OUR PRIORITIES: IN OUR COMMUNITIES

HIGH EXPECTATIONS, CLOSING THE GAPS

The NSW Government plan for Aboriginal affairs (OCHRE)

OCHRE (opportunity, choice, healing, responsibility, empowerment) is the NSW Government’s community-focused plan for Aboriginal affairs in NSW. Released in 2013, the plan has education, employment and accountability at its heart. Aboriginal Affairs and its government, industry, non-government and tertiary partners are implementing OCHRE initiatives with communities across the state.

OCHRE: An Approach to Evaluation has been published, committing the government to ethical and participatory practice. A framework to monitor, evaluate, report and improve OCHRE initiatives has also been completed, including draft measures of success. Independent evaluators have been engaged to analyse the major initiatives.

OCHRE has a number of components, including Local Decision Making, industry based agreements, economic development, Aboriginal employment in the public service, leadership in government, opportunity hubs, and increasing support for learning Aboriginal language and revitalisation. Achievements in these areas are outlined below.

Local Decision Making

Six Local Decision Making sites have been established, with the first accord between the NSW Government and a regional alliance negotiated with the Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly. Local Decision Making contributed to the state priority included in the Premier’s Priorities, to improve customer satisfaction with government services by ensuring Aboriginal people have genuine input into decisions about the services they receive. A review of the accord negotiation process was completed, with results informing further negotiations in 2016. A Premier’s Memorandum was released by the Hon. Mike Baird, MP, in March 2015 to encourage innovation.

Industry based agreements and economic development

Three industry based agreements are operational with the mining, construction and civil contractor industries. The NSW Minerals Council has demonstrated strong leadership by extending its agreement with government despite a downturn in the sector.

In September 2015, Aboriginal Affairs convened a roundtable discussion on Aboriginal economic development in NSW. The roundtable brought together key industry, community and government representatives, with participants agreeing to take action and to share responsibility for enduring Aboriginal economic prosperity in NSW.

The NSW Government’s commitment to Aboriginal economic development is reflected in the most recent data from the Office of Finance and Services showing government spending of $58.3 million over the past two years on products and services provided by Aboriginal businesses.

Aboriginal employment in the public service

The 12 Premier’s Priorities include doubling the number of Aboriginal people in senior leadership roles in the government sector in the next 10 years. The NSW Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014–2017 has been released by the NSW Public Service Commission. The first ever aspirational target of 1.8 per cent has been set for under-represented salary bands to challenge the pyramid effect of Aboriginal over-representation in lower grades. Forty-four Aboriginal employees have graduated from the Public Service Commission’s Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Programs, with 20 per cent of these employees offered career development opportunities including acting opportunities and promotions into more senior roles.
Leadership in government

The Head of Aboriginal Affairs has declared three solution brokerage projects, which require NSW Government agencies to work together to find practical solutions on issues that might otherwise fall between the cracks:

- resolution of long-standing land and economic development issues with the Eden Local Aboriginal Land Council area
- an integrated early childhood service model for the Murdi Paaki region
- resolution of planning and infrastructure management on Aboriginal lands to enable economic development of assets, which is being led by Aboriginal Affairs in conjunction with the Department of Planning and Environment.

Opportunity hubs

Opportunity hubs coordinate and broker services that support young Aboriginal people to stay at school and progress to further education, training and employment. Four hubs are now operating in Dubbo, Upper Hunter, Tamworth and Campbelltown.

By December 2015, 89 schools and 1,584 Aboriginal students in years 5 to 12 were actively engaged with the hubs, which help students to gain an understanding and appreciation of the career pathways and opportunities available to them. Hubs also provide mentoring and other support to pursue those opportunities and help students link aspirations to learning plans and real jobs. Ninety employers were active partners, and 164 jobs and training opportunities were banked.

Increasing access to Aboriginal languages

Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests in NSW are fundamental to the department’s efforts to increase access to Aboriginal languages. The five nests were established in 2013 and 2014 in partnership with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group and local Aboriginal language groups. They are North West Wiradjuri, Gumbaynggirr, Bundjalung, Paakantji and Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay Language and Culture Nests.

The nests provide communities with opportunities to revitalise, reclaim and maintain their languages in partnership with schools, TAFE NSW, universities and other community language programs. They support Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students to learn Aboriginal languages in schools so that Aboriginal languages are preserved and used. They provide a critical conduit to community empowerment, cultural self-determination, cultural reconnection/connection and cultural health and wellbeing.

Each Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest also includes a keeping place where language resources and materials are accessible to schools and the community through community consultation. A long-term keeping place for the Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay/Yuwaalayaay nest has been identified at Goondee Aboriginal Keeping Place, Lightning Ridge. Temporary keeping places for the other nests are at Gnibi Southern Cross University, Lismore; Wilcannia Central School, Wilcannia; Yarradamarra; TAFE Western, Dubbo; and Coffs Harbour Education Campus.

The number of students studying an Aboriginal language in schools covered by the five nests has steadily increased, rising from approximately 1,950 students in December 2014 to around 4,000 students in December 2015. Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest teacher positions are located at the base school in each Aboriginal Language and Culture Nest. They have a key role in supporting schools to implement local Aboriginal language programs.

In addition, the department continued to support schools outside of the Aboriginal Language and Culture Nests to teach an Aboriginal language. In 2015, 32 additional schools were provided with specific funding to implement locally negotiated Aboriginal language programs.

Learning Aboriginal languages broadens career pathways and employment opportunities for Aboriginal students and people, as well as helping to build identity, self-esteem and resilience amongst Aboriginal students.
Aboriginal Centre for Excellence

In March 2015, the NSW Government made a commitment of $20 million for the establishment of an Aboriginal Centre for Excellence in western Sydney. Western Sydney has a significant Aboriginal population and is one of the fastest-growing economies in NSW.

A key objective of the centre will be to deliver programs and services that equip local Aboriginal people, and particularly young people, to seize opportunities stemming from the region’s economic growth, especially with the business and corporate sectors. This initiative will complement existing services and amplify the positive work already happening in the community. Aboriginal Affairs supported a first round of community consultation that was completed in early December 2015 to ensure the centre reflects the needs, interests and aspirations of Aboriginal people in western Sydney. In addition to an online survey and a social media campaign targeting young people, more than 80 participants attended a facilitated community workshop.

STRONGER COMMUNITIES AND LEADERSHIP

Making volunteering easier and more rewarding

The department made significant progress in implementing the NSW Volunteering Strategy, which aims to make it easier for people to volunteer.

The Statement of Principles for the Recognition of Volunteers aims to ensure that volunteers are treated with respect, dignity and fairness. The statement has been endorsed by more than 355 organisations representing more than 762,000 volunteers. One-third of volunteers in NSW now enjoy this additional protection and support. An evaluation of the statement in 2014 found that organisations that had adopted the statement reported improved practices in volunteer management and recognition.

Timebanking is a free community program that allows the voluntary exchange of services between members. Members can earn time credits for volunteering their time and sharing their skills to help other members. They can then use these credits to secure services from other members, including internet coaching, house cleaning, language tuition and babysitting. Up to 30 June 2015, Timebanking members have exchanged almost 19,300 hours of support since 2012, including 4,000 hours in 2015. In addition, 4,900 people and 478 organisations have joined Timebanking, with one-third of members new to volunteering. An evaluation found that the program is one of the largest in the world, attracting new people to volunteering, creating social networks and a sense of community, and improving the quality of life for those involved.

In 2015, the department provided subsidised police checks for 500 volunteers in aged care, bringing to 4,000 the total number of reduced-price checks since 2012. The department also contributed $35,000 to support the Volunteer of the Year Awards and a regional awards program in 20 locations across NSW. Up to 30 June 2015, more than 150,000 people visited the website (volunteering.nsw.gov.au), with more than 800 people downloading the free risk management resource and more than 500 people accessing the new social media toolkit.
In February 2015, the NSW Premier, the Hon. Mike Baird, MP, launched the new Premier’s Volunteer Recognition Program and the associated student volunteering campaign, Shape Your Future NSW. This program provides recognition certificates for student and adult volunteers, including for those who have given 25 and 40 years of service.

**Strengthening youth leadership**

Youth Opportunities provides funding to youth organisations and local government for mentoring and other projects to help young people lead and participate in community development activities. In February 2015, the Premier launched the Youth Frontiers youth mentoring program. During 2015, a total of 1,200 Year 8 and Year 9 students across NSW were mentored. We also supported Youth Week 2015 from 10 to 19 April 2015. Almost 100,000 young people participated in more than 750 local activities and events. More than 120 young people from across NSW attended the Youth Week forum at Parliament House.

In January 2015, responsibility for administrative support for the Youth Advisory Council transferred to the NSW Advocate for Children and Young People, consistent with the repeal of the Youth Advisory Council Act 1989. The activities of the council will be reported in the Advocate for Children and Young People annual report.

**Making our communities stronger**

In 2015, the department provided community engagement expertise as well as advice and support for initiatives aimed at increasing communities’ capacity and opportunities to be involved in planning, influencing and implementing local actions. For example:

- The department worked with other government and community organisations and volunteers in undertaking the innovative Ask Illawarra Shoalhaven exercise, accessing a rich base of community knowledge to inform future strengths-based, collaborative approaches.

- The department’s regional coordinators have been active partners in Collective NSW, an innovative approach to community engagement involving government, community and business in a number of districts across NSW.

The department also supported innovative programs in regional and remote communities, including the successful Tackling Violence program. This program engages men and boys through 19 rugby league clubs and high schools in predominately rural and regional communities. It includes education programs for players and local high school students, as well as a TV ad against domestic violence and a social marketing campaign. Club players and officials sign a code of conduct that penalises players for domestic violence offences. An evaluation in 2014 confirmed the program’s effectiveness in raising awareness as well as changing attitudes and behaviours to domestic violence in some of NSW’s most disadvantaged communities.

The Gallipoli 2015 School Tour was a major initiative in the NSW Centenary of Anzac program. It enabled 128 NSW school students and supervising teachers to represent their schools, communities and state at the official 100th anniversary Anzac Day commemorative services at Gallipoli. The tour provided participants with a life-changing experience that was completed safely and efficiently. Participants continue to deliver the Government’s Centenary of Anzac message throughout their communities.