMA data collection started in 2021. The disaster relief map shows disaster-affected Local Government Areas and places that are or have been receiving different kinds of program support and funding.

A Local Government Area (LGA) Profile report is available for download (via a word document without a map).

Even though the interactive map doesn't show any disasters and relief for Walgett, the LGA report shows five disasters from 2021. Reports include how many applications were received and approved, plus amounts for grants, loans disaster recovery allowances and payments.

Currently not captured is data about service providers who deliver emergency relief. An example is the \$24 million granted to St Vincent de Paul Society which has been distributed via cash and vouchers in Walgett and other communities.

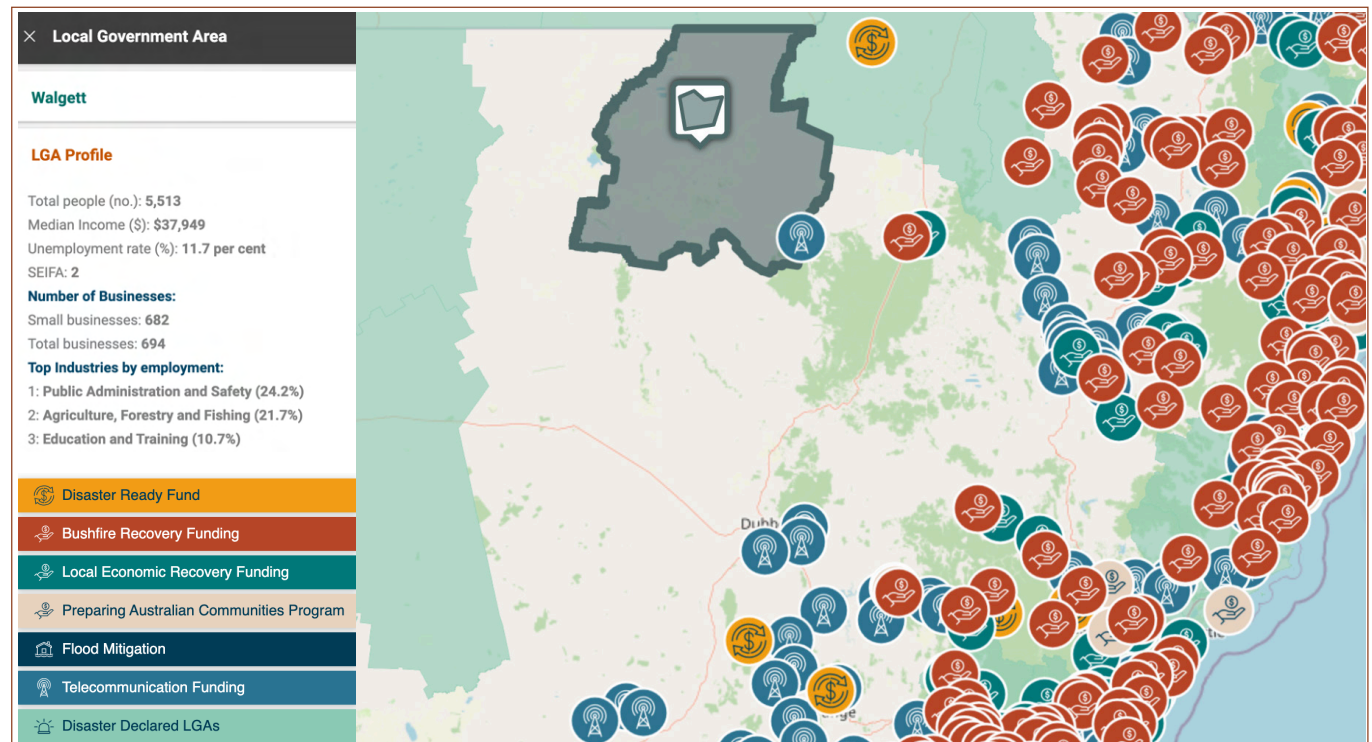


Figure 36: The National emergency Management Agency map using the search term Walgett. Source: <https://nema.gov.au/data#/map>

87. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/apps/7e3c360b5f6e4514936b6fd105ac63cd/explore>





## DIGITAL ATLAS | NATIONAL ADDRESS POINTS

The National Address Points<sup>88</sup> is a dataset with over 15 million records representing the physical location of addresses in Australia developed for spatial visualisation and analysis. The records include geocodes, which are latitude and longitude map coordinates.<sup>89</sup> It does not contain personal information or details relating to individuals.

It is a spatial adaptation of Geoscape Australia's<sup>90</sup> Geocoded National Address File product known as Geoscape G-NAF. The National Address Points dataset is available for use through the Digital Atlas of Australia or a desktop GIS (Geospatial Information System). Geoscape G-NAF was made openly available<sup>91</sup> by the Commonwealth in 2016 and recently extended until 2029.

The dataset is available as open data on [data.gov.au](https://data.gov.au) under terms that are based on the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International license (CC BY 4.0), with a restriction<sup>92</sup> relating to the use of G-NAF for sending mail.

A rich source of information, this service has the potential to be an invaluable source of accurate location data for ACCOs, providing the foundation for transforming government grant, contract, and service delivery information across all government agencies.

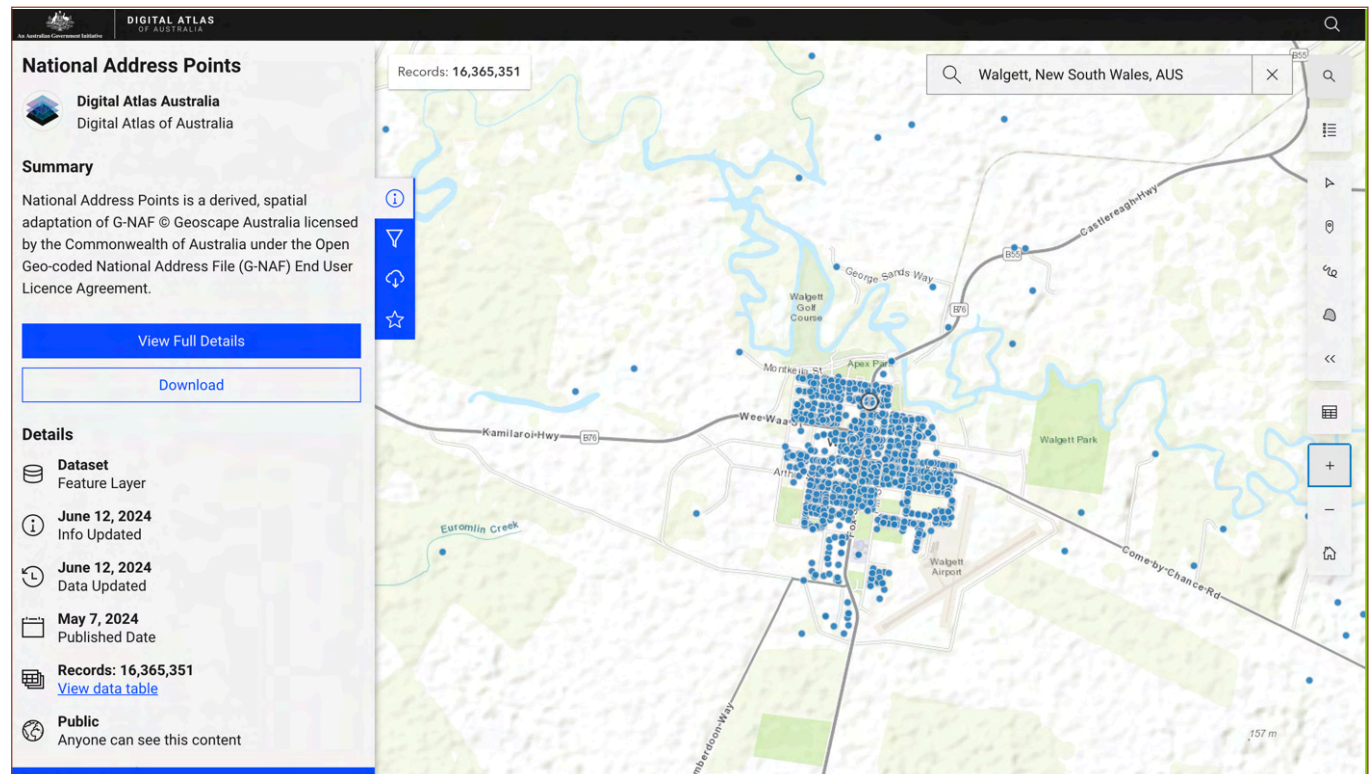


Figure 37: The Digital Atlas National Address Points map showing addresses in Walgett. Source: <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/datasets/digitalatlas::national-address-points/explore?location=-30.020670%2C148.117112%2C14.00>

88. <https://nema.gov.au/data#/map>

89. <https://digital.atlas.gov.au/datasets/digitalatlas::national-address-points/about>

90. [https://docs.geoscape.com.au/projects/gnaf\\_desc/en/stable/data\\_quality.html#positional-accuracy](https://docs.geoscape.com.au/projects/gnaf_desc/en/stable/data_quality.html#positional-accuracy)

91. <https://geoscape.com.au/>

92. <https://www.industry.gov.au/news/open-address-data-better-services>





# INDIGENOUS MAPPING

## INDIGENOUS MAPPING WORKSHOPS

The ability to use spatial data and mapping are invaluable skills for developing digital capabilities to care for country and Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

In 2014 Indigenous Mapping Workshops were started by Canadian cartographer, Steve DeRoy of the Firelight Group, in collaboration with Google Earth Outreach. The vision was to create a conference that gave Indigenous peoples direct access to the tools and training they needed to map their lands.

“Mapping is critical to supporting Indigenous rights and interests, decolonizing place and space, and sharing Indigenous stories of the land.”<sup>93</sup>

A partnership with Google, Google Maps and Google Earth led to Indigenous territories and reserve boundaries being added to their base maps.<sup>94</sup> With the belief that “[m]aking Indigenous lands and waters visible and part of the landscape is critical for recognition and reconciliation.”

Now known as the Indigenous Mapping Collective, there are 2000+ members from over 44 countries. Workshops are held in person and online on demand. Membership is free for Indigenous people, and a paid monthly subscription basis for government, non profit, private and academic sectors.

The workshop program extended to New Zealand in 2016, with Moka Apiti of Digital Navigators, Indigenous Mapping Wananga.<sup>95</sup> Australia hosted its first-ever Indigenous Mapping Workshop in 2018, with Andrew Dowding of Perth based company Winyama.<sup>96</sup>

Winyama’s vision is to see full and equal participation of Indigenous people in the digital economy and as an enabler of young Indigenous talent seeking careers in technology.

The Indigenous Mapping Workshops Australia program, in collaboration with its strategic partners, is committed to advancing culturally sensitive and inclusive geospatial technologies that serve Indigenous leadership, agencies, and communities, reinforcing Indigenous rights and interests.

Through the workshops, Winyama provides culturally appropriate training to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in land management, cultural centres, and arts centres, helping communities showcase their connections to land and water, and learn digital information management skills.

In order for governments across Australia to support community development and ACCOs to reach their potential, support for these kinds of initiatives and funding for training in geospatial and data capabilities are an absolute necessity, especially for young people.

93. <https://www.indigenousmaps.com/ourstory/>

94. <https://canadiangeographic.ca/articles/canadas-indigenous-lands-added-to-google-maps-google-earth/>

95. <https://digitalnavigatorsld.com/gis-mapping-services/indigenous-mapping-wananga/>

96. <https://www.winyama.com.au/>



## INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE AND GRANTS MAP

Kowa Collaboration honours the legacy of Darren Clinch, a Badimia man from Yamatji, whose passion for empowering Indigenous communities through technology led to the development of a groundbreaking interactive grants map. This prototype is a testament to Darren's vision to allow people to visualise grant data in the context of Indigenous languages, making this vital information more accessible and Culturally relevant.

Using the Qlik data platform, the map enables users to search grant data by LGA, filter by categories, and identify Indigenous-specific programs and activities.

This project incorporates language maps based on data collected by anthropologist Norman Tindale, made available through the generosity of the Clinch family. While Tindale's maps provide invaluable historical insights, it's important to acknowledge their limitations. Due to the challenges of the time, some inaccuracies and omissions exist, and boundaries may differ from those established through more recent Native Title research.

This project, a lasting tribute to Darren's dedication, reflects Kowa's ongoing commitment to empowering Indigenous Communities through technology and Culturally sensitive data practices. It stands as a powerful example of how innovative data visualisation can create positive change and serves as an inspiration for future collaborations that prioritise Cultural sensitivity and Community leadership in data representation.

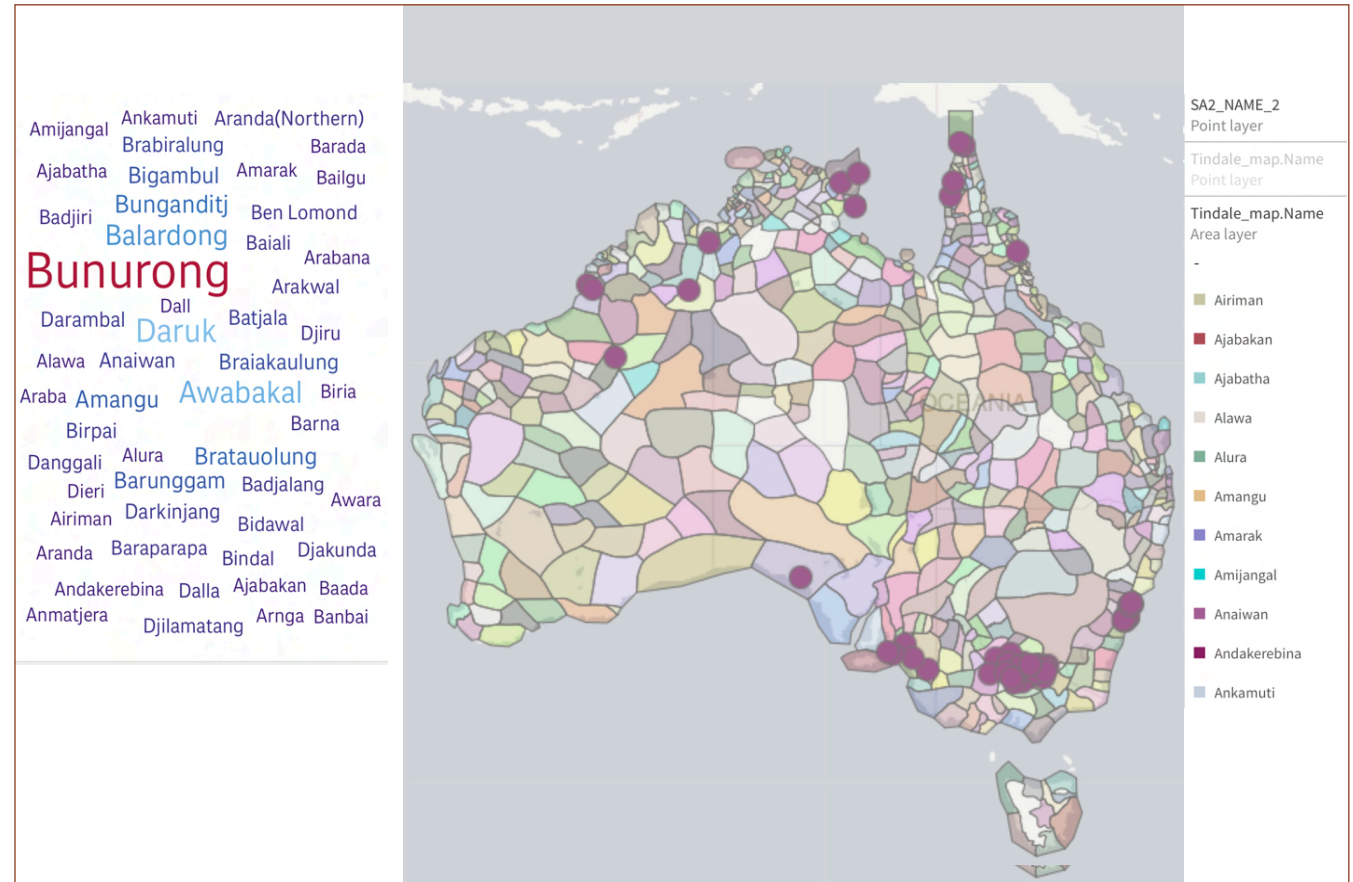


Figure 38: Indigenous language map using the Tinsdale data.

Source: National archives of Australia

<https://www.naa.gov.au/students-and-teachers/student-research-portal/learning-resource-themes/first-australians/history/map-indigenous-languages>

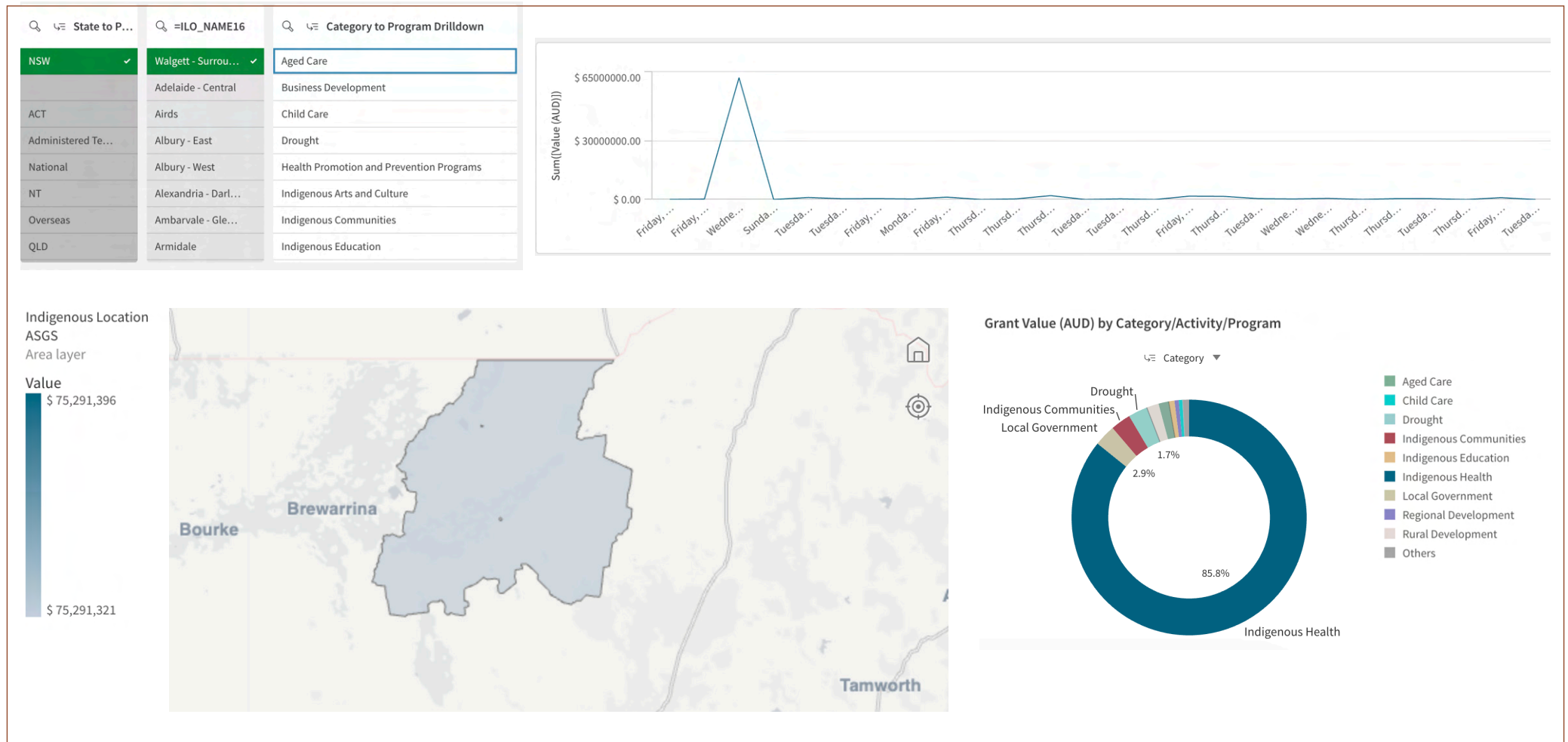


Figure 39: Kowa Collective Indigenous grants map showing results using the search term 'Walgett LGA'.



# WAYS FORWARD

The experience of the Dharriwaa Elders' Group aligns with the findings of the 2024 Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

"[The] persistent barriers to progressing the Agreement's Priority Reforms are the lack of power-sharing needed for joint decision-making, and the failure of governments to acknowledge and act on the reality that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for their communities."

This policy paper has detailed the barriers in current practice and systems to local communities being able to access relevant information and shape decisions about priorities, resourcing and contracting for their place.

As above, this is particularly crucial for Aboriginal communities and aligns with the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms Two and Three to (in parallel) build the community-controlled sector and improve mainstream institutions.

As with our previous work on Creating Better Futures with Contracts, both policy papers have highlighted the range of examples of positive practice both in Australia and internationally that could be adapted and built on.

## **So, what could genuine partnership, shared decision-making and sector strengthening for and with ACCOs and community-based leadership look like in practice?**

This section outlines what a community-controlled budgeting and commissioning pilot could entail in a place like Walgett.

At its heart, a pilot could involve identifying a priority area— such as children and young peoples' wellbeing as highlighted in our examples earlier – and working collaboratively to share decision-making power around priorities and resources with local ACCOs and other relevant community leaders and collaborators.

This could enable that local group to determine priorities and allocate budget resources including overseeing relevant commissioning, with ongoing engagement with the local community and an ability to adapt to changing circumstances.

Some of the important enablers for an approach like this include:

- Genuine co-design of the pilot approach from the outset between ACCOs and government.

- Listening to community right from the outset and for Aboriginal community through their representative organisations to lead the identification of their issues, priorities and meaningful metrics of success.
- Commitment at Ministerial and senior leadership level within government to share power and decision-making and an understanding by the community leadership and all levels of government around what this means in practice, in particular the centring of local priorities and timelines, and commitment to transparent and honest communications.
- Genuine information sharing from governments to enable a full view of past and planned budgetary allocations to the local area and contracts currently held, along with responsiveness to requests for specific information from local ACCOs.
- Longer term investment and trust in communities to achieve the outcomes and accountability that both governments and communities want to see for money invested in services on the ground. This can be achieved by using principles-based funding, and models which allow for 'pivoting' to community needs and priorities when there is an underspend or a change in circumstances (e.g. the pandemic).





- Allocation of funding to ACCOs with broad and flexible parameters to enable community-led commissioning that can replace old approaches where governments micro-manages commissioning, and the funding of capability-building for the ACCOs to build sustainability and independent research and policy capabilities.

In practice, this looks like:

- a. Core funding and/or funding aimed at long term goals, not short term activities or outputs:

The funding can be organised around particular roles the organisations plays, long term goals or medium term outcomes – but should not be restrictively tied to specific activities.

This enables the flexibility required for organisations to respond to community input and needs over time and to actively learn from and adapt their work.

This funding needs to include core resourcing for organisational strengthening and building important capabilities within ACCOs.

- b. Flexible timeframes:  
Governments following ACCOs' and community timelines, for example, enabling appropriate local

recruitment and induction processes and during extended periods of Sorry Business, where community life can be disrupted for multiple weeks due to numbers of deaths.

- c. Sufficiently long timeframes: Linked to the above, the funding should be for a minimum of 3-5 years.

- d. Access to capital funds: For building the infrastructure needed to support new projects and workforces.

- Ongoing collaborative processes for governments and non-government agencies to address potential challenges or opportunities identified through the work of the pilot by the local organisations and to explore potential transition of services to Aboriginal Community Control.
- Community-led evaluation practices: Importantly, measures of success informed by community and processes that make sense locally for gathering feedback and assessing progress need to be used to produce meaningful insight.

This needs to be informed by systemic analysis of broader conditions for change, including ability of mainstream government agencies to shift their ways of working to align to community priorities and

operate in ways that support locally set goals, such as children and young peoples' well-being.

## THE TIME IS NOW

There are strong conditions in Walgett for this kind of shared decision-making and commissioning pilot to take place, applying the evidence base around young peoples' wellbeing and experiences.

This would be a collaboration amongst the Dharriwaa Elders Group, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service and Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT to take a holistic approach to supporting the wellbeing of children and young people.

It would include a local Holistic Working Group convening community, social service and government representatives with a shared commitment to improving outcomes for children and young people and their families and community.

The Dharriwaa Elders Group would welcome genuine engagement from the NSW Government on design of such a pilot.

Thank you for reading our paper.





Figure 40: Photo taken at the Walgett weir on the Baawan during Dharriwaa Elders Group's celebrating renewed access to the river on a public road that has been locked for over 15 years, with Water NSW, 1 November 2023.