



An evaluation of the Central Australia Plan.

Final report.

Prepared by Inside Policy for the National Indigenous
Australians Agency

11 August 2025

Disclaimer

This document has been prepared by Inside Policy Pty Ltd on behalf of the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) for the sole use of NIAA and for the purposes for which it was commissioned. The contents of this document do not reflect the views of NIAA.

Intellectual property

Inside Policy grants NIAA a fee free, non-exclusive, irrevocable, world-wide licence to exercise the intellectual property rights in relation to this document. The licence granted to NIAA includes a right to sub-licence those rights, including to the public under an open access licence.

Inside Policy warrants that it is entitled to grant this licence; and that the provision of this document and its use by NIAA will not infringe any third party's intellectual property rights.

Third Party Reliance

The information, statements and commentary contained in this report (collectively, the "Information") have been prepared by Inside Policy based on material publicly available, information provided by NIAA, interviews, documents and data related to the Central Australia Plan and otherwise from sources indicated within this report. Inside Policy has not sought to independently verify those sources unless otherwise noted within this report. Inside Policy does not give any guarantee, undertaking or warranty in relation to the accuracy, reliability or completeness of the Information contained in this report, the assumptions made by the parties that provided the Information or any conclusions reached by those parties. Inside Policy does not accept or assume any liability arising from any actions taken in response to this report (including investment or strategic decisions made because of the Information contained in the report).

Inside Policy does not accept or assume responsibility for any reliance that may be placed on this report by any third-party. Any reliance placed is that party's sole responsibility.

Acknowledgements

Inside Policy acknowledges the First Nations' lands on which we live and work. We pay our respects to the Elders past and present of these Nations. We thank them for their ongoing custodianship of land, waters, air, and all aspects of Country and remind ourselves that it always was, and always will be, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land.

Inside Policy acknowledges and thanks the staff of the National Indigenous Australians Agency, the Aboriginal Leadership Group, the Youth Roundtable, Central Australian service providers and government stakeholders. We are grateful for all the rich and diverse contributions that have helped shape and inform this report.

Table of contents

Acknowledgements	3
Terminology	5
Acronyms	7
Executive summary	8
Introduction	12
About the Central Australia Plan	13
Evaluation methodology	15
Key insights	19
Findings in detail	20
Case studies.....	61
Conclusions & recommendations	70
Appendix A: References	73
Appendix B: CAP Theory of Change	74
Appendix C: Focus areas of the final report.....	75
Appendix D: Government stakeholder interview guide.....	77
Appendix E: YRT and ALG interview guide	79
Appendix F: Case study interview guide	81
Appendix G: Financial information tables	82
Appendix H: Stakeholders interviewed	86

Terminology

Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(s) are used interchangeably within this report.

In addition to the above, below is common terminology related to the Central Australia Plan and used throughout this report:

Term	Description
Central Australia	<p>Central Australia is the Northern Territory's largest region, covering 42% of the total land area. The region includes the major centre of Alice Springs, as well as 26 communities, 16 town camps and over 200 outstations separated by long distances. It is home to around 41,400 people, with a population of around 29,200 living in Alice Springs.¹ Across the region, approximately 41% of the population identifies as Aboriginal with this increasing to 80% outside of Alice Springs.² The region is also multi-cultural, with 32.9% of the population of Alice Springs being born outside Australia, and 31.9% speaking a language other than English at home.³</p> <p>For the purposes of the Central Australia Plan, the region of Central Australia is defined as the Local Government Areas of Alice Springs, Central Desert (excluding the community of Lajamanu) and MacDonnell. It excludes the Barkly region, as this area has a separate regional arrangement. Please see the map in the Introduction section.</p>
Central Australia Plan	<p>The Australian Government has committed \$250 million to support the plan for <i>A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia</i> (also known as the Central Australia Plan or CAP). This was announced as a four-year plan that has since been extended and is being implemented in partnership with the Northern Territory Government (NTG), local governments, organisations and communities.</p>
Community	<p>Community is defined in relation to Country, including family ties and shared experience. Community refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in a geographical region. Community is about inter-relatedness and acknowledging that belonging is central to culture. There is diversity for those who form and live in communities, noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may belong to more than one community, including where they come from, where family is, where people live and what organisations they belong to.⁴</p>
National Agreement on Closing the Gap	<p>The current National Agreement, which took effect on 27 July 2020, includes for the first time, Indigenous representatives as parties to the agreement through the leadership of Coalition of Peaks. The National Agreement centres the voices and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the design and delivery of services that affect them for more impactful outcomes to be achieved.⁵</p>

¹ Budget NT Government (2024) *Central Australia Fact sheet*, NT Government, accessed June 2025.

² NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, NIAA, accessed June 2025.

³ ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2021 *Alice Springs*, ABS website, accessed April 2025.

⁴ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2022) *The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology*, Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, accessed August 2024.

⁵ Australian Government (2020) *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Australian Government, accessed on 2 February 2025

Term	Description
Allocated	The amount announced by the Government as a measure and set aside for a specific purpose (as reported in the Portfolio Budget Statement or equivalent). For example, when announced in February 2023, \$155.9 million was allocated for measures managed by six government departments and since then, there have been announcements about how much of that funding will be spent on a specific service/project such as On-Country Learning and Junior Rangers.
Committed	Funding that has been reserved for a specific project or activity, and a financial arrangement is in place e.g. via contract, funding agreement, or Federation Funding Agreement.
Funding paid-to-date	Money that the Australian Government has <i>paid</i> for the delivery of service/project (see Committed).
Financial Arrangement	A Financial Arrangement is a formal agreement, contract, deed or understanding between the Australian Government and another party that involves the provision, management, or transfer of public funds. ⁶ Under financial legislation and frameworks (e.g. the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act), a financial arrangement may include a grant or procurement, or refer more broadly to any financial obligation or liability entered into by a Commonwealth entity, including loans, leases, or guarantees. ⁷

⁶ Department of Finance, '[Entering arrangements and committing relevant money](#)', Australian Government, accessed 14 July 2025

⁷ Department of Finance, '[Grants Procurements and other financial arrangements \(RMG 411\)](#)', Australian Government, accessed 14 July 2025

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Government)
ACCO	Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation
AGD	Attorney-General's Department (Australian Government)
ALG	Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group
CAP	Central Australia Plan
CAPI Taskforce	Central Australia Plan Implementation Taskforce
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap
National Agreement PR	Closing the Gap Priority Reform
DCMC	Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet (Northern Territory Government)
DEWR	Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (Australian Government)
DFV	Domestic and Family Violence
DITRDCSA	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts (Australian Government)
DoE	Department of Education (Australian Government)
DHDA	Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (Australian Government)
DSS	Department of Social Services (Australian Government)
FASD	Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder
FFA	Federation Funding Agreement
IAS	Indigenous Advancement Strategy
IDC	Inter-Departmental Committee
KEQ	Key Evaluation Question
LDM	Local Decision-Making
NAIF	Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NTG	Northern Territory Government
OCARC	The Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller
RCC	Regional Coordination Committees
SFCP	Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership (Australian Government)
YRT	Central Australia Plan Youth Roundtable

Executive summary

In February 2023, *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia* Plan (the Central Australia Plan or CAP) was announced as a 4-year, \$250 million plan supporting a range of initiatives delivered in partnership with the Australian, Northern Territory and local governments, organisations, and communities. It has since been extended to a 6-year plan.

By listening to locals, Elders, and community organisations, the CAP aims to invest in programs and services that will improve the lives of First Nations people and contribute to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement).⁸

The central theme of the CAP is to “do things differently” when administering the \$250 million and aims to address six key priority areas of improved community safety, job creation, better services, addressing issues surrounding Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD), investing in families and On-Country learning. These priority streams were identified on the advice of the Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller (OCARC) after a consultation process across the region.

Focus of this evaluation

Inside Policy was engaged in September 2024, by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to conduct an independent evaluation of the CAP. This theory-led evaluation is intended to produce key insights on the implementation of the CAP, to inform the ongoing roll-out of funded initiatives and any future NIAA place-based approaches in Central Australia. This evaluation comes 18-months into the implementation of the CAP and seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current state of CAP implementation?
2. How has the CAP been implemented differently?
3. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of ‘doing things differently’?
4. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of positive life and community outcomes?
5. What are the lessons learnt from the CAP process so far?

Methodology

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data, assess outcomes and identify themes and patterns across different stakeholders and projects relating to the evaluation questions including:

- a review of 316 policy, program and implementation documents
- interviews, focus groups and yarning circles with 37 Australian, state and local government representatives, 13 service providers, and 14 First Nations stakeholders from the Aboriginal Leadership Group (ALG) and Youth Roundtable (YRT)
- analysis of CAP funding data to 30 April 2025 provided by NIAA
- three case studies using success case methodology to inform lessons learned for the program.

Limitations

There were a range of limitations to note that can assist reading and interpreting the findings contained in this report. These include the stage of CAP implementation, which limited the availability of outcome data to evaluate. Further information on limitations is in the Methodology section of this report.

Key findings

Overall, the CAP is being implemented in line with its intent in terms of addressing the six priority streams in a way that “does things differently”. Fig 1 provides a snapshot of the funds announced, allocated, committed and spent since the commencement of the CAP.

The key findings by evaluation question are summarised below.

⁸ NIAA, *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, <https://www.niaa.gov.au/our-work/housing-and-community-safety/better-safer-future-central-australia>, accessed 26 June 2025

Figure 1: CAP funding announced, allocated, committed and spent.



What is the current state of CAP implementation?

In February 2023, six priority streams were identified and informed by advice of the OCARC. \$242.7 million funding has been allocated to these streams. Of the funding allocated, \$156 million has been committed through financial arrangements with providers to specific projects while \$94 million is yet to be committed to specific projects in the areas of: Tranche 3 funding for Community and Regional Infrastructure Projects, Justice Reinvestment, Regional Connectivity, Remote Training Hubs Network, the DSS Strengthening Family and Community Partnerships program of work, and Supporting Youth and Leadership in Central Australia programs.

Funding allocated through the CAP was broadly welcomed as an important investment, however funding was not always strategically implemented or addressed for feasibility. This raised concerns about the effective impact of funding, project sustainability, and its ability to address root causes and immediate needs in Central Australia.

Responsibility for the CAP is shared, with strategic oversight and funding decisions led by the Australian Government, with input from the Northern Territory Government (NTG), the ALG, and the YRT; and program delivery and service implementation led by government agencies and community organisations.

How has the CAP been implemented differently?

The CAP included some important elements where implementation differed from 'business as usual'. Embedding community consultation, a dedicated, ongoing Australian Government Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) response and establishing the ALG and YRT for advice supported better ways of working with First Nations communities.

The full \$250 million of CAP funding has been allocated to the six priority streams or for CAP governance. At the time of the evaluation, initiatives based in Alice Springs were allocated \$69 million (29% project-related funding) while initiatives based in remote communities outside of Alice Springs were allocated \$96 million (41% project-related funding). It should be noted that initiatives and organisations based in Alice Springs have received further funding from other sources outside of the CAP, however these funds were outside the scope of this evaluation.

Government stakeholders have shown commitment to more respectful and collaborative approaches involving Aboriginal leadership in policy and planning through the ALG and the YRT, which is seen as essential for building trust and improving long-term outcomes.

Seen as a key strength of the CAP, the ALG has played a direct role in shaping funding decisions and ensuring discussions remain grounded in community realities as a meaningful mechanism for Aboriginal community influence in government decision-making and accountability. The rapid roll-out of the CAP, with the package being announced in February 2023 and a significant portion of funding being allocated by May 2023 (\$155.7 million), means that some of the funding already had to be directed to specific projects before the ALG was formed and could meet for the first time in June 2023. Despite this, most of CAP funding (\$159 million) has been directed based on the ALG's advice.

The intent to "do things differently" is not well defined in either the CAP's design or implementation. While broadly aligned with the National Agreement commitments to work in partnership with First Nations communities, clearer use of established National Agreement terminology and policy could strengthen consistency and coherence.

What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of 'doing things differently'?

Early short-term outcomes are being seen in improved collaboration and communication between Australian Government departments, through mechanisms like the IDC and Community of Practice.

There is also evidence of alignment with the National Agreement Priority Reforms, particularly in Priority Reform 3 and Priority Reform 4. Existing work already under the CAP could be strengthened to further align implementation with National Agreement Priority Reform 1, in the following ways:

- bolstering ALG and YRT mechanisms which have improved community agency and support greater First Nations community leadership and influence in decision-making
- supporting CAP funded Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Traditional Owner service provider programs to continue to activate First Nations leadership at the service provider level.

As ultimate decision-making power largely rests with governments, greater structural shifts and shared decision-making authority are required to work in true partnership.

The relationship between the Australian Government and the NTG in funding First Nations programs is complex and in the context of the CAP, is marked by unclear roles and responsibilities. While the Australian Government provides substantial investments into the NT for First Nations initiatives, this can also come with a level of overlap and encroachment into place-based responses that reflect community needs. Any shifts in Australian Government priorities can also disrupt continuity and stability for service delivery in the NT. Additionally, the recent policy and legislative shifts in the NT, including a move towards more punitive law-and-order responses, risk undermining gains made under the CAP that focused on supporting community-led initiatives aimed at better outcomes for young people and overall community wellbeing.

What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of positive life and community outcomes?

Several early signs of positive life and community outcomes have been identified because of the CAP:

- Early improvements in remote school attendance and employment, including: an increase in students in Vocational Education and Training, 210 new staff employed, 42.7% of staff identifying as First Nations, and a reduction in student absenteeism in remote schools.
- Early outcomes for youth through; establishing the Oonchiumpa program, which is successfully diverting youth; and youth programs and school holiday activities with more than 24,600 attendances (nearly 16,000 remote community attendances) across 1,461 activities over the 2024-25 holidays.
- Supporting service providers with funding to increase organisational capacity, improve program quality, and expand their reach.
- Improved community safety outcomes, including strengthened DFV support, Alcohol and Other Drug services, justice reinvestment, youth engagement activities, and emergency accommodation.
- Progress being made on projects that increase digital inclusion.

While the above early signs of positive outcomes are encouraging, some non-government stakeholders have expressed concern for the sustainability of outcomes with time limited CAP funding. Further, the impact of the investments will require assessment as more activities are implemented.

What are the lessons learnt from the CAP process so far?

Key strengths supporting the CAP include the establishment of strong governance mechanisms, the active leadership and involvement of community members, and the willingness of government stakeholders to adopt a flexible, relational approach. These elements have created a strong foundation for collaborative and responsive implementation, with buy in from key First Nations community organisations and service providers. The ALG and YRT are important mechanisms for strengthening community voice in policy development and will be critical to sustaining First Nations-led and locally responsive delivery.

Experienced public servants with strong networks across government agencies made a significant contribution to implementing the CAP. This approach also introduced risks by relying on personal relationships rather than consistent, formal processes.

Key improvements that are required to improve the likelihood that CAP can reach its full potential moving forward are:

- systematic data capture and reporting on CAP funding, outputs and outcomes that align to the National Agreement framework
- clarification of the role of the NTG within the CAP
- use of criteria and policy domain expertise by the ALG for advising on the allocation of the remaining funds.

Conclusions & recommendations

The evaluation findings evidence that governments and First Nations communities can work together effectively in ways that are different to conventional practices of the past, to address complex and longstanding challenges. The CAP demonstrates the importance of partners committing to “doing things differently” while bringing this commitment to life in its design and implementation. The inclusion of a diversity of First Nations voices, including the voice of young people, through a range of governance structures within the CAP is one of its core strengths. The cross-government collaboration – particularly within the Australian Government and with local governments – is another strength.

These governance structures have laid important groundwork for more and deepened collaboration with governments as well as the direction of funding to the priorities, locations and initiatives that represent the greatest need as articulated by communities. In turn, this has led to early evidence of improvements in outcomes in the areas within the focus of the CAP.

As the CAP moves from design into full implementation, the evaluation findings illustrate the need for the CAP to build on its strengths, address implementation gaps, ensure policy alignment, and engage with the Central Australia community while embedding the role of, and accountability related to, the NTG.

The seven recommendations that respond to these broad themes are:

Build on the CAPs strengths

- Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a comprehensive set of guidelines for “doing things differently”.
- Recommendation 2: Continue and strengthen the current CAP governance mechanisms.
- Recommendation 3: Continue and strengthen the community of practice for government agencies.

Address gaps in CAP priority implementation

- Recommendation 4: Accelerate and strengthen the investments in community safety initiatives.

Align CAP priorities and other policy settings

- Recommendation 5: Review and align CAP implementation to the National Agreement Targets.
- Recommendation 6: Address misalignments between CAP priorities and relevant NTG policies.

Share information about the CAP

- Recommendation 7: Frequently share information with the Central Australia community about the CAP.

Implementing these recommendations aim to:

- build a shared understanding of “doing things differently” across CAP stakeholders, align the CAP’s implementation more strongly to the National Agreement Priority Reforms, and provide a mechanism for accountability
- strengthen the viability and sustainability of funding decisions while supporting participation and informed decision-making
- accelerate the uptake of learnings on how to do things differently while involving the NTG in these learnings
- address the underlying root causes that led to the CAP as they relate to community safety, justice and social cohesion
- ensure that NIAA collects the required data to evidence the relationship between CtG and CAP
- resolve any inconsistencies between the priorities and policy settings are understood and addressed to support the overall success and intent of the CAP
- improve the Central Australian community’s understanding of the CAP, its progress and the outcomes it is achieving.

Introduction

In September 2024, Inside Policy was engaged by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) to design, undertake and report on an independent evaluation of the Central Australia Plan (CAP).

The evaluation of the CAP, which is largely focused on implementation, will inform the ongoing roll-out of funded initiatives and any future NIAA place-based approaches in Central Australia. The evaluation also benefited from advice and oversight provided by the Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group (ALG), the Youth Roundtable (YRT), and the NIAA Indigenous Evaluation Committee (IEC).

About the Central Australia Plan

On 6 February 2023, the Australian Government announced \$250 million to support *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, also known as the CAP. The CAP is a six-year plan being implemented in partnership with the Northern Territory Government (NTG), local governments, organisations and communities. It is focused on addressing enduring challenges and working with communities and organisations on long-term solutions across six key areas:

1. Improved community safety and cohesion
2. Job creation
3. Better services
4. Preventing and addressing issues caused by FASD
5. Investing in families
6. On-Country learning.

About the evaluation

Given CAP is 18-24 months into implementation, this evaluation takes a formative approach to understanding CAP's processes, emerging outcomes and lessons learned. The evaluation is intended to produce key insights into the Australian Government's investment, as well as to inform future planning and improvement of the CAP. The evaluation looked at the implementation of the CAP, including any early outcomes. This involved an overall assessment of the implementation of CAP investments, cutting across its six streams; the process of delivery specific to the priority of 'doing things differently'; and lessons learnt – this involved understanding lessons learnt in terms of implementation and 'doing things differently'.

To achieve this, data was collected and analysed over two phases. The first phase of data collection (Phase 1) occurred prior to ethics approval from the Menzies School of Health Research and thus focused on findings from documents and interviews with government stakeholders only. This work culminated in an interim report. The second phase of data collection (Phase 2) occurred following receipt of ethics approval and included interviews with a range of ALG, YRT, grant recipients and government stakeholders. Phase 2 culminated in this full report.

Structure of this report

The remainder of this report is structured as follows:

- **About the Central Australia Plan** – this describes the CAP, its policy objectives, funding arrangements and priority streams.
- **Evaluation methodology** – this outlines the evaluation design, data collected and methods of analysis used to inform this report, including limitations to help frame how the report findings are interpreted.
- **Key insights** – this summarises the high-level evaluative insights from the evaluation.
- **Findings** – this details the findings against the five evaluation questions.
- **Conclusions & recommendations** – this outlines the implications of the findings and a series of recommendations designed to address the matters identified by the evaluation.
- **Appendices A-H** – provides more detailed information on references relied upon, Theory of Change and evaluation design, interview guides, stakeholders interviewed, and CAP financial information.

About the Central Australia Plan

On 24 January 2023, Australia’s Prime Minister announced a \$48.8 million package to stabilise Alice Springs and support immediate community needs. Following this, it was recognised that a different approach was required to address alcohol related harm and improve outcomes against key social indicators for First Nations people in Central Australia.

The Central Australian Regional Controller (Regional Controller) and Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller (OCARC) were established by the Australian Government and the NTG to lead consultation with communities on alcohol restrictions and other needs and priorities. The OCARC, with the Australian Government and NTG, led two phases of engagement in twenty-one remote Central Australian communities from March to August 2023, listening and talking to remote community members about the issues they were experiencing.

On 6 February 2023, the Australian Government announced a further \$250 million to support *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia/* the CAP. The focus of this evaluation is the implementation of the \$250 million, four-year plan (noting initiatives under the CAP now extend beyond four years, and total funding commitments exceed \$350 million).

Underpinning the funding packages is the need to ‘do things differently’. In the National Agreement, governments agreed to ‘do things differently’ by working in partnership with First Nations organisations and communities to make decisions and improve life outcomes for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.⁹ In the CAP, this includes establishing the systems that enable shared decision-making authority for First Nations people in Central Australia through formal partnership arrangements such as the ALG and YRT.¹⁰

Figure 2: The Central Australia Plan – Boundaries and Main communities map.¹¹

Central Australia Plan: Boundaries and Main Communities

Updated 12 September 2023



Produced by: Data and Insights Section
Select Support Report Branch, NIAA
(c) Copyright, Commonwealth of Australia, 2023
September 2023 Ref: 2023/046

⁹ Australian Government (2020) *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, Australian Government, accessed February 2025

¹⁰ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) 2022 *Closing the Gap Annual Report*, Australian Government, accessed March 2025.

¹¹ NIAA, (2025) *The Centralia Australian Plan – Boundaries and Main communities map* shows the broader region that comes under the CAP and the main communities within that, [internal document], accessed May 2025.

Figure 3: Remote Community Clusters and towns within them that have received funding under the CAP. Defined using the seven OCARC groupings.¹²



¹² OCARC, *Summary of Advice: Building strong and viable remote communities in Central Australia*, Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller, [internal document], p21

Evaluation methodology

The evaluation was designed as a theory-driven¹³ mixed methodology evaluation. The design of the overarching evaluation is rooted in the CAP Theory of Change (ToC) at Appendix B, which was tested and revised with key stakeholders including NIAA and the ALG during the evaluation design process. Detail on how this final report addresses the evaluation questions including their areas of focus can be found at Appendix C.

Evaluation objectives and questions

The outcomes of this evaluation will inform NIAA's place-based approach in Central Australia, in doing so this evaluation aims to contribute to:

1. Understanding how the CAP is being implemented, including the process of delivery specific to the priority of 'doing things differently' (**Process**).
2. Identifying any early outcomes in terms of 'doing things differently' as well as positive life outcomes (**Outcome**).
3. Identifying lessons learned on implementation (**Future**).

To fulfil the above objectives, the evaluation sought to answer the following questions.

1. What is the current state of CAP implementation? (**Process**)
2. How has the CAP been implemented differently? (**Process**)
3. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of 'doing things differently'? (**Outcome**)
4. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of positive life and community outcomes? (**Outcome**)
5. What are the lessons learnt from the CAP process so far? (**Future**)

Evaluation design

In line with best practice in engaging and collaborating with First Nations organisations,^{14,15} and best practice in engaging with place-based initiatives,¹⁶ Inside Policy co-designed the overarching evaluation framework with NIAA and the ALG. The evaluation framework was also informed by research into systems initiatives for community violence prevention,^{17,18,19} engaging the community in developing solutions,^{20,21} and a systems evaluation framework.²²

Data collection methods

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods were used to collect data and identify themes across different stakeholders and data types. These included:

¹³ Donaldson S (2007) 'Program Theory-Driven Evaluation Science: Strategies and Applications', *Routledge*, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809730>.

¹⁴ AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) (2020) *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*, AIATSIS, accessed June 2025.

¹⁵ AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) and the Lowitja Institute (2013) *Researching Right Way (2013) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review*, NHMRC, accessed June 2025.

¹⁶ Fry R (2019) 'Simple rules for place-based approaches addressing disadvantage', *The University of Melbourne*, accessed June 2025.

¹⁷ Arthur M, Hawkins J, Brown E, Briney J, Oesterle S and Abbott R (2010) 'Implementation of the Communities That Care prevention system by coalitions in the Community Youth Development Study', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(2):245–258.

¹⁸ Bath R and O'Moore E (2019) 'A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention: A resource for local system leaders in England', *London: Public Health England*.

¹⁹ Krug E, Mercy J, Dahlberg L, Zwi A (2002) 'The world report on violence and health', *Lancet*, 360(9339):1083-8. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11133-0.

²⁰ Desmond G and Davidson A (2019) 'A framework for developing justice reinvestment plans for crime prevention and offender rehabilitation in Australia's remote indigenous communities', *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, 58(6):520–543.

²¹ D'Inverno A and Bartholow B (2021) 'Engaging communities in youth violence prevention: Introduction and contents', *American journal of public health*, 111(S1):S10–S16.

²² Coffman J, (2007) 'A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives', *Build – Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children*, accessed March 2025.

Document review

In total, 316 documents were reviewed for the final report, this includes 245 documents in Phase 1 and 71 documents in Phase 2. Documents reviewed pertained to:

- CAP documentation including government level documents, and funding agreements.
- ALG documentation, including meeting attachments, papers, minutes, and packs.
- YRT and Youth Services Action Plan (YSAP) documentation.
- OCARC documentation including community engagements and consultation activities.
- Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC) related documents including meeting papers and minutes.
- Funded project documents including agreements and project reports.

These documents were reviewed for the purpose of understanding the status of implementation to 30 April 2025.

Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and yarns with program stakeholders

Four group and thirteen individual interviews were held with a total of 31 government stakeholders who participated in one-hour virtual semi-structured interviews or focus groups. Stakeholders engaged included:

- 28 Australian Government staff (5 from NIAA and a total of 23 representatives from Services Australia; Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR); the Attorney-General's Department (AGD); Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCA); Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C); Department of Health, Disability and Aging (DHDA); Department of Social Services (DSS) and Department of Education (DoE).
- Four NTG representatives.
- Five representatives from each of MacDonnell, Central Desert, and Alice Springs Regional Councils (four stakeholders were included in case studies).
- 10 ALG members (three remote community ALG members and seven from Alice Springs including three members of the Grandmothers Group while the ALG only has one Grandmothers Group representative).
- Three YRT members (one Alice Springs member and two remote members).
- 13 service providers (including four of these service remote locations, two remote and Alice Springs and seven primarily service Alice Springs). Five service providers participated in the case studies.

The purpose of these engagements was to obtain perspectives on each of the five evaluation questions. The guides for these interviews (including case study interview guides) can be found at Appendices D-F. The stakeholders interviewed can be found at Appendix H.

Implementation tracker data

NIAA provided its CAP financial tracking data which was current up to 30 April 2025. The purpose of this analysis was to assess how the CAP funding allocations and commitments had been distributed by key CAP priority areas, location (Alice Springs compared to remote), National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) Targets, and by input received from the ALG.

Tables containing key financial data analysis that informs the findings (including graphs contained in the findings section) can be found at Appendix G.

Methods of analysis

Each evaluation question was answered using mixed data sources, depending on their purpose. Indicators were developed to map to the evaluation questions. The program logic and data sources for each indicator were analysed separately in a way that is appropriate to their source (see qualitative and quantitative data below). They were then triangulated to form final evaluative judgements (see triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings below).

Qualitative data

Qualitative data collected through the document review, observations and interviews were analysed thematically against the evaluation questions and areas of focus.²³

Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and derive themes out of the qualitative data regarding each domain, and evaluation question. The evaluation team identified and agreed codes for each of the evaluation questions and a 'coding tree' was created (deductive analysis). For questions four and five, codes were also derived from the data as themes emerged to identify early outcomes and learnings (inductive analysis). All qualitative data was coded by hand in Microsoft Excel to help the evaluation team identify the first parse of emerging patterns and themes. This first parse was then refined and reviewed for inaccuracy and bias before a group theming session, where First Nations researchers also discussed and reviewed the themes.

Quantitative data

The purpose of the use of quantitative data sources in this evaluation was to map investments made by key area of focus. The \$250 million of CAP funding was the sole focus of this analysis.

Investment and activity data from the NIAA investment tracker were analysed in Microsoft Excel using simple descriptive analysis techniques appropriate to the evaluation question.

Location of project, alignment with the National Agreement and the six CAP focus areas defined by the PM&C were used by the NIAA in its implementation tracker spreadsheet. These categories were used to analyse funding in this report.

Alignment to ALG advice was assessed using four categories developed by NIAA for each project committed through a financial arrangement with a provider in the implementation funding tracker.

Modified success case methodology

In addition to the thematic and descriptive analysis described above, a modified success case methodology was included in the evaluation.²⁴ This methodology documents early positive outcomes of the CAP for the community. Organisations selected contributed to the understanding of outcomes that may be valuable to include in project monitoring. The methodology also provided additional data on the lessons learned for future implementation of CAP.

The methodology asks stakeholders to define success for a project. One "successful" and one "less successful" is then examined in detail through interviews and document review to identify factors contributing to success or lessons learned at a project or program level.

Due to time constraints of the evaluation, Inside Policy aligned the selection of successful projects with the CAP ToC, which had been informed by both the ALG and NIAA. Key components of success were aspects of "the repairs that need to be made to the tyres of the truck" (see blue text in Appendix B) that were possible to be seen at the project/program level (the four on the right-hand side of the ToC) and listed below.

Key features captured by "successful projects" or missing in "less successful projects":

- governments and communities address root causes (assessed as six priority areas of the CAP)
- seek out and listen to community voices
- collect and share regional data
- coordination and governance across governments and community.

NIAA assisted in identifying projects that met the criteria for success. To ensure First Nations views were included at the point of choosing case studies, further input was also included from ALG members. NIAA did not identify any projects that were "unsuccessful" due to the variation in progress of the projects. NIAA were able to suggest three initiatives that had progressed to different degrees that could be included as "cases". The ALG supported the inclusion of the community infrastructure projects.

The case studies were formulated through review of documentation and interviews with stakeholders.

²³ Patton, M (2014) 'Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice', *Sage publications*.

²⁴ Brinkerhoff, R (2003) 'The success case method: A step-by-step guide for evaluating programs and projects', *Jossey-Bass*.

Triangulation of qualitative and quantitative findings

Qualitative patterns and themes and findings from quantitative data were triangulated²⁵ during the theming stage and report write up of the evaluation by looking for where data shared similar themes (converged) or differed (diverged) to minimise the risk of bias in evaluative judgements that have been made.

Limitations

The following limitations aim to assist reading and interpreting the findings contained in this report.

- The stage of CAP implementation limited the availability of outcomes to evaluate.
- The financial data provided to Inside Policy by NIAA provided a complete and accurate dataset for understanding the high-level questions related to total funds committed, allocated and spent by agency and priority stream. Variations in data maintenance practices have led to some inconsistencies and incomplete data limiting the more detailed questions that could be answered like when a funding commitment was made, when funding began and ended, why the ALG did not advise on a funding allocation, and the locations of investment. These gaps limit the precision of financial analysis and should be considered when interpreting the findings.
- This evaluation included interviews with a range of stakeholders involved in CAP but there were fewer interviews conducted with remote funding recipients than originally intended. Inside Policy had intended to include video stories from remote service providers in the evaluation but this data collection method proved unfeasible due to time constraints of the project. Visiting and meeting with service providers, community members and leaders in remote communities (outside of Alice Springs) was out of scope for this evaluation. Despite being unable to conduct these video interviews, almost half the service providers service remote locations or a combination of Alice Springs and remote service provision. Further, three of the four remote ALG members were interviewed. Therefore, there is a good level of representation of remote voices in the evaluation.
- Seven service provider organisations nominated for consultation were not consulted as part of this evaluation, either because they were unavailable or declined to participate. Stakeholder consultations for this evaluation were conducted either in person in Alice Springs or virtually. Stakeholders who were unable to attend in person had access only to phone or virtual meetings. As a result, input from stakeholders in remote communities may have been limited.

²⁵ Creswell, J and Creswell, J (2017) 'Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches', *Sage publications*.

Key insights

Overall, the CAP is being implemented in line with its intent in terms of addressing the six priority streams in a way that “does things differently”. Key insights regarding how the CAP funding has been expended, stakeholder views on CAP, how the CAP is being implemented differently, early outcomes and lessons learnt are captured below:

- In February 2023, six priority streams were identified and informed by advice of the OCARC. \$242.7 million funding has been allocated to these streams. Of the funding allocated, \$156 million has been committed through financial arrangements with providers to specific projects while \$94 million is yet to be committed to specific projects in the areas of: Tranche 3 funding for Community and Regional Infrastructure Projects, Justice Reinvestment, Regional Connectivity, Remote Training Hubs Network, the DSS Strengthening Family and Community Partnerships program of work, and Supporting Youth and Leadership in Central Australia programs.
- Funding allocated through the CAP was broadly welcomed as an important investment, however funding was not always strategically implemented or addressed for feasibility. This raised concerns about the effective impact of funding, project sustainability, and its ability to address root causes and immediate needs in Central Australia.
- The CAP included some important elements where implementation differed from ‘business as usual’. Embedding community consultation, a dedicated, ongoing IDC response and establishing the ALG and YRT for advice supported better ways of working with First Nations communities.
- The ALG advice is being responded to with \$159 million of CAP funding being directed based on the ALG’s advice.
- The intent to “do things differently” is not well defined in either the CAP’s design or implementation. While broadly aligned with the National Agreement commitments to work in partnership with First Nations communities, clearer use of established National Agreement terminology and policy could strengthen consistency and coherence.
- Several early outcomes have been identified, particularly in the areas of expanding service reach, creation of jobs, and direct funding to schools. This includes the creation of 210 jobs through the On Country learning measure, where 42.7% of staff identify as First Nations, an increase in students in VET, and reduction in student absenteeism in remote schools.²⁶ The impact of the investments requires further assessment as more activities are implemented.
- Strong governance, clear accountability and transparency are essential elements of the CAP and will be critical for driving ongoing implementation. Strengthening community voice in policy development through mechanisms like the ALG and YRT, alongside a place-based approach supported by the NIAA regional network, will be critical to sustaining First Nations-led and locally responsive delivery.
- The relationship between the Australian Government and the NTG in funding First Nations programs is complex and often marked by unclear roles and responsibilities. While the Australian Government provides substantial investments into the NT for First Nations initiatives, this can also come with a level of overlap and encroachment into place-based responses that reflect community needs. Any shifts in Australian Government priorities can also disrupt continuity and stability for service delivery in the NT. Additionally, the recent policy and legislative shifts in the NT, including a move towards more punitive law-and-order responses, risk undermining gains made under the CAP that focused on supporting community-led initiatives aimed at better outcomes for young people and overall community wellbeing.
- Opportunities to improve the implementation of the CAP exists in capturing and reporting on CAP funding data in a systematic way, aligning CAP funded projects to the National Agreement Areas, clarifying the role of the NTG in the CAP, strengthening the criteria upon which the ALG bases its advice, and communicating the CAP, what it has funded and what it has achieved to the Central Australian community.

²⁶ NIAA (Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) ‘Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief [internal document], accessed June 2025.

Findings in detail

This section outlines the evaluation findings for each key evaluation question and its related areas of focus in summary then in detail.

KEQ1: What is the current state of the CAP implementation?

These findings explore the current state of implementation of the CAP focussing on its intent, the level of investment that has been made and priorities decided as well as the mechanisms that support implementation and the roles and responsibilities of CAP stakeholders.

Summary of evaluation findings

The 'CAP is a responsive investment by the Australian Government aimed at addressing growing community needs and safety concerns in Central Australia. The CAP was first announced in 2023 and at that time comprised a total additional investment from the Australian Government of \$250 million.²⁷ The CAP was initiated as a rapid government response to stabilise the situation in Alice Springs and prevent further harm. As an urgent measure to address the social unrest, activities commenced without a formalised implementation plan, unfolding in a more iterative and situationally driven way.²⁸ Considering this, the evaluation does not assess fidelity to a fixed model; instead, it adopts a descriptive approach to document how the CAP has been implemented in practice.

The CAP is a little over two years into implementation, with documented progress across several areas.

Intent of the CAP

The CAP was established by the Australian Government with an intent to work in partnership with the NTG and local communities, to create long-term, sustained change in Central Australia. The CAP reflects a commitment by the Australian Government to 'doing things differently', including improving safety and wellbeing through more collaborative and place-based approaches. While this intent has been welcomed, stakeholder perspectives on the CAP's purpose varied. Some viewed it as a platform for implementing First Nations voices, others as a significant investment strategy, and some as a short-term response to community safety concerns.

Investment made

The Australian Government announced \$250 million to the CAP, distributed across six priority funding streams. As of April 2025, the full amount has been allocated, with a substantial proportion committed to specific projects and governance mechanisms through financial arrangements with providers (\$156 million), and a portion already paid to projects (\$85 million). While this represents a significant investment, stakeholder feedback highlights the importance of ongoing transparency in how funds are committed through financial arrangements and spent, particularly at the community level.

Funding priorities

The CAP's investment is directed toward six key priority areas: community safety and cohesion, job creation, improved services, preventing and addressing Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder, investing in families, and On-Country learning. These priorities were shaped with input from the OCARC and reflect a broad commitment to addressing both immediate and long-term community needs. However, there remain differing views on how priorities should be balanced, particularly between urban and remote areas, to ensure the feasibility and sustainability of CAP outcomes and projects.

Implementation mechanisms

CAP implementation is supported by governance and coordination mechanisms across three levels:

- Australian Government: The NIAA Central Australia Plan Implementation (CAPI) Taskforce provides national oversight; the NIAA Central Australia Regional Office and CAPI Taskforce members based in Alice Springs offer place-based engagement and support. Cross-agency collaboration is facilitated through an Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC); and a Community of

²⁷ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, NIAA website, accessed June 2025.

²⁸ NIAA (Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency) (n.d.). 'Historical timeline and key decisions associated to the Central Australia Plan', NIAA, accessed June 2025.

Practice helps identify and resolve policy and delivery issues.

- NTG: The Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet leads strategic coordination, with Regional Coordination Committees (RCCs) supporting regional priority-setting and action. The OCARC played a key role in early engagement and investment advice, with its functions redistributed across NT Government in early 2025. The NTG is also a member of the Community of Practice.
- Community level: Community consultations led by the OCARC engaged over 1,000 people and informed the CAP priorities. The ALG established in 2023, provides independent advice to government and grounds decision-making in community realities. The YRT, formed in late 2023, enables young people to provide input to government primarily via the ALG with the chair of the YRT sitting on the ALG.
- Communication and accountability: Effective two-way communication and accountability between government, non-government, and community stakeholders are essential components for the CAP implementation. Efforts have been made to track progress of projects and demonstrate progress of the CAP to the stakeholders including the ALG, YRT and the IDC. However, further refinement of the communication and accountability processes for the CAP are still required, especially at the community level.

Roles and responsibilities

The CAP operates within a complex, multi-stakeholder structure that spans multiple levels of government and sectors. Responsibility is shared across two main domains:

- Strategic oversight and funding decisions, led by the Australian Government with input from the NTG and advisory groups such as the ALG and YRT.
- Program delivery and service implementation, primarily led by government agencies and community organisations.

A key challenge identified across stakeholder groups is the lack of clarity regarding roles and responsibilities, particularly regarding the role of the NTG. Staff turnover, the number of agencies involved, and breadth of project types being funded have compounded this challenge. Uncertainty exists about long-term responsibilities after the four-year funding window ends, including future support for established programs, and the ongoing role of advisory mechanisms such as the ALG and YRT.

The intent of the CAP

The intent of the CAP is described in documentation as supporting the Australian Government's commitment to working in genuine partnership with the NTG and local communities to make the long-term sustained changes that communities have said they want. This includes making Central Australia safer and improving the lives of children, families and communities, and a commitment to 'doing things differently.'²⁹

Stakeholder perceptions of the intent of the CAP vary, reflecting the multifaceted nature of the response. Overall, there was broad recognition of its significance. Stakeholders emphasised different aspects of the CAP as:

- a vehicle for implementing the voices of Aboriginal people
- a significant investment into Central Australia, with a focus on the scale of the investment
- a strategy to address immediate concerns around community safety, particularly in Alice Springs and surrounding areas.

²⁹ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, NIAA, accessed June 2025.

Doing things differently

The concept of 'doing things differently' aligns with a commitment by government to work in a different way with First Nations people,³⁰ but it is not explicitly defined or operationalised within CAP documentation.

Analysis of evaluation data suggests that there is no shared understanding, across CAP stakeholder groups, of what 'doing things differently' means.

Documents and interviews with government stakeholders suggest the concept is broadly interpreted as an intention to work in 'genuine partnership' with First Nations organisations and communities, including listening and creating real solutions with First Nations people.³¹ Government stakeholders also describe doing things differently' as a commitment to work with First Nations communities in a different way than in the past. This includes a focus on more meaningful engagement. These are reflected in the Theory of Change drafted as part of this evaluation in consultation with NIAA and the ALG (see Appendix A).³² One government stakeholder stated:

“a really good thing about the Central Australian Plan, is that we all came together and we all committed to doing things differently, I suppose, which was the catchphrase at the time within our remote communities, and we stood up and made promises about the funding and the impacts that that could have on the lives of people in those communities, and I suppose we have adopted practices from that program that we continue to use now, I feel like it's informed our agency to do things, to do work differently in terms of community consultation.”

In contrast, non-government stakeholders tended to interpret the concept more literally, directly assessing whether practice had, in fact, changed or not. This divergence in interpretation points to conceptual ambiguity across stakeholders, likely stemming from unclear or undefined terms.

Without clear definitions, some stakeholders looked outside the CAP to inform their interpretation of 'doing things differently' or working in genuine partnership. For example, some government stakeholders referenced the National Agreement Priority Reform One and the importance of community inclusion in decision-making, or framed their responses in terms of CAP alignment to the National Agreement. Another stakeholder indicated that their understanding of working in genuine partnership had been informed by frameworks such as the local decision-making framework (LDM) as it gave clear direction on how to work with communities in alignment with National Agreement.

CAP documentation suggests however, that the concept of 'doing things differently' or working in genuine partnership has not been explicitly aligned to the National Agreement Priority Reform One as there was no direct reference or clear link to it identified during the evaluation.

Overall, the data suggests that despite unclear definitions, the government stated a clear intention to adopt a 'different' approach for implementation of the CAP. Most visible were the process changes to ensure that First Nations people were actively included in CAP investment and implementation decisions at critical time points in the policy cycle.

³⁰ NIAA (Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief [internal document], accessed June 2025.

³¹ NIAA (Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief [internal document], accessed June 2025 and NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) [A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia](#), NIAA, accessed June 2025.

³² NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) [Central Australia Plan Theory of Change](#), Commonwealth Government, accessed June 2025.

Priorities

Announced by the Prime Minister and informed by advice from the OCARC, the CAP focuses \$250 million in Australian Government investment on the six priority streams of:

1. **Improved community safety and cohesion** (\$53.3m allocated) – through stronger youth engagement and diversion programs, high visibility policing and law enforcement operations, investments in emergency accommodation and safe places for women and children, and justice reinvestment.
2. **Job creation** (\$34.5m allocated) – particularly in the communities that surround Alice Springs – including urgent changes as part of replacing the Community Development Program (CDP) and junior ranger programs.
3. **Better services** (\$60.3m allocated) – by improving services in surrounding communities, there will be less pressure on Alice Springs. These include digital inclusion, and community and regional infrastructure.
4. **Preventing and addressing the issues caused by Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorders** (\$23.4m allocated) – including better health and justice system responses, and funding child and youth assessments and treatment services.
5. **Investing in families** (\$33.9m allocated) – including better support of Elders and parents, boosting domestic and family violence services, and developing a YSAP for the region.
6. **On-Country learning** (\$40.4m allocated) – improving school engagement through caring for culture and Country.

Specific findings on implementation relating to the CAP's level of investment, priorities, mechanisms to support implementation, including roles and responsibilities, are below.

Level of investment

As described in the section above and shown in Figure 4, at 30 April 2025, all CAP funding has been allocated to the six funding streams. The majority of this funding (\$156 million or 62%) has been committed to specific projects or governance through a financial arrangement with a provider, and some of the funding committed (\$84 million or 34%) has been paid to projects. The remaining funding is in the process of being committed through financial arrangements to specific projects or funding recipients. There have been delays to project delivery in some projects under the CAP, resulting from a range of issues including government processes and workforce challenges. Further detail is described in the findings related to evaluation question 5.

Figure 4. CAP funding announced, allocated, committed and spent.



Funding is managed by the six Australian Government agencies who have each invested in the CAP including the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), Department of Social Services (DSS), Australian Department of Education (DoE), Attorney-General's Department (AGD), Department of Health, Disability and Aging (DHDA), and the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCA).

There are two key types of funding commitment that have been made under the CAP:

- **Departmental funding** to contribute to the cost incurred by the Australian and Northern Territory governments for the oversight, governance and coordination of CAP projects.
- **Project-related funding** paid to provider/s to deliver a project/service.

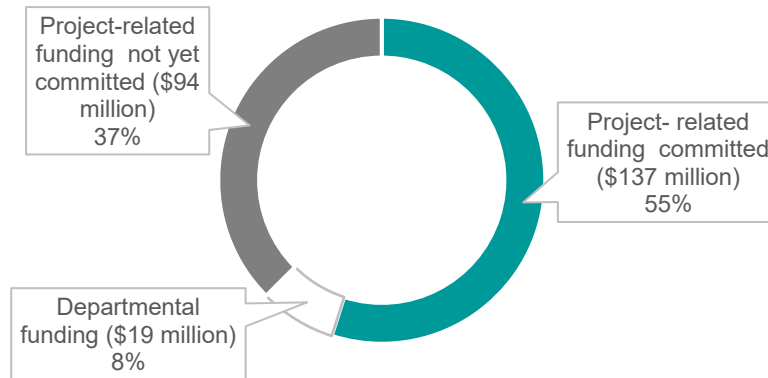
Four government agencies have received departmental funding to oversee CAP projects/services totalling \$19 million (or 8%) of the allocated CAP funding. They are:

- DEWR (\$9.7 million) for the Remote Training Hubs Network
- the Australian Government and Northern Territory Departments of Education (\$0.4 million each) for the On-Country Learning Program

- NIAA (\$8.4 million) to coordinate and deliver the CAP, including the ALG, YRT, Community of Practice, and the YSAP.

The remaining \$231 million in CAP funds has been allocated for project-related costs. At the time of the evaluation, \$137 million (37% allocated CAP funding) has been committed through financial arrangements with providers for 144 projects. A further \$94 million will be rolled out to projects as implementation progresses. Further detail is shown in Figure 5 below.

Figure 5. CAP funding allocated for departmental and project-related costs at 30 April 2025.



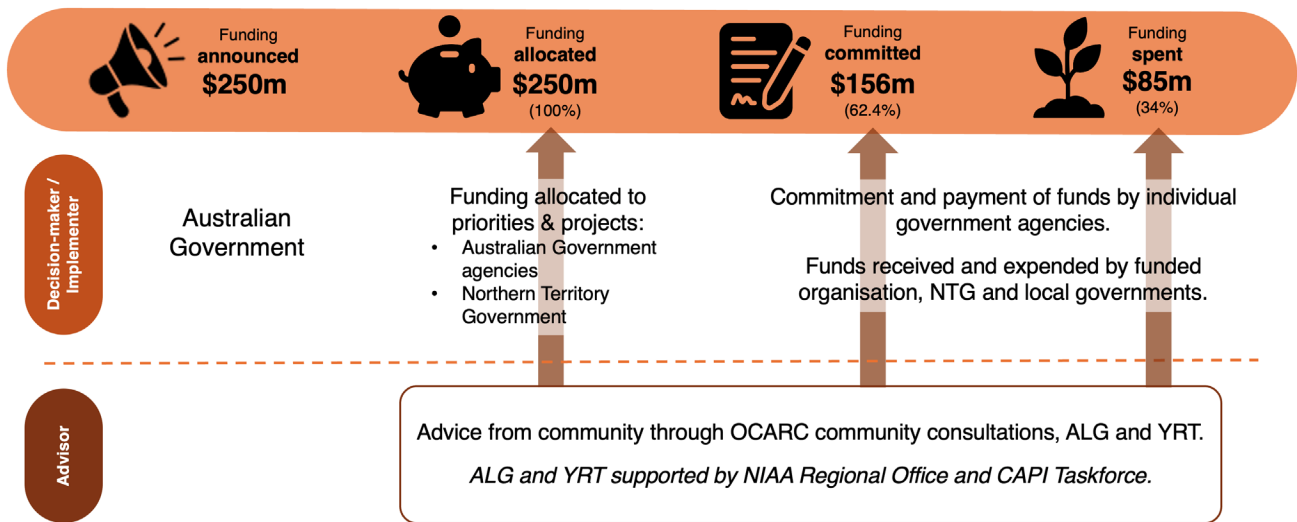
The \$137 million that has already been committed through a financial arrangement with providers has gone to three main project types described below:

- **Workforce development including education (\$47 million for 67 projects).** Includes projects relating to the Supporting Youth in Central Australia stream, Remote Training Hubs Network, On-Country Learning Program, and the Junior Ranger sites.
- **Infrastructure improvements (\$46 million for 42 projects).** Includes social, community and regional infrastructures projects like upgrading sporting fields and other community facilities, improving digital inclusion, increasing capacity and improvements to First Nations Hostels, and the Todd St Health Hub.
- **Service delivery (\$44 million for 34 projects).** Includes school holiday programs, diversion services, child and youth assessment and treatment services, and youth outreach services.

Mechanisms to support implementation

A number of mechanisms at the community, Australian Government and NTG levels have been established to support implementation of the CAP. This includes mechanisms to deploy the CAP investments and to support ‘working in a different way’.

Figure 6. Stakeholder involvement in government funding decisions for administered funds.



Stakeholder roles and responsibilities

The implementation of the CAP involves multiple tiers of government and delivery partners, including the Australian Government, NTG, service providers, and community partners. These contribute across 2 broad functional domains:

- Oversight and decision-making** on priorities and funding led by the Australian Government with NTG agencies, with input from advisory mechanisms such as the **ALG, the YRT (via the ALG)**, and formerly, **OCARC**.
- Program implementation and service delivery** led by various government agencies and primarily undertaken by community organisations and service providers through funded initiatives aligned to the CAP streams.

The CAP operates through a multi-layered structure that involves numerous actors across different levels of government and sectors. Coordination currently takes place across several domains, including between the Australian Government and the NTG, within interagency forums, and through formal advisory mechanisms such as the ALG. These mechanisms intersect with service providers and community organisations responsible for delivering on-the-ground initiatives. Each of the 6 streams of CAP engages with different lead agencies, partners, and local stakeholders, resulting in varying coordination arrangements and degrees of alignment. This layered approach means that decision-making, planning, and implementation occur across multiple forums, with overlapping responsibilities and interdependencies that require ongoing engagement across jurisdictions and sectors.

Table 1. CAP partner roles and responsibilities.

Partner	Description of role
Australian Government	
NIAA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide overarching strategic leadership and funding coordination. Ensure alignment with national priorities including the National Agreement. Facilitate interdepartmental coordination to reduce duplication. Monitor and report on national-level outcomes and commitments.

Partner	Description of role
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight of multiple funding streams under CAP (Supporting youth in Central Australia (\$24.1m), Youth Services Action Plan (\$3.9m), Strengthening Community Safety in Central Australia (\$9.2m), Strengthening leadership in Central Australia (\$10m) and Junior Ranger Sites (\$4.3m)).
DSS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight and delivery of the Strengthening Communities and Families Partnership (\$30m). Oversight and delivery of the Wi-Fi Solutions for Alice Springs Town Camps (\$500k).
DoE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight of the NTG's delivery of the On Country Learning initiative across Central Australia (\$40.4m).
AGD	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight of delivery of the Justice Reinvestment in Central Australia Program, with funding for multiple projects (\$10m).
DHDA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight and delivery of the Improved health infrastructure in Central Australia stream (\$23.4m).
DITRDCA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight of the NTG's delivery of the Community and Regional Infrastructure projects stream (\$50m). Oversight and delivery of the First Nations Connectivity - Regional Connectivity Program (\$10m).
DEWR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversight and delivery of the Remote Training Hubs Network (\$30.2m)
Northern Territory Government	
NTG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate Community and Regional Infrastructure Projects, Mparntwe Community Justice Centre (a justice reinvestment project) and the NTG Department of Education coordinates the On Country Learning investment in Central Australian schools. Lead service delivery and program implementation on the ground. Embed CAP priorities within NT policies and initiatives. Ensure place-based, culturally responsive approaches in coordination with community partners.
Community	
ALG	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify regional priorities for investment, strategies and outcomes—particularly for children and young people. Provide culturally grounded advice on service delivery, program effectiveness, and ways to strengthen Aboriginal lore and culture. Represent and amplify the views and aspirations of Aboriginal people across Central Australia.
YRT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advise on what programs, services and investments are most important to Aboriginal young people in Central Australia. Share how young people want government to engage with them and their communities. Highlight emerging issues and provide youth-led perspectives to the Aboriginal Leadership Group and the Australian Government.

Interviews with stakeholders indicate that clarity of roles and responsibilities under the CAP is an ongoing challenge particularly for the ALG and the NTG, which has ongoing responsibilities for CAP projects and infrastructure. Staff turnover and the large numbers of government entities involved in CAP implementation both appear to be contributing factors.

A range of government and non-government stakeholders raised concerns about the lack of clarity regarding who would manage CAP projects if CAP funding concludes. This related predominantly to infrastructure projects that would require ongoing maintenance. Many government stakeholders noted that no maintenance funding was provided and the capacity for local councils and organisations such as ACCOs to take responsibility for ongoing service delivery or maintenance of infrastructure is limited. Further, stakeholders expressed that there had not been any handovers to First Nations organisations undertaken or long-term plans developed to determine the future of projects at the end of the CAP.

CAP documentation indicates that the ALG have a broad scope when it comes to input and advice. Interviews with stakeholders across different stakeholder groups identified that could be greater clarity around the role of the ALG, including how advice is used. Some stakeholders (including the ALG itself) perceive that the role of the ALG has solidified over time, with government becoming more proactive about engaging with the ALG for advice and guidance. The ALG members also reported a better understanding of their roles and maturing as a mechanism to hear from Aboriginal people in Central Australia as implementation has progressed.

Across interviews, Australian Government stakeholders indicated that it was clear that the Australian Government holds decision-making responsibility under the CAP. Whilst there is evidence that ALG advice has been followed by the Government, this indicates that there could be more work done to align the CAP with the National Agreement and Priority Reform One which seeks structural shared decision-making responsibility between First Nations people and government.

The future of the ALG and YRT was also questioned with their current terms extended until July 2025. Some documentation suggests that the ALG will continue to play a role in providing oversight and monitoring under the CAP, however it is unclear if this has been formalised.³³

The NTG supports CAP investments translating into positive outcomes for community, for example through on the ground support and monitoring, working collaboratively with local and Australian Government agencies that have a presence in the NT (such as NIAA and DSS regional staff).

The NTG is in a unique position to support working in partnership so that funding can be aligned with local priorities. NTG stakeholders held the view that there were still opportunities under the CAP to work with the new NT government to facilitate genuine engagement with community and to continue to inform program design and delivery. While this may be the intent and vision at the officer level, revised policy and legislative changes are likely to impact progress. For example, Local Decision Making Agreements (LDMs) which were designed to give greater control of service delivery back to community, will not be renewed under the current Country Liberal Party government.³⁴ It was also acknowledged by NTG stakeholders that the Australian Government had a role in continuing to drive momentum for CAP implementation where it has influence and control (e.g., through its funding arrangements, policy settings such as The National Agreement and existing partnerships).

³³ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) '*Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief*' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

³⁴ ABC News, Northern Land Council chair voices anger at NT CLP government scrapping Local Decision-Making program, accessed 30 June 2025.

Australian Government

At the Australian Government level, 4 mechanisms exist to support the CAP's implementation. The Australian Government is the primary decision maker for the CAP policy and funding.

Each are briefly outlined below:

NIAA CAPI Taskforce

- Has responsibility and oversight of all policy and initiatives related to implementing the CAP.
- Members of the taskforce are primarily located in Alice Springs and Canberra.

NIAA's Central Australia Regional Office in Alice Springs

- Works in a place-based way with First Nations communities to identify, support and address their needs and aspirations.
- Works with Australian Government agencies and providers.
- Responsible for implementation of some CAP NIAA funded initiatives.

Australian Government Inter-Departmental Committee (IDC)

- Cross-agency collaboration between senior representatives of Australian Government agencies involved in the CAP.
- Discusses policy development, progress of initiatives and implementation
- Comprised of senior executives from representative agencies.

Community of Practice

- Brings together the NTG, implementing agencies, and regional office staff
- Discusses and troubleshoots issues.

Northern Territory Government

At the NTG level, there was one key mechanism that supported the CAP's implementation:

The Office of the Central Australian Regional Controller (OCARC)

- Established jointly between the Australian Government and the NTG in January 2023.
- In January 2025, following machinery of government changes in the NTG, the OCARC's functions were redistributed across the NTG.
- When the OCARC was in place, the Regional Controller was an ex officio member of the ALG and delivered a report on alcohol related harm, fostered collaboration between government, led a 2-phase community engagement process, and informed the Australian Government on the potential key investment priorities under the CAP.

Community Level

At the community level, three mechanisms exist to support the CAP's implementation:

Central Australian Aboriginal Leadership Group (ALG)

The ALG first met on 19 June 2023 and up until April 2025 had met 16 times. The purpose of the ALG is to:

- provide independent advice to the Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Northern Territory Chief Minister, and the (former) Regional Controller on the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan under the 6 priority areas
- complement existing structures through which diverse community voices have been, and will continue to, actively contribute to identifying priorities, needs and solutions
- actively contribute to identifying priorities, needs and solutions for the future in areas such as health, education, town camps, economic development, law and order issues.

The ALG does not make funding decisions or select providers.

At the outset of the CAP, functions of the ALG were expected to include:

- identification of any priorities for coordinated investment from the Australian Government and NTG

- identification of priorities, strategies and investments to improve outcomes and opportunities for First Nations people in Central Australia, with a particular focus on children and young people
- advice on the effectiveness and efficiency of government service delivery and program implementation, including opportunities to improve service delivery, address gaps and duplication, and enhance local service provision
- advice on the views of First Nations people across the region, cultural protocols, and options to strengthen First Nations lore and culture
- any other advice as the ALG sees fit.

The ALG comprises 11 First Nations members from the following groups:

- Four remote members (Central Land Council to nominate two elected Central Land Council remote community delegates, Central Desert Regional Council and MacDonnell Regional Council to each nominate one elected local authority remote representatives).
- Four service provider representatives (nominated from Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation, Central Land Council (chair), and Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. Tangentyere Council has also been invited to sit on this group, however, has declined to participate at the time of writing).
- One member of the Strong Grandmothers Group of the Central Desert.
- One member of the Alice Springs Town Council.
- One member of the YRT.

Ex-officio positions include one representative from the:

- NTG Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet
- NIAA
- OCARC when it was operational.³⁵

Meetings initially occurred twice monthly and in April 2025 were being held monthly, however have moved to once a month to once every 2 months. At 30 April 2025, there had been 16 ALG meetings since June 2023 (including sub-group meetings). Members are supported with travel and other arrangements (including sitting fees) for attendance at meetings.

In April 2025, the ALG's term had been extended until 31 July 2025.

Central Australia Aboriginal Youth Roundtable

The YRT was established in late 2023 and intends to support the development of young First Nations leaders across Central Australia, while offering opportunities to identify and consider topics of importance to young people in the region.

The YRT provides advice to the Australian Government about what is important to First Nations youth in Central Australia. YRT priorities are passed through the ALG via the YRT chair. The Youth Roundtable may provide advice on:

- what programs and services are working in Central Australia
- how young people want government to engage with them
- how the government should spend money in Central Australia
- anything else that is important to them.⁹

Members of the YRT must be a First Nations person aged between 16-25 years from Central Australia. The Chair of the YRT sits on the ALG.

The YRT meets approximately two weeks before each ALG meeting. The YRT held initial meetings in 2023, refreshed membership in 2024, and held five meetings in 2024. In 2025, there has been a total of three meetings. The YRT term has been extended until 31 July 2025.

Community Consultations

Between March and August 2023, a series of community consultation were undertaken to inform the CAP. These consultations were led by the OCARC and comprised engagements with over 1000 people, including:

³⁵ Central Australia Plan Aboriginal Leadership Group (n.d.), *Terms of Reference*, National Indigenous Australians Agency [internal document], accessed June 2025.

- 80 sessions with the community sector (including land council, service providers, Aboriginal peak bodies, regional industry groups, community organisations).
- 22 sessions directly with communities (including Atitjere, Kaltukatjara, Finke, Haasts Bluff, Imanpa, Kintore, Laramba, Mt Liebig, Ntaria, Nyirripi, Papunya, Santa Teresa, Titjikala, Ti-Tree, Yuendumu and Willowra).

These consultations helped inform the Australian Government’s understanding of community priorities and potential projects, guiding decisions around targeted investment and funding allocations.

Communication and accountability

Effective communication and accountability between government, non-government, and community stakeholders are essential components for the effectiveness of the CAP. Documents show that efforts were made to track progress of projects and demonstrate progress of the CAP to stakeholders including the ALG, YRT and the IDC. Stakeholder interviews suggested that further refinement of communication and accountability processes for the CAP are still required. Further detail is outlined below.

Communication with the ALG

Across documents it was identified that ALG members have repeatedly requested greater access to data and implementation updates, particularly regarding the influence of their input on CAP-funded activities and on broader progress.³⁶ While internal documents show regular reporting and briefing materials are prepared by the NIAA, the persistence of these requests may indicate that communications are not being delivered in formats or methods that meet the needs and preferences of ALG members. It was highlighted in an interview that greater clarity and plain language are required in ALG meetings for members to understand what is being asked of them or delivered to them.

Interviews with stakeholders identified that there should be several formalised avenues to hear from the voices of community that are not solely through the ALG. These findings highlight that community governance structures are inherently complex, shaped by diverse cultural, social, historical, and political contexts. They often involve multiple layers of leadership including traditional bodies, elected representatives, community-based organisations, and advocacy groups.³⁷ This complexity is compounded when community governance intersects with government systems, which often operate through more rigid, top-down structures and statutory obligations and are under significant pressure to act rapidly.³⁸ However, it also highlights an opportunity to strengthen the ALG and other avenues for community input, and align these mechanisms with the National Agreement commitments to enhance the government’s commitment to ‘doing things differently’ under the CAP.

Communication with service providers and community

Accountability mechanisms to the wider First Nations community need to be strengthened to inform and engage community in CAP investment, planning, and implementation updates. The reliance on the ALG to inform community of CAP activities is insufficient to support community awareness of implementation in the Central Australia region. This reliance on the ALG has resulted in the formation of social tensions in community, and a lack of community understanding and buy-in. With no formalised process for regularly reporting progress of the CAP back to community organisations or communities across Central Australia, most stakeholders raised concerns about a lack of visibility and transparency. Many stakeholders who had received CAP funding stating they knew little about the CAP. As a stakeholder commented:

“In our community, the reality is the community is talking and saying, what did that group of people do with the money? You know, that’s our money. Where did it go?”

³⁶ ALG Meeting minutes, National Indigenous Australians Agency [internal document], accessed June 2025.

³⁷ Hunt J and Smith D (2006) ‘Building Indigenous community governance in Australia: Preliminary research findings’, *Australian National University: Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research*, accessed June 2025.

³⁸ AIHW (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare) (2012). ‘Improving Indigenous community governance through strengthening Indigenous and government organisational capacity’, *Closing the Gap Clearinghouse*, Resource sheet no. 10, accessed June 2025.

Participants called for increased feedback loops and more accessible progress updates to ensure communities remain informed and engaged. DSS under the Strengthening Family and Communities Partnership (SFCP) has developed a community engagement process that has been endorsed by the ALG which includes ‘feedback loops’.³⁹ This process could be adopted more broadly under the CAP.

As highlighted across interviews, without clearly defined roles and shared accountability frameworks, there is a danger that perceived failures or implementation challenges may be attributed to First Nations-led mechanisms, even where these groups lack formal authority over resourcing, program design, or service delivery. These dynamics risk undermining the principle of genuine partnership and may reproduce power imbalances under the guise of local leadership. Increased transparency could also assist in ensuring that stakeholders including community organisations are working collaboratively and not duplicating services. As a stakeholder commented:

“Want to know where the money’s gone in spaces that you work in order to potentially maximise the benefit and so we avoid duplication. We can partner, not in silos. And what we’ve found where government has previously done that, they’ve put money into [x] for another service. We haven’t known what they’re doing. We’re going off trying to do our work, and then everyone’s seeing the same clients, and we’ve created conflicts, and it’s been really troubling for community members and troubling for us”.

Some stakeholders called for greater transparency to ensure equitable, consistent, and evidence-based funding processes. Many stakeholders interviewed highlighted the application process for funding, describing it as ad hoc in nature and not aligned with typical government funding processes. In addition, stakeholders reported markedly different experiences when applying for and receiving funding, ranging from being invited to apply in different ways, to navigating unclear or informal processes with varying expectations and timeframes. Some of these experiences may be related to the nature of the CAP, with different agencies involved delivering different projects, or due to the nature of the organisation applying for funding. However, interviews with stakeholders consistently identified the benefit of transparency from NIAA to foster trust and confidence in the integrity of funding decisions.

Stakeholder interviews identified broader confusion around the CAP, including which organisations had received what levels of funding, how decisions were made, and how investment aligned with community priorities. This included confusion around some stakeholders and their own organisational funding, with some unclear about what funding they had received and when.

Given the high profile nature of the CAP and its visibility within the region, stakeholders expressed a strong interest in understanding the distribution of funding, including clear articulation of how funding decisions have been made, and how resources are distributed across communities and sectors. While there will be opportunities to provide this clarity moving forward, this interview data indicates a desire for funding transparency to be provided early on when governments are investing money or delivering initiatives into communities.

NIAA communications received by some service providers supported their project implementation, facilitated the process, and improved relationship building. Increased formal communication and accountability mechanisms would continue to strengthen relationships between government and community stakeholders.

³⁹ DSS (Department of Social Services) (2025), ‘The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership Master Information Pack’, Australian Government, [internal document], accessed June 2025.

KEQ2: How has the CAP been implemented differently?

These findings explore the extent to which the CAP is “doing things differently” and focuses on decision-making processes, the location and focus of investments, alignment investment to the advice provided, and the alignment of funding to CAP (and broader policy) priorities.

Summary of evaluation findings

The CAP included some important elements where implementation differed from ‘business as usual’. The first is the use of dedicated mechanisms to meaningfully and consistently engage First Nations peoples in investment decisions. Second, there is a focus on ensuring that remote communities that have poorer access to services receive equal or more funding compared to the more urbanised Alice Springs. Finally, a dedicated, ongoing interagency response, and working through the IDC is a key feature of CAP implementation.

Decision-making processes

The CAP marks a notable shift in the way governments are engaging with First Nations communities to make important policy and investment decisions. There is a growing commitment to more respectful and collaborative approaches that involve First Nations leadership in policy and planning namely through the ALG and the YRT. This shift is seen as essential for building trust and improving long-term outcomes. The ALG is widely regarded as a key strength of the CAP. It provides a meaningful mechanism for First Nations voices to shape decisions, influence investment priorities, and hold governments accountable to community priorities. The ALG has played a direct role in shaping funding decisions and ensuring discussions remain grounded in community realities.

Location and focus of investment

At the time of the evaluation, remote locations have been allocated the largest amount of CAP funding at \$96 million, with more projects in the pipeline for additional remote locations. Alice Springs has been allocated \$69 million. It is noted that additional complexities and requirements to implementing projects in remote locations has led to relative delays in those areas compared to Alice Springs. These include identification of appropriate cultural authority for a region and approvals from the Central Land Council, assessments of existing infrastructure and challenges relating to remoteness. A total of \$46 million has been paid to Alice Springs initiatives and \$22.8 million has been paid to remote projects to date.

Alignment to advice

As the ALG was established after the CAP had already commenced and certain funding allocations had been made, it has not been involved in informing all aspects of CAP funding decisions. Despite this, since commencing, the ALG’s advice has been sought on approximately \$160 million dollars of CAP funding (64% of the total \$250 million), with a further \$6.8 million yet to be determined. ALG advice directly influenced implementation and/or design on \$20.8 million of funding. The ALG provided advice on implementation or policy advice on \$54.4 million of funding. In addition, their advice shaped funding allocation implementation on design, location, and other advice in \$84 million of the funding.

Alignment of funding to policy priorities

Almost all the CAP funding has been allocated to the six priority streams, with only \$7.5 million (3%) being allocated to the governance of the CAP program (see below).

- Community safety and cohesion - \$53 million allocated, \$14 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$7 million paid to date
- Job creation - \$31 million allocated, \$17 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$5 million paid to date
- Better services in Alice Springs - \$60 million allocated, \$41 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$3 million paid to date
- FASD and health infrastructure - \$23 million allocated, \$23 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$17 million paid to date
- Investing in Families - \$34 million allocated, \$14 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$7 million paid to date

- On-Country learning - \$40 million allocated, \$40 million committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, \$38 million paid to date

The decisions and funding allocations under the CAP were not explicitly formed through the lens of the National Agreement framework, however data indicates that the CAP broadly contributed to the aims of the National Agreement. Analysis of funding commitments under the CAP shows that all the administered CAP funding that has been committed through a financial arrangement to date aligns in some way to National Agreement Outcome Areas.

National Agreement Outcome Areas 1, 5 to 11, 13 to 15 and 17 are all addressed in some way by the CAP initiatives. It is not possible to determine how much funding relates to each Outcome Area, as projects were not designed to target just one area and often contribute to multiple outcomes. However, at least \$23 million of the funding appears to be related to Outcome Area 1 - First Nations people enjoy long and healthy lives, \$10 million to Outcome Area 13 - First Nations families and households are safe, \$7 million to Outcome Area 17 - First Nations people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives, and \$33 million to Outcome Area 9 - First Nations people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.

Decision-making processes

The CAP demonstrates a growing commitment by government to involve First Nations people in decisions that impact their people and communities. Historically, many government decisions impacting First Nations communities were made without meaningful engagement, leading to policies and programs that failed to reflect local context or support community aspirations⁴⁰. In recent years, there has been increasing recognition that genuine partnerships with First Nations people are essential to improving outcomes and rebuilding trust.⁴¹ This includes a move away from top-down, transactional consultation approaches and towards more respectful, collaborative processes that centre First Nations leadership.

There are multiple ways that decision making processes for programs are being implemented differently in the CAP compared to 'business as usual' for government. This includes incorporating First Nations voices earlier and more consistently. Evidence of different decision-making processes are noted in CAP documents, financial analysis, and feedback from government stakeholders.

The most notable structure supporting change in the way government is working with First Nations people in Central Australia is the ALG. Government documents and stakeholder feedback indicates that ALG advice has directly influenced many funding and program decisions, including for over half the allocation of funds. Further detail on this is described below.

As mentioned in the 'Mechanisms to Support Implementation' section, the ALG provides advice on priorities for coordinated investment from the Australian Government and NTG, including needs and solutions for the future in areas such as health, education, economic development, and law and order issues. The ALG also advise on the effectiveness and efficiency of government service delivery and program implementation, including opportunities to improve service delivery, address gaps and duplication and enhance local service provision. The purpose of the ALG is to advise on the views of First Nations people across the region, cultural protocols and options to strengthen First Nations law and culture. The ALG does **not** select providers or make investment decisions.

A review of the ALG meeting minutes identified that members consistently raise issues, concerns, and priorities that, while not always articulated in explicit terms, clearly reflect an underlying commitment to improving cultural safety across programs and services and in the way governments work. These contributions often centre on:

- the importance of representative local decision-making, including utilising already existing structures

⁴⁰ SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) (2012) '*Creating change through partnerships: An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services*', Melbourne: SNAICC, accessed June 2025.

⁴¹ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2022) '*NIAA Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan 2022-2025*', Australian Government, accessed June 2025.

- continuously reminding government to be mindful of community consultation fatigue
- embedding cultural knowledge and practices
- fostering trust
- two-way learning between government and community to ensure capability building of all parties
- ensuring that service delivery is responsive to the needs and realities of First Nations peoples.

The frequency and consistency with which these culturally grounded perspectives are raised suggests that cultural safety is a foundational concern for members even when not directly named as such.

The ALG has also provided advice to government departments on how to engage with community, including driving departments to undertake broader community engagement. There was an example where one Australian Government department sought advice on the best way to reach community following unsuccessful attempts, and the advice provided supported the agency to reach community.

Stakeholders consistently identified the ALG as a valuable and meaningful mechanism within the CAP. It is seen as a structure that enables First Nations voices to inform and influence decision-making processes. Stakeholders note that the ALG plays a key role in grounding discussions in community realities and ensuring that local knowledge and lived experience informed government planning and investment. In particular, the ALG is viewed as a trusted forum for navigating complex issues, strengthening accountability, and fostering a more genuine collaboration between government and First Nations communities. This change in approach has resulted in a notable difference in outcomes, with government stakeholders pointing to clear examples where the ALG influenced ministers' funding decisions. An example of the accountability function of the ALG is seen in the comment below from a government stakeholder:

“The broader mechanism being the Aboriginal Leadership Group, held both the Commonwealth side and the Northern Territory Government side and the ALG accountable for not moving away from the voices of the end users of the systems that we work within, and the products or programs that we deliver to those end users, and keeping their voices and their solutions to the issues that they experience based on their lived experience, and making sure that that that we didn't ...that the that the mechanism, uh, being the ALG and the two tiers of government didn't deviate from what it is that the people said that they needed and wanted in order to address the issues that they were experiencing”.

The involvement of the ALG in ministerial funding decisions under the CAP is a key shift in the way government ministers engage with First Nations communities in their decision making. In a typical budget process, a department will develop a detailed proposal for consideration by ministers often without direct input from community. This reflects standard practice around material that is being prepared for Budget and treated as 'Cabinet-in-Confidence'. In a normal budget process, communities would be engaged after government has already taken a funding decision and determined the scope of an initiative. The involvement of the OCARC in recommending the priority streams of the CAP, and the ALG in advising on the development of proposals, is a significant departure from normal government funding processes. This change in approach has resulted in a notable difference in process, with government stakeholders pointing to clear examples where the ALG influenced ministers' funding decisions.

The ALG minutes and interview data also suggest that there has been a trend toward earlier engagement of the ALG as CAP implementation has progressed. This has enabled the ALG to give more timely and meaningful input on investment discussions and is a positive step toward moving from reactive consultation to more proactive, structured engagement.

In addition to changes in high level decisions, there also appears to be some change in the way that decisions are made within funding streams as a result of the CAP. Interviews with stakeholders from Australian Government agencies involved in overseeing CAP projects indicated that they are either making meaningful steps to engaging First Nations people in procurement and implementation decisions or that that they were already working in this way prior to the commencement of the CAP.

Many emphasised the importance of continuing to strengthen and support the ALG to maintain momentum, build trust, and deliver outcomes that reflect the aspirations and priorities of First Nations people in Central Australia.

While the ALG is recognised as an important mechanism, stakeholders highlighted the need for broader, more connected engagement structures that reflect the diversity of community perspectives and provide clear pathways for influence and accountability. Strengthening these connections and ensuring visible responses to community input is essential to rebuilding trust and demonstrating that consultation is a genuine driver of change.

The YRT represents another mechanism within the CAP to ensure that the voices, perspectives, and leadership of First Nations young people are meaningfully embedded in the process. As a demographic disproportionately affected by the complex social and structural challenges facing Central Australia, young people, particularly First Nations youth, are central to both identifying issues and shaping the solutions.⁴² The YRT advised on Tranche 2 of infrastructure funding and provided input into the Youth Action Plan.

Stakeholders interviewed view the YRT as an important and emerging mechanism within the CAP, recognising its potential to ensure that the voices of young people are actively included in shaping policies and programs that directly affect them. Stakeholders acknowledged that young people in Central Australia face complex and compounding challenges and represent a significant portion of the population across Central Australia. The group was valued not only for bringing youth-specific insights into CAP discussions but also for fostering leadership and agency among young First Nations people. While documents identify that the YRT is still developing in its structure and influence,⁴³ there was strong support for its continued growth and integration into broader decision-making processes. Stakeholders emphasised the importance of sustained support, capacity building, and meaningful engagement to ensure the YRT becomes a lasting and effective component of the CAP governance framework. As a stakeholder stated:

'Really important to have representation of young people to speak on behalf of young people and especially those who can't and those who are most at risk. It's good that can speak for the young people... because they're their voices, you know, because our young people, you know, they're struggling to have a quiet sleep at night. They're struggling to have a feed daily. They're struggling to, you know, see watching their back, you know, and stuff like that. because they, you know, highlight the challenges our young people face.'

The Regional Controller also played an important role in bringing First Nations voices into the funding decisions for the CAP. The Regional Controller and the OCARC led engagement processes with key community stakeholders in Alice Springs, including service providers, local government, First Nations organisations, and community leaders. These consultations aimed to surface community priorities, identify service system gaps, and shape local implementation of the CAP. This regional engagement process helped raise the visibility of community concerns at the national level and supported more contextually informed decision-making. Derived from community consultations, the OCARC advice helped identify the priority streams of the CAP. This is a significant departure from normal government funding processes.

It was widely expressed that early inclusion of community voices is a departure from 'business as usual' for government, but there were mixed views on the process undertaken to engage community and the role of the OCARC in the priority setting process. Stakeholders noted that the issues arose from broader challenges with the reactive nature of the CAP and the need for a fast-tracked process, and were not associated with the work of the OCARC. Some stakeholders noted that it was challenging starting consultations with a blank sheet and that the process would have benefited from clearer structure or alignment with the parameters like the National Agreement framework as a guide. Other stakeholders were either not invited to or unaware of the consultations, or felt that that the process was a one-off engagement that limited meaningful participation. Some stakeholders expressed frustration that consultation with community continues to occur across a range of government programs without leading to meaningful change. Many noted that the same messages are repeated across different forums, yet there is little evidence of action or feedback loops that show how input has been used. This ongoing cycle contributes to consultation fatigue and a sense of disengagement, particularly when communities feel their voices are not translating into outcomes. Stakeholders noted that the OCARC had been a strong advocate for First Nations people across Central Australia, working hard to bring important issues to the forefront of government.

⁴² ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2022), '[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2021-22](#)', ABS website, accessed June 2025.

⁴³ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) *Central Australia Youth Roundtable Meeting Agenda*, [internal document], NIAA, accessed June 2025.

While the CAP has strengthened the approach of working in partnership with First Nations communities, many stakeholders noted that self-determination under the CAP is limited so long as final decision-making authority rests with ministers. In addition, the CAP expenditure is still subject to complicated, legislative rules around grants and procurements, adding additional complexity and slowing down the process of implementing the CAP initiatives once the decision has been taken. Government stakeholders noted that a key challenge to integrating the ALG into government decision-making processes stemmed from a misalignment between the timeframes in which government funding decisions are made, and the time the ALG needed to form a position and provide advice on potential projects. The involvement of multiple levels of government and multiple ministers also made decision-making processes more complicated and has slowed down approvals and implementation after the ALG had formed its position.

Allocation & focus of investment

Across the Central Australia region, approximately 41% of the population identifies as Aboriginal with this increasing to 80% outside of Alice Springs.⁴⁴ The region is also multi-cultural, with 32.9% of the population of Alice Springs being born outside Australia, and 31.9% speaking a language other than English at home.⁴⁵

An important element of the CAP was considering the need of both the Alice Springs community, and the many remote communities and town camps across Central Australia. At the time of the evaluation, Alice Springs has been allocated almost third of the project-related CAP funding (\$69 million). Remote communities have been allocated more funding at \$96 million (42% project-related funding). Approximately \$64 million has not yet been allocated to specific projects but will go towards Tranche 3 of the infrastructure funding that will be delivered in remote communities, Remote Training Hubs Network, the DSS Strengthening Communities and Families Partnership (SCFP), Leadership and Youth funding, and supplemental funding. NIAA expects that this remaining funding will be directed predominantly toward remote projects.

Approximately \$6 million has been allocated to initiatives that cover both remote communities and Alice Springs.

Stakeholder views regarding how the investments should be split between Alice Springs and remote communities varied. Some stakeholders feel that investment is overly weighted toward remote communities, identifying that Alice Springs has the greatest need. Other stakeholders considered a focus on remote communities needs to remain, to reduce pressure on Alice Springs caused by people who otherwise have to travel to Alice Springs from remote communities to access services and programs.

⁴⁴NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, NIAA, accessed June 2025.

⁴⁵ ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2021 *Alice Springs*, ABS website, accessed April 2025.

CAP funding by remote clusters

At the time of the evaluation, the amount of funding distributed across the seven remote community clusters (see Figure 3 for a map) differs. It is noted that a third tranche of infrastructure funding is yet to be committed through a financial arrangement with a provider and other CAP projects in remote areas are also pending commitment, so the overall funding distribution will change over time. Anmatiere and Luritja Pintubi clusters have each received approximately 25% of the remote funding committed to date. Southern Tanami, Rodinga and Lijrapinta each received between 10 and 13% of the funding, the Plenty received 7% and Iyarrka received the least, but NIAA confirms that Iyarrka are a focus for Tranche 3 Regional Infrastructure Funding (see Table 1 below).

Table 1. Remote CAP funding that has been committed through a financial arrangement at 30 April 2025 by community cluster.

Cluster	\$ Committed to specific projects	% Remote committed
Anmatjere	\$15,498,109	25
Luritja Pintubi	\$14,090,377	23
Southern Tanami	\$7,969,405	13
Rodinga	\$6,946,526	11
Ljirapinta	\$6,235,623	10
The Plenty	\$4,191,824	7
Iyarrka	\$2,704,137	4
Multiple clusters ⁴⁶	\$4,126,487	7
Total remote	\$61,762,488	100

Alignment of funding to the advice of the ALG

The advice from the ALG has been sought to inform CAP implementation in a range of ways, including advice on design and location of funding allocations, implementation and policy advice and project design.

The rapid roll-out of the CAP, with the package being announced in February 2023 and a significant portion of funding being allocated by May 2023 (\$155.7 million), means that some of the funding already had to be directed to specific projects before the ALG was formed and could meet for the first time in June 2023.

Despite this, most of CAP funding (\$159 million, 64%) has been directed based on the ALG's advice. A further \$6.8 million is yet to be determined. Their advice has informed funding or implementation of the CAP projects in three main ways which are described below and in Figure 7.

⁴⁶ Due to the way the funding has been labelled in tracking, projects that have benefitted more than one community have been labelled as multiple rather than counting toward individual clusters.

Figure 7. Funding committed through financial arrangements with providers to specific projects by level of ALG input.

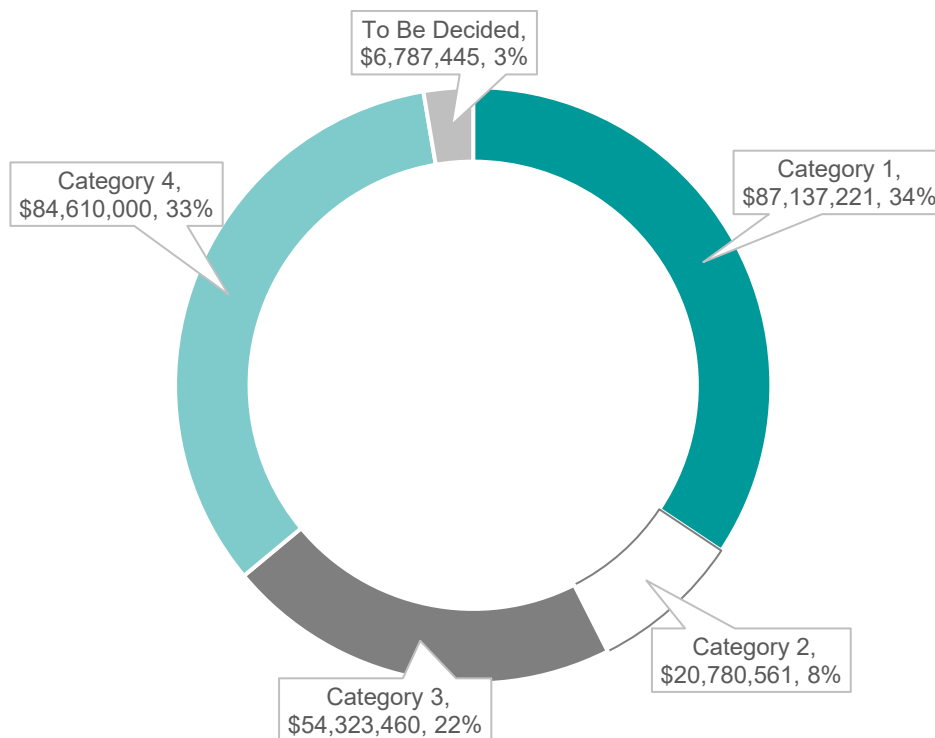


Figure 7 shows that the ALG advice directly influenced implementation and/or design on \$20.8 million, or 8% of funding (**Category 2**). They provided advice on implementation or policy advice (not funding allocation or commitments) on around 22% (\$54.3 million) of funding (**Category 3**) and their advice shaped funding allocation implementation through design, location or other advice in around a third \$84 million of the funding (**Category 4**)⁴⁷. **Category 1** is where the ALG did not provide advice on any parameter of the funding.

The ALG papers and minutes also strongly evidence that the ALG has had influence on CAP project prioritisation. For example, the ALG shaped priorities for the \$50 million in community Infrastructure investment and the way that decisions were made. Further, the ALG’s advice has been sought to help government align funding to priorities and key actions of the Youth Services Action Plan (YSAP) and priorities related to young people. Specifically, an agenda item in the September 2024 meeting was dedicated to allocating funding to communities/clusters based on the population of young people in those locations.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) ‘Implementation tracker spreadsheet, with an updated being provided on ALG advice on 24 June 2025’, [internal document], accessed May 2025.

⁴⁸ Aboriginal Leadership Group (2024) ‘Meeting 14 Slide Pack Day 1 and Media and Communications- Status of CA Packages (end of August)’, [internal document], accessed September 2024.

Alignment of funding to policy priorities

In February 2023, six priority areas for CAP investment were identified: community safety and cohesion, job creation, improved services, preventing and addressing FASD, investing in families, and On-Country learning. These priorities were shaped with input from the OCARC, based on rapid community consultation around the time of the announcement.

Almost all the CAP funding has been allocated to the six priority streams, with only \$7.5 million (3%) being allocated to the governance of the CAP program. Figures 8 and 9 below show the amount and proportion of funding by stream. The amount of funding allocated across the streams varies between \$23 million and \$60 million. The largest allocation of funds is for the Better Services stream, which is allocated \$60.3 million for 40 projects, followed by the Improved Community Safety and Cohesion stream, which is allocated \$53.3 million for 35 projects. The smallest investment is to the Investing in Families stream which is allocated \$33.9 million for 10 projects. Some of the streams have been able to commit and pay funding more rapidly than others including On-Country Learning and preventing and addressing the issues caused by FASD. The Job creation and Better Service Streams have been slower to commit funds and pay for funds committed through financial arrangements with providers (see Figure 8 below). This difference reflects the varying nature of the projects under CAP, with all the Better Services projects being infrastructure projects, which have many levels of application and planning process to undertake and are thus slow to roll out. The Job Creation stream covers the Remote Training Hubs Network and Junior Ranger initiatives and the Remote Training Hubs have needed additional time for discussion and prioritisation.

Figure 8. Funding by priority stream allocated, committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, and paid at 30 April 2025.

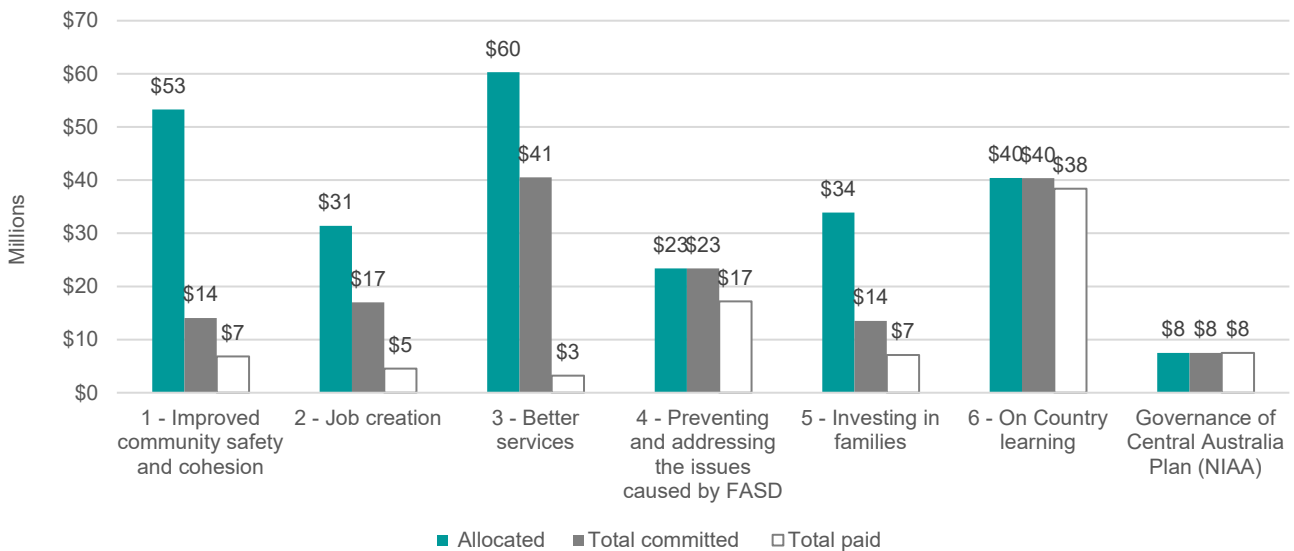
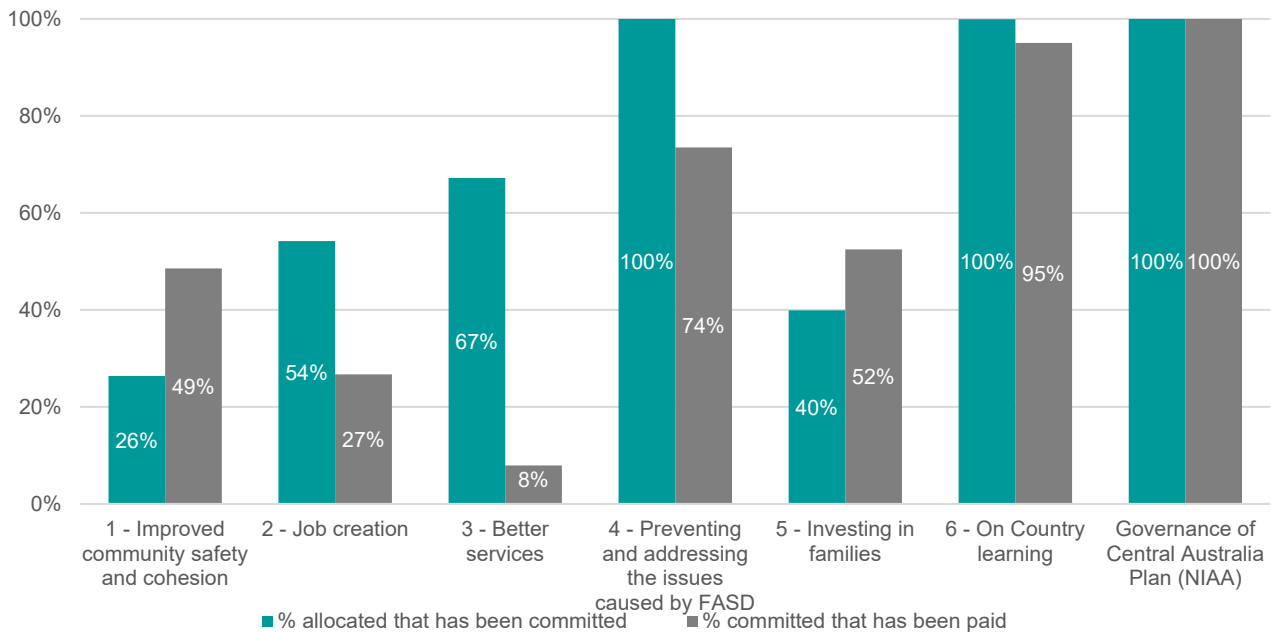


Figure 9. Proportion of CAP funding that has been committed through a financial arrangement with a provider and paid by priority stream (proportion allocated that has been committed and proportion committed that has been paid at 30 April 2025).



Government stakeholders note funding priorities under the CAP were not explicitly formed through the lens of the National Agreement framework. Despite this, stakeholders felt the CAP broadly contributed to the aims of National Agreement⁴⁹. Analysis of funding commitments under the CAP shows that all the CAP funding to date that has been committed through a financial arrangement with a provider aligns with Outcome Areas. The following National Agreement Outcome Areas are addressed in some way by CAP projects:

- Outcome Area 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long and healthy lives.
- Outcome Area 5 – Students achieve full learning potential.
- Outcome Areas 6 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students reach their full potential through further education pathways.
- Outcome Area 7 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education.
- Outcome Area 8 – Strong economic participation and development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- Outcome Area 9 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need.
- Outcome Area 10 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.
- Outcome Area 11 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system.
- Outcome Area 13 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.
- Outcome Area 14 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing.
- Outcome Area 15 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters.
- Outcome Area 17 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

⁴⁹ IV2.

The CAP funding broadly aligns to the National Agreement Outcome Areas like improving life expectancy, education, employment, and community safety. Because projects often support more than one Outcome Area, it is not possible to determine exactly how much funding relates to each National Agreement Outcome, but estimates suggest at least:

- \$23 million aligns with Outcome 1 (lifespan and health)
- \$10 million with Outcome 13 (housing)
- \$7 million with Outcome 17 (digital inclusion)
- \$33 million with Outcome 9 (safe communities)

Table 4 in Appendix G shows the amount of CAP funding that has been committed through financial arrangements with providers and paid to specific projects by National Agreement Outcome Area.

KEQ3: What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of ‘doing things differently’?

These findings explore what short-term outcomes are evident from the CAP in terms of ‘doing things differently’. It includes findings on the extent to which:

- doing business in Central Australia has changed for the Australian Government, the NTG, and local government
- progress has been made towards National Agreement Priority Reforms
- First Nations community leadership is being developed.

Summary of evaluation findings

The evaluation suggests that there are early short-term outcomes from the CAP in terms of ‘doing things differently’ and as the CAP progresses there are opportunities for improvement to bolster ongoing outcomes.

- The CAP has improved collaboration and communication between government departments, fostering a sense of shared and collective responsibility through mechanisms like the IDC and Community of Practice, which have strengthened shared decision-making and responsiveness.
- While the CAP broadly aligns with the objectives of National Agreement, particularly in strengthening partnerships and showing emerging alignment with transforming government organisations (Priority Reform 3) and shared access to data and information (Priority Reform 4), it does not fully achieve the structural shift and shared decision-making authority required by Priority Reform One, as ultimate decision-making power largely remains with the government despite consultative mechanisms like the ALG. There is ongoing opportunity to better align the CAP with the National Agreement framework.
- First Nations community leadership is being actively supported and developed through key mechanisms like the ALG and the YRT. These mechanisms have bolstered community agency and provided opportunities for Aboriginal people to gain confidence and contribute their views. Additionally funding for youth services and programs delivered by Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Traditional Owners demonstrates a trend towards Aboriginal leadership at the service provider level.
- The NTG has played a critical role in the CAP’s early progress. The NTG’s engagement through joint structures, such as the ALG, has supported more coordinated decision-making and responsiveness to community priorities. While this partnership approach is showing positive signs, further strengthening of collaboration is needed to fully realise a genuinely shared and accountable relationship between governments and community in Central Australia.

Extent to which doing business in Central Australia has changed for the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and local government

Collaboration/ communication between departments and regional level

Effective collaboration between the three levels of government – local, territory and Australian – is vital in the Northern Territory, where unique geographic, cultural and socio-economic factors shape community needs. Interviews with many stakeholders, both government and non-government, suggest that the CAP has contributed to collaboration between government departments. The interviews suggest that the collaborative nature of the CAP, with several government agencies working together fosters a sense of shared responsibility. As one stakeholder noted:

“We are part of an integrated program of work, and so the authorising environment means that we all need to kind of play our part, and there's a sense of collective responsibility for the successful delivery of the Central Australia plan that goes above our kind of individual responses... you don't want to let the team down. And so, it's really been a positive thing to be involved in something that's got a strong authorising environment, is ambitious, is integrated using the kind of approaches of engaging the community, and then we take that back, those lessons learned, and we can apply it to other programs of work that we do.”⁵⁰

The majority of government stakeholders indicated that the approach under the CAP, including key mechanisms such as the IDC and the Community of Practice, has strengthened shared decision-making and facilitated timely, coordinated responses to complex, cross-cutting issues raised by community partners, including the ALG. As a stakeholder stated about the IDC:

“So, we obviously attend the IDC meeting... I think they're really useful meetings, really good information sharing, really frank conversations, which are really good. We get a really good idea of how all the initiatives are going... touch points, the sensitivities, particularly, or, you know, just on the ground from Alice Springs, where the task force is based.”⁵¹

Another stakeholder stated the following about the Community of Practice:

“ The community of practice for remote engagement was particularly useful because we were following in others footsteps, so it was really important for us to learn from others and to learn from others in real time as people were rolling out the programs in Central Australia. So that really allowed us to share our knowledge and get to know people and to sort out how we could leverage off others' learnings.”⁵²

Stakeholders highlight that the interagency approach taken under CAP enables government representatives to collectively address challenges and adjust priorities in real time, showing increased flexibility and responsiveness. Some government interviewees also indicated that they are learning from other agencies and the ALG how to meaningfully and effectively engage with First Nations people and communities.

Additionally, the NIAA Central Australia Regional Office is identified as critical for driving a place-based approach for government departments based outside the Northern Territory. Staff in the Regional Office provide on the ground support with their knowledge of the local community context and their ability to draw on existing relationships with key delivery organisations. Regional staff are also cited as being important for relationship building with the ALG.

Reactive approach

Both documentation and interviews with stakeholders suggest that the reactive approach adopted by the Australian Government to address emerging issues in the Northern Territory reflects past approaches. The rapid response to public pressure and media attention prioritising swift action over thoughtful planning is prevalent in the CAP and previous responses by government. Whilst pressure on governments to act rapidly and demonstrate immediate responsiveness is apparent, there is an identified need for governments to develop formalised implementation plans informed by community voice that focus on sustainable long-term change.

Capacity building of government to work with community

Some government stakeholders identified that being engaged in the CAP supports professional development of government staff including increasing capacity building of government agencies and staff in working with First Nations engagement and with First Nations matters. Building the capacity of government agencies to work effectively and respectfully with First Nations communities can help achieve the outcomes set out in the National Agreement, particularly those related to genuine partnership. As a stakeholder noted:

“The fact that this has been so cross government and all the agencies involved and the buy in up to the Deputy Secretary and Secretary level, there’s just so much added professional experience has been added to everyone right up and down the line in that sense. So, you know, the next time we need to do X, Y and Z, or we’re directed or asked to do X, Y and Z in relation to a First Nations issue with a First Nations community, obviously this is going to become a kind of core practice, or, you know, lesson that we have from the past and experience that people will draw on.”

Working in partnership at the NTG level

A key feature of the CAP is the commitment to working in genuine partnership with the NTG.⁵³ The aim is to work together to align investments, reduce duplication, and improve the responsiveness of services. Through structures like the ALG, both the Australian Government and NTG engage jointly with community representatives, ensuring that government decisions are informed by local voices and that both governments are accountable to communities. The interview data suggest that positive outcomes are beginning to be achieved through this relationship, including improved alignment between Australian and territory systems. However, some stakeholders also suggest that this relationship could be strengthened to ensure that the partnership is genuine and collaborative.

Collaborative relationships between NIAA and service providers

Some stakeholders perceived that NIAA staff members had been engaging in a different way, with a view to being more collaborative and seeking to listen to and understand community perspectives at the service provider level. Many stakeholders identified that through the CAP, there had been an increase in working relationships between NIAA and some service providers.

Extent to which progress has been made towards Closing the Gap Priority Reforms

Interviews and documentation indicate some instances where the CAP is aligning with the objectives and intent of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Some stakeholders identified that the CAP was supporting Priority Reform areas, particularly in strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities. However, stakeholders also note that while the direction of the CAP is broadly aligned with National Agreement, more work is needed to deepen and embed this alignment in practice. As a stakeholder noted:

“They do need to put those hard topics on the table and align it more with Closing the Gap, you know. And I think that would be more respect, more respectful, and an easier conduit for the government to do it in that manner.”

The following section outlines a more in-depth analysis of how the CAP aligns with the National Agreement.

Alignment of the CAP with Priority Reform One – Formal Partnership and Shared decision-making

The CAP demonstrates a clear intent by government to engage more closely with First Nations communities and to ‘do things differently’. Mechanisms such as the establishment of the ALG represent a positive step toward more inclusive and responsive ways of working. The ALG has played a key role in shaping priorities, providing cultural oversight, and ensuring community perspectives are heard. There was consensus among government stakeholders that the partnership approach, particularly the ALG informing government decision-making, supports National Agreement Priority Reform One: Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making.

⁵³ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2023) *A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia*, NIAA, accessed June 2025.

However, while these mechanisms reflect progress, the approach does not fully align with the commitments set out under National Agreement Priority Reform One. Priority Reform One calls for a structural shift in the way governments work with First Nations people. This includes the establishment of formal partnerships with shared authority, jointly agreed priorities, co-designed implementation approaches, and clearly articulated shared accountability. Under the CAP, while First Nations voices are being included, the decision-making authority ultimately remains with government, and the processes in place lack the formalised governance and accountability structures that would enable power to be genuinely shared. Further, the ALG has only provided advice on a portion of the total investment. In its current form, the CAP does not reference or embed the specific language, principles, or outcome indicators of the National Agreement, which limits its alignment with this national policy framework. As a result, the mechanisms in place, though valuable, are established more as consultative structures than as vehicles for shared governance.

While the ALG exists to provide strategic advice, the operational control of the engagement process remains with NIAA. Meeting agendas, briefing materials, and the scope of discussion are determined by NIAA, limiting the agency of the ALG to set its own priorities or raise unstructured community concerns. This reinforces a dynamic where the process remains government-led.

These limitations highlight the need for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to governance under the CAP. The approach should recognise and leverage existing community structures, shift decision-making power, and build accountability to the broader First Nations community in Central Australia. Addressing these issues will be critical to realising the stated intent of 'doing things differently' in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Alignment of the CAP with Priority Reform 2 - Building the Community-Controlled Sector

While the CAP does not have an explicit focus on increasing support for ACCOs, ACCOs or First Nations businesses receive approximately \$42 million of the \$156 million funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider at 30 April 2025. This accounts for approximately 27 % of funding committed to specific projects under the CAP.

In Alice Springs, most of the \$69.4m funding committed through financial arrangements has been for either ACCOs or First Nations businesses (\$36.8m or 53%). Of the \$61.8m funding committed through financial arrangements to remote projects, a small proportion of the funding has gone to ACCOs to date (\$5.7m or 9%), most has gone to local councils as brokerage funding or to deliver infrastructure projects (\$36.7m or 59%).

Some ACCOs interviewed identified that prior to receiving CAP funding they had not had success accessing government support due to significant barriers. For instance, Case Study One: Oonchiumpa demonstrates how this funding enabled their Traditional Owner-led business to successfully deliver its youth program.

The design of CAP infrastructure projects includes transferring ownership of assets to ACCOs upon completion. This approach has created economic opportunities for ACCOs that they previously would not have had access to. However, because CAP funding does not include provisions for maintenance or ongoing support for asset use, projects have been delayed in their hand over to ACCOs.

Alignment of the CAP with Priority Reform 3 – Transforming Government Organisations

The data collected as part of the evaluation show that CAP appears to demonstrate emerging alignment with Priority Reform 3, which calls for systemic transformation of government organisations to be more accountable, culturally safe, and responsive to First Nations people. Findings include:

- A shift toward community-led decision-making: Government agencies involved in the CAP are increasingly working in partnership with First Nations-led bodies such as the ALG, responding to advice and adapting processes to better reflect community priorities. This marks a move away from top-down approaches and towards more shared governance.
- Improved cross-agency coordination and responsiveness: The CAP has encouraged greater collaboration between government departments, with some agencies actively aligning their programs and funding to support coordinated, place-based action. This reflects a growing recognition of the need to work holistically and responsively with communities.
- Changes to internal government processes: Some participating agencies have begun to adjust internal systems to better enable local decision-making for example, by streamlining approval processes, embedding local engagement roles, or allocating flexible funding in response to community-identified priorities. These are early signs of cultural and structural change within government.

- Use of community-informed data in government decision-making: Government agencies are increasingly drawing on data shared by communities and using it to guide decisions. This includes applying ALG insights in determining funding priorities and adjusting service delivery models, demonstrating a shift towards more inclusive and accountable practice.
- Recognition of community expertise: Through mechanisms like the ALG, the YRT and under activities such as the partnerships under the Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership (SFCP) measure, government is recognising and valuing the expertise of First Nations people in leading solutions. This aligns with the emphasis of Priority Reform 4 on valuing cultural knowledge and leadership.

Alignment of the CAP with Priority Reform 4 - Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level

The CAP demonstrates some alignment with Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement, particularly in facilitating shared access to data and information at the regional level to support First Nations communities. Examples identified include:

- ALG as a key data-sharing mechanism.
- Through the ALG, there has been significant and ongoing sharing of data between government and community representatives. Government agencies including multiple departments at the Australian and Northern Territory levels have provided the ALG with access to detailed information to support informed, place-based decision-making.
- The governance structures around the ALG also appear to have strengthened and formalised information sharing between government and community. The ALG meeting papers are structured to link progress updates on the CAP's implementation against the six priority funding streams, illustrating the total investment committed through financial arrangements with providers per stream and the initiatives funded within each commitment. This demonstrates sharing of information, in real time, with stakeholders outside of funding agencies and outside of government. This type of process is a new way of government implementing policy and programs.
- The ALG meeting minutes also indicate that the ALG is empowered to seek information from the government about certain decision-making processes regarding funding commitments, as well as the deployment of funds once a commitment has been made. It is also clear from the ALG minutes that time is allocated for the YRT to provide its advice. Continuity was also achieved, with each meeting including summary of the discussion from its prior meeting. Further, these meeting papers also request advice from the ALG on strategic matters to guide the allocation of funding. For example, how to identify projects for funding, should funding be spread across more projects at lower values or less projects at higher values. Documents also show that advice has been sought on the allocation of funding between Alice Springs and remote communities.

As a stakeholder noted:

"I think there has been some transparency of data with the Aboriginal Leadership Group at a regional level, so that, I think that's probably one area where we've been quite literally presenting data and information to the group".

Extent to which Aboriginal community leadership is being developed

Community leadership development is a key priority area raised by the ALG and in the CAP theory of change. The ALG and the YRT are both examples of community leadership mechanisms supported under the CAP. Some stakeholders indicate that the ALG bolsters community agency, which is seen as highly important in the context of previous government actions including the intervention. As one stakeholder commented:

"it's been helpful for Central Australia, you know, because they had the intervention. Then they had the super shires, you know, getting rid of the Community Councils, and our people just didn't have any agency on the ground. And putting things back in like this helps, you know, develop it again."

Interviews and various observations with the YRT indicate that this group has demonstrated leadership skills and capacity. Young people in the YRT value the opportunity to speak on behalf of other young people. Interview data from some of the YRT members suggests they feel that being part of the YRT has supported them to feel more confident to share their views and understand how they can contribute. A service provider stakeholder indicated that the YRT brings an important function of speaking on behalf of young people, especially those who were unable to speak due to their current circumstances.

\$34.1 million has been allocated to youth services and community leadership programs under the CAP. This funding is specifically intended to support young people and develop future leaders in Alice Springs and remote communities across Central Australia.⁵⁴

Other examples of community leadership under the CAP includes delivery of funding to ACCOs to deliver activities under the CAP and the funding of the Oonchiumpa program, led and delivered by Traditional Owners (see Case Study one for further details).

⁵⁴ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) '*Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief*' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

KEQ4: What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of positive life and community outcomes?

These findings explore what early short-term outcomes from the CAP can be seen focussing on the progress being made by funded organisations/communities, early outcomes in remote communities, and early outcomes in Alice Springs.

Summary of evaluation findings

The CAP is still in its early implementation phase relative to other government projects of its scale and complexity. Interview data suggest that most stakeholders agree that it is too early to identify many long-term positive life and community outcomes under the program. Further, there are no cross-project monitoring systems in place to capture outcomes of CAP projects, and there have been few evaluations of programs conducted by service providers.

Despite the above the evaluation has found some early signs of positive life and community outcomes in the areas of:

- Education and employment: Early impacts on remote school attendance and employment.
- Digital Inclusion: Progress is being made on digital inclusion projects.
- Youth: The Oonchiumpa program is successful in diverting youth while Youth Programs and School Holiday Activities School Holiday Activities were confirmed as successful over the 2024-25 summer holidays. There were more than 24,600 attendances across 1,461 activities, with nearly 16,000 attendances in remote communities.⁵⁵
- Service provider capacity: Funding is supporting service providers to increase organisational capacity, improve program quality, and expand their reach.
- Community safety: strengthened DV support, AOD services, justice reinvestment, youth engagement activities, and emergency accommodation.

While the above early signs of positive outcomes are encouraging, some service providers and ALG members express concern for the potential for long term and sustainable outcomes impacts of existing CAP funding due to its short-term nature.

Organisational outcomes

Many service providers involved in the implementation of CAP projects report that CAP funding has influenced their service delivery, including improving project quality, increasing their operational capacity, and extending their reach.

Improved project quality

CAP funding has been used by many service providers to supplement their existing program funding and improve service delivery. Service providers noted that funding has allowed them to diversify the types of services they deliver. For example, some funded youth programs have been able to improve their services to better suit the geographical and cultural needs of young people and children in the region. Others have been able to increase the amount and type of school activities they had previously delivered, increasing the quality of the program for more youth participation. Interviews with some service providers indicate that CAP funding has been supplemental to their program delivery, rather than providing significant change to the way they are able to operate.

CAP funding has facilitated the delivery of more comprehensive, refined, and user-friendly infrastructure projects, by enabling providers to go beyond basic requirements. For one provider, they plan to fund the development of a skate park for their local community that is supported by additional infrastructure like landscaping, shades, lights, and a bubbler.

Increased operational capacity

⁵⁵ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief [internal document], accessed June 2025.

Some service providers indicated that they have been able to, or plan to, expand the reach of their existing programs to more clientele because of the CAP funding. A small number of services indicated that CAP funding has significantly increased their organisational capacity, increasing funds for staff and services. One provider interviewed noted receiving funding three-times their normal operational funding under CAP which has increased their operational capacity. Increased funding for staff has also improved service reach to community members out of town who ordinarily would not have access to services, such as domestic and family violence (DFV) supports and legal advice.

Expanded program reach

CAP funding has expanded the opportunities for services to reach a greater geographical area with increased services through increased staff and program funding. This has increased service access for those in need, which for one service particularly impacts three remote communities. This service also noted that CAP funding has enabled them to work on areas of need that otherwise would be left unattended, such as strategic planning, that allows them to invest into organisation sustainability.

CAP funding has also expanded service reach to some remote communities through innovative service provision, with one service expanding their youth service delivery through the purchase of a mobile bus under CAP funding. The service was funded to acquire the mobile bus for the delivery of a specific youth program; however, they have effectively leveraged this resource to enhance and expand the delivery of their other existing services, thereby broadening their overall service reach. While the funding has enabled general service expansion, limitations within CAP funding require service providers to seek alternative sources to cover ongoing costs such as maintenance, staffing, and operations associated with the portable facility. This is reflective of other stakeholder concerns that funding have not appropriately planned for project sustainability.

General community progress towards early outcomes

Assessing early improvements in life and community outcomes under the CAP is challenging given the investment is still in the early stages of implementation, indicating that it may take years to see the effects of initiatives. While all of the funding has been allocated and \$156 million has been committed through financial arrangements with providers to specific projects under the CAP, many projects are still in early stages of development and are not yet being delivered, with challenges of procurement and workforce availability contributing to delays. Some service providers also noted project delays due to late payments by government.

It is important to note that many of the initiatives funded under the CAP seek to achieve long term behaviour change, of which there may be limited evidence in the short term. Some indications of short-term community outcomes were identified by stakeholders as the result of projects that had been successfully delivered.

Youth education and local workforce

Approximately \$40 million CAP funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider aligns with the National Agreement Target 7 “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are engaged in employment or education”. This represents one of the largest commitments to National Agreement Outcome Areas in the CAP in terms of the value of projects funded (although this also includes projects that address other outcome areas simultaneously).

Community outcomes in Central Australia schooling are improving through On-Country learning agreements and Local Decision-Making (LDM) framework integration, which allows for valuable system-wide learning and improved school planning across the Territory. CAP funding for On-Country learning is reported to allow schools to hire more staff and run community-based activities.

All 44 Central Australian schools receiving funding for On-Country learning have developed community-led School Action Plans to implement new ways of learning and support for young people, with a focus on improving school attendance and learning outcomes. Approximately 210 staff have been employed under this measure, with 43% of staff identifying as First Nations peoples, increasing the employment of First Nations people in schools.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) ‘Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief [internal document], accessed June 2025.

Data suggests that the CAP has contributed to an increase in students in VET, and a reduction in school absenteeism among First Nations students. Anecdotal reports from Australian Government stakeholders suggested that the increase of First Nations employment in schools is what has improved attendance levels.

Expansion of funding for services has also increased general employment opportunities in the region. An improvement in workforce planning and the provision of vocational education and training was noted by some ALG members as a service that had previously not existed in community.

Infrastructure

The CAP is providing funding for infrastructure investment under multiple streams, with a total of \$63.6 million allocated and \$45.8 million committed through financial arrangements so far for infrastructure projects across areas including health, social infrastructure and telecommunications. This funding is meeting a different set of needs compared to those that are addressed through the Australian Government's major infrastructure programs in the Northern Territory such as the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF). The NAIF is the Australian Government's 'flagship financing agency for infrastructure in northern Australia' and targets large scale investment decisions aimed at supporting economic growth and development. To date the NAIF has made nine investment decisions and allocated \$947.4 million in loans in the Northern Territory.⁵⁷ While these investments drive public benefit and economic growth for the NT as a whole, they are not able to meet the unique needs of specific communities in the way the CAP is able to, through its approach of working in partnership with communities.

The CAP infrastructure package has contributed to building the community-controlled sector, with the planned transfer of assets to ACCOs an opportunity for economic empowerment that would not have been accessed without the CAP.

Community safety and health

Progress on DFV and justice supports is noted in the CAP documentation, with specific outcomes including strengthened DFV support services, and AOD treatment services (including Child and Youth Assessment and Treatment Service (CYATS) assessments). Despite this investment, a DFV service provider noted a lack of change in community-level safety because of the CAP, police agency interactions with victim survivors continuing to negatively impact people interacting with the justice system in DFV cases.

Most stakeholders expressed ongoing concern around ensuring the early gains being achieved by the CAP are sustained beyond the funding period. Some indicated that outcomes from investments will likely take more than three to five years to be witnessed, with more time and attention needed to address root-cause community issues.

Alice Springs progress

While some early outcomes for this CAP funding have been noted, many projects are still in early implementation and stakeholders interviewed emphasised the need for a later evaluation to assess the impact of projects in the town.

Digital inclusion

Interviews with government stakeholders indicate some early positive anecdotal changes related to the CAP, particularly for those projects that were funded in the first Tranche. This included Wi-Fi connectivity projects in Alice Spring's town camps which have improved digital connectivity. CAP Documents suggest that this Wi-Fi connectivity has been improved in four town camps.

⁵⁷ NAIF (Northern Territory Infrastructure Facility) (n.d.) *Investing Impact Across the North*, NAIF website, accessed February 2025.

Youth

Some early positive youth outcomes seem to be arising from the CAP. Positive anecdotes were shared by Australian Government stakeholders indicating early positive change with the development of school action plans, and suggested improvements in education, employment and youth engagement as a result of holiday programs, but these outcomes could not be verified with data in this evaluation. That there have been a range of short term opportunities for youth in Alice Springs, such as sport and youth programs as a result of the CAP. The YRT also note that their representation in youth leadership opportunities has improved the youth representation in the region.

Infrastructure

Initial investments in youth and infrastructure have begun to show positive results in Alice Springs, with the community responding favourably as the projects have been quickly implemented. Document data indicates that the Todd Street Health Hub construction is progressing, and boarding facilities are being upgraded and built at Alice Springs schools.

Community safety

Through the CAP, community safety support has been provided. Whilst the link cannot be verified or causation assumed, Alice Springs crime statistics show significant reductions in property offences (house break-ins, commercial break-ins, theft) in January 2025 compared to January 2024, although assaults were higher.⁵⁸

Some suggestions of positive outcomes have also been noted in the town because of CAP-funded youth justice support. An internal evaluation of one of the CAP programs observed a reduction of previously high-risk young people being involved with the justice system, improved behaviour in public spaces, and culturally grounded accountability and behavioural change through their program (see Case study One). Government stakeholders also relayed anecdotal evidence of reductions in alcohol-fuelled violence as measures under the CAP being implemented by NTG.

Neutral or negative changes

Some stakeholders interviewed suggested that perceptions in the Alice Springs community that the CAP investment is focused solely on the First Nations population when the broader community also experienced the impacts of the unrest that led to the CAP have had a negative impact on social cohesion in Alice Springs.

Some ALG members noted they and their communities have not yet seen any changes in Alice Springs. Those that noted some positive initial changes also identified that the core issues felt in Central Australia would require longer term input to have sustainable change.

Remote community progress

Early outcomes in remote communities were difficult to assess as most CAP investment remains in the early stages of implementation. Some remote stakeholders indicated that they had observed some early changes because of CAP funding to their communities, but delays are noted in many of the remote projects, as seen by the low proportion of funding paid to date. Early investments in remote communities are also aligning with some National Agreement reforms and community priorities.

Youth

Some remote schools note improved school attendance, which they have attributed to the On-Country Learning Program.⁵⁹ Some ALG and YRT representatives also note that CAP funded projects have made a difference for youth in some remote communities with increased youth programs, leadership opportunities, and involvement with elders. School holiday activities recorded significant attendance across Central Australian communities,⁶⁰ and while one CAP-funded school holiday program has only operated for 12-months, it has been reported to keep youth engaged during the school holidays.

⁵⁸ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

⁵⁹ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

⁶⁰ NIAA (National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) 'Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

Infrastructure

Tranche 1 and 2 Infrastructure projects, like playgrounds, ovals and lighting, are progressing, underway or completed in remote communities and towns. Digital inclusion projects are also progressing in these areas. Some service providers noted positive change in remote communities following the completion of CAP infrastructure projects, noting the increased ability for community to safely use areas like playgrounds, basketball courts, and recreational centres with the provision of fencing and CCTV access. These areas are being constructed with the intent to have multiple uses, and community have expressed early positive feedback to ALG members.

Community safety

Community safety initiatives are now operating in remote areas.⁶¹ The funding has supported remote community patrols that work with police to address community unrest. Improved infrastructure in town, such as fencing of outdoor spaces, is also supporting safer community places for sporting activities and outdoor play. While support is appreciated by services, funding is seen by some providers as a 'band-aid' solution that does not address their community's major concerns with safety. Some service providers also note that they have not yet been able to see any changes in their community since CAP implementation, and expressed a need for strategic and ongoing funding to address underlying issues impacting remote communities.

⁶¹ NIAA (Australian Government National Indigenous Australians Agency) (2025) '*Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief*' [internal document], accessed June 2025.

KEQ5: What are the lessons learnt from the CAP process so far?

These findings explore the lessons learnt from the CAP focussing on the factors that enable the CAP and doing things differently, the barriers, and future areas of focus.

Summary of evaluation findings

Strong governance mechanisms, involvement of community leadership, and government taking a flexible, relational approach are key enablers of the CAP. The involvement of experienced public servants with strong networks across government is another key factor in the CAP's implementation. However, this posed risks where there was a reliance on personal relationships rather than an official process or mechanism that could be followed, regardless of personnel involved.

Barriers to effective implementation of the CAP and long-term meaningful change stem from:

- Minimal time to develop CAP strategic direction and alignment with existing mechanisms such as National Agreement and local decision making has reduced the effectiveness, and representativeness of Aboriginal community-led decision making in the CAP.
- Complex legislative processes around government grants and procurements have remained unchanged from business-as-usual processes, delaying implementation once a funding decision has been made.
- Time pressures and a lack of established frameworks to plan and conduct feasibility analyses of proposed projects mean that producing outcomes in alignment with the overarching goals of the CAP has not been purposefully guided or tracked.
- Lack of formal mechanisms for communicating CAP objectives and accountability of implementation progress to stakeholders and community has resulted in confusion, and a lack of visibility of CAP actions for community stakeholders.

Underlying all these challenges are the ongoing drivers of the unrest in Central Australia including the impacts of years of government interventions, overcrowding, food insecurity, a lack of social investment in the region, and poor social cohesion - all of which pose barriers to genuine partnership with community and achievement of long-term positive change.

Looking to the next phase of the CAP, a key focus needs to be on the effective implementation of the funding that has been allocated, and on building the sustainability of existing measures beyond the four-year life of the CAP. Stakeholders also identify a need to prioritise funding of initiatives that are likely to address underlying root-cause issues, such as housing, education, and health.

Future action also needs to include improving communication with people outside of the CAP architecture, including service providers and general community, to ensure the visibility of the CAP's rollout and achievements.

Specific findings on lessons learnt on the CAP process to date on enablers, barriers and future areas of focus are below.

Enablers and barriers of strategic decision-making relating to implementation

Governance mechanisms and leadership in decision-making

Strong governance mechanisms, such as the ALG, the IDC, and NIAA coordination, are identified as critical enablers of the CAP. They are described as being vital for understanding the needs of communities across Central Australia and coordinating the multiple departments and layers of government involved in delivering projects under the CAP. All stakeholders were clear that success under the CAP is reliant on strong functioning relationships across agencies, all three levels of government and the ALG.

The CAP has established new mechanisms to specifically improve the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in decision-making. These mechanisms have established new avenues for Aboriginal people to contribute to the development and implementation of the CAP. These mechanisms also reflect a broader recognition identified in documents and interviews of the need to rebuild trust following the legacy of previous government interventions. However, analysis of documents and stakeholder interviews highlights several systemic and operational constraints of the current approach. These are highlighted in detail below:

Aboriginal Leadership Group representation

The creation and integration of an ALG was agreed by most stakeholders as a step in the right direction of government intent to involve First Nations communities in Central Australia investment. However, while the ALG includes respected community leaders authorised to speak on behalf of their respective organisations or communities, they cannot represent the full diversity of First Nations peoples across Central Australia. The region is home to many distinct language groups and communities.⁶² Several limitations are identified across the interviews and documentation regarding community input via the ALG into the CAP including:

- the creation of the ALG added a new representative body, when many governance structures already exist in Central Australia.
- alternative governance bodies and decision-making forums already operating within some communities have not been engaged under the CAP, creating confusion, distrust, and potential duplication.
- projects under the CAP had not been distributed equitably, in part due to the utilisation of certain Local Decision-Making (LDM) groups, and existing decision-making structures not fully representing all communities.
- the process for selection of the ALG representatives is not clear to community stakeholders, which has caused tensions in community.
- whilst ALG members are First Nations peoples and have cultural authority, they are not chosen to be experts in all areas that CAP projects cover. Some stakeholders queried whether they have adequate knowledge and expertise to comment on all types of CAP projects (for example DFV projects) without support.

The representative nature and composition of the ALG is highlighted as an essential potential enabler of the CAP, that at this time does not appropriately contain the representation or expertise required to inform decision-making or appropriately represent all communities in the Central Australia region.

Lack of clarity of ALG membership selection, roles and responsibilities of ALG members, and NIAA governance of ALG membership, has led to tensions between ALG members. Greater clarity of ALG roles and the provision of culturally appropriate and government decision-making supports for the ALG, would further enhance ALG decision-making. This may include the sharing of evidence-based feasibility data and providing project and subject matter expertise to assist ALG in decision-making.

Youth Roundtable representation

As mentioned earlier in the report, the YRT provides a mechanism for youth input to the CAP. The YRT has had input into some priorities under the CAP. However, interviews with some stakeholders identified there are limitations in the structure and effectiveness of this group. Although the Chair of YRT holds a seat on the ALG, the current arrangement does not provide the YRT with a direct or formalised platform to influence decisions or shape youth-specific priorities within the CAP. Further, there were examples highlighted where the YRT have not been consulted regarding issues directly impacting young people.

These limitations suggest a need to strengthen the role of YRT within the CAP by establishing more direct pathways for youth input, improving consultation processes on youth-specific issues, and ensuring that young people's perspectives are embedded across all relevant areas of investment and service delivery.

⁶² Rural Generalist Program (n.d.) '[Living in the Central Australia Region](#)', *Rural Generalist Program Northern Territory website*, accessed June 2025.

Relationship building and consistency

Many stakeholders indicated that consistency in government personnel is an essential component for working with community stakeholders, the YRT, and the ALG, and may improve inter-agency collaboration for government stakeholders.

The support of the NIAA leading the CAP Implementation Taskforce and overseeing governance of the CAP was identified as a key enabler for government stakeholders, particularly in the early stages of the CAP when the governance mechanisms were being established, and for government agencies with limited networks or experience working in Central Australia. The NIAA Central Australia Regional Office was also identified by some service providers as providing strong support, developing relationships and trust in the region as a bridge between governments and service providers.

Most participants highlighted that building trust and fostering effective collaboration in Central Australia requires sustained relationships over time, which can be undermined by frequent staff turnover, different representatives attending meetings, or short-term engagement from government representatives.

Some First Nations stakeholders noted that when the same government staff are present across multiple engagements, it supports relationship building and strengthens momentum and progress. This consistency allows for more meaningful dialogue and greater follow-through on commitments made. Conversely, a lack of continuity was perceived to create disruptions in communication and progress on agreed activities.

The reflections highlight the importance of relational consistency as a key enabler of effective partnerships and implementation. Early reliance on existing government relationships and networks—rather than establishing formal governance structures and decision-making processes—raises concerns about the sustainability of the current CAP governance model, as this approach is vulnerable to staff turnover. In regions like Central Australia, where long-term government relationships with First Nations stakeholders are critical, building and maintaining strong, structured partnerships is essential to achieving the goal of ‘doing things differently’.

Government processes

An authorising environment created by senior executives in government at both the ministerial and departmental level is described as an enabler for the effectiveness of the CAP. This initial objective gave departments the impetus to adopt new ways of working with community through the ALG, and supported better coordination across government and ownership by different Australian Government departments around their roles in the CAP.

Government taking a more flexible and responsive approach to co-design, program and project delivery, was identified as an important enabler for progress under the CAP. Some government stakeholders found this way of working consistent with their usual practice in line with National Agreement. Others were required to adopt new ways of working and greater flexibility than had previously been supported. In such instances, having a network through the IDC that could share learnings and support progress was critical. Although deemed useful in the initial stages of the CAP, these flexible and unstructured ways of working within government have begun to slow with the CAP’s progress, and turnover of government staff has reduced IDC engagement.

Some non-government stakeholders expressed that while they had experienced strong engagement with Australian Government, minimal and inconsistent engagement with the territory government had been a barrier to more effective implementation. Unclear or inconsistent processes for engagements between Australian and territory governments may have contributed to this perceived disengagement by territory agencies.

Reflections on the ways the CAP inter-agency collaboration has enhanced project implementation and engagement with community suggests a need to support and strengthen the continued use of the IDC for government actions in Central Australia.

Communication and accountability

Effective communication and accountability between government, non-government, and community stakeholders are essential components to the effectiveness of the CAP. Improving mechanisms to achieve improved communication and accountability is essential to ensuring CAP efficacy as discussed in KEQ1.

This includes developing improved First Nations community representation through:

- Greater clarity and plain language in ALG meetings for members to understand what is being asked of them or delivered to them.
- Developing several formalised avenues to hear from the voices of community that are not solely through the ALG.
- Strengthen the ALG and other avenues for community input and align these mechanisms with the National Agreement commitments to enhance the government's commitment under the CAP to 'doing things differently.'

Community accountability can be strengthened by:

- Developing formalised process for regularly reporting progress of the CAP back to community organisations or communities across Central Australia, to increased transparency of CAP impacts, and reduce confusion in community and among service providers.
- Increased feedback loops and more accessible progress updates to ensure communities remain informed and engaged, such as the DSS community engagement process under the Strengthening Family and Communities Partnership.⁶³
- Increased transparency of decision-making groups roles in resourcing, program design, and/or service delivery to ensure appropriate accountability, collaborative working and reduced duplication of work efforts.
- Increased transparency of grants processes to ensure equitable, consistent, and evidence-based processes for funding.

Systems limitations

Challenges to 'doing things differently' raised by government stakeholders stemmed largely from inflexible and complex government and legislative processes that funding and projects under the CAP are still subject to. Complexity and delays around grants, procurements and government approval timeframes is a source of frustration, with one key stakeholder observing that processes of government are not designed for this kind of work, and another questioning the appropriateness of funding mechanisms, and their grounding in Aboriginal community-led design and outcomes-based planning. It is noted that this is a broader systemic issue but it requires consideration to achieve long-term change.

The CAP expenditure is still subject to complicated, legislative rules around grants and procurements, adding additional complexity and slowing down the process of implementing the CAP initiatives once the decision has been taken. Government stakeholders noted that a key challenge to integrating the ALG into government decision-making processes stemmed from a misalignment between the timeframes in which Government funding decisions are made, and the time the ALG needed to form a position and provide advice on potential projects. The involvement of multiple levels of government and multiple ministers also makes decision-making processes more complicated and slows down approvals and implementation when the ALG has formed its position. Delays in funding are impacting service providers, delaying project initiation and placing liability on the provider, with some proceeding with project timelines at their own cost. Working directly with local government was noted by one ALG member as producing faster implementation of CAP projects, perhaps due to this personal responsibility that some providers had undertaken. Conversely, at times government ministers would want to move more quickly than the ALG and community could match, creating tension between speedy delivery and genuine partnership. Timeframes being driven by political pressure rather than timeframes that support engagement with community and the ALG have the potential to impact the success of the CAP in delivering on its intent of 'doing things differently'.

⁶³ DSS (Department of Social Services) (2025), 'The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership Master Information Pack', Australian Government, [internal document], accessed June 2025.

The size of the CAP funding pool is also somewhat at odds with the approach taken to community consultation. While consultations with community were expansive in documenting issues identified by Central Australian communities, some government stakeholders and service providers acknowledged that the \$250 million package was insufficient to address all issues raised by community. Government stakeholders experienced difficulties managing community expectations after the broad nature of consultations. Service providers reported confusion within their organisations and community, as the funding received was seen to have little impact relative to the scale of issues raised in consultations.

Project needs, feasibility, & sustainability

Many interviews identified that any investment decisions must be supported by robust, evidence-based planning and feasibility assessments. This has been consistently raised as an ongoing concern of ALG members in meetings. Service providers, ALG members, and government stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the adequacy of project planning, including limited consideration for long-term sustainability such as maintenance funding. Stakeholders also noted concern around the capability of selected projects to deliver the most meaningful, and lasting change possible with available funds.

The ongoing fundamental issues facing disadvantaged communities in Central Australia will continue to present major barriers to meaningful change through the CAP. The level of regional investment under the CAP, while substantial, was not designed to improve all areas of social and economic life in Central Australia. Issues such as overcrowding, food security, a lack of social investment in the region, and poor social cohesion all pose a risk to meaningful change without ongoing political will and investment additional to the CAP.

Complex contextual factors have made it difficult to implement CAP-funded projects easily across Central Australia. ALG members and service providers noted that the lack of strategic design in CAP investments (and not accounting for the contextual factors) limited ability to address the region's needs. Typical challenges facing service delivery in remote areas arose throughout the process, including the capacity of councils to deliver and manage infrastructure projects, procurement shortages, and thin markets impacting workforce recruitment and service delivery. Greater consideration of this context within project design and allocation would enable improved project implementation by service providers.

There is a need for disciplined, transparent funding decisions that are both community-informed and technically sound, not an open-ended allocation of resources without due regard to service gaps, capability constraints, important evidence or long-term sustainability. Non-government stakeholders identified that some major infrastructure projects currently have issues of use and feasibility already apparent. Some other stakeholders identified that large investments have been allocated to infrastructure builds without forward planning for ongoing funding to support significant maintenance requirements or asset handover to the community.

Additionally, while some agencies work well in communicating and collaborating with the ALG and IDC, inconsistent data sharing across government agencies is restricting the implementation of data-informed action. Service providers noted that a lack of consistent agency transparency in reporting of specific issues, such as housing needs, is a barrier to adequately informing project feasibility and decision-making.

Interviews with many stakeholders identified that ensuring the feasibility of actions under the CAP is critical to secure community trust and sustained engagement and ensure that proposed initiatives are realistic, implementable, and capable of delivering meaningful, long-term outcomes. The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnerships (SFC) project examined in Case Study number two used both community input, and evidence-based decision-making processes to ensure that decisions are heavily guided by community input, are feasible, and backed by evidence. Some local governments indicated that they are contributing additional funding to cover shortfalls in CAP funding to continue to support the social and economic benefits that they are beginning to see in community from initial CAP investment. There is an opportunity to greater engage with service providers and community stakeholders, to 'do things differently' to address project funding needs.

Future areas of focus

Priority project areas

Stakeholders raised the importance of greater consideration of addressing ongoing social issues and the root causes of community unrest in the next phase of the CAP. These priority areas can be broken into education and youth, housing, justice, health supports, crime, youth engagement, social cohesion, and community development and capacity building. Specific initiative focus areas identified include:

- Education and youth that have a strengths-based view of young people, including changes to the curriculum to support all First Nations youth, availability of residential programs for kids at risk of anti-social behaviour, or kids engaging in anti-social behaviour, and remote sport and recreation programs to provide support on a regular basis, to cater for kids of all ages.
- Housing including supports and funding to raise town camps to a liveable standard.
- Health including mental health, alcohol and drug support services, food security, particularly for youth.
- Justice with a focus on supporting early prevention activities rather than reactive programs and supports, to address root cause issues before they reach crisis.
- Investment is needed for smaller communities and smaller organisations that work towards community safety, as they can closely work with community.

Community development and capacity building

Supports for developing local workforce to support broader and longer-term outcomes. Support initiatives are needed to build Alice based workforce including training and skills, secondments, staff accommodation etc. Focus should be on upskilling community members and developing communities economically. The money should assist people in engaging and getting involved in their own communities.

Some expressed a need to maintain funding for remote communities, as creating better living conditions in remote areas could help ease some of the issues felt in Alice Springs. Others believed prioritising funding in Alice Springs should be prioritised to support the needs of residents and mobile communities entering the town.

Community development services, such as cultural and language programs, were identified as an opportunity for CAP investment, as programs that mainstream government departments typically do not fund.

ALG membership and supports

The ALG and the YRT were seen by stakeholders as useful mechanisms to improve the way government agencies 'do things differently'. There is a need for the CAP continue to be led by Central Australian First Nations people, with empowerment and resourcing.

To improve community leadership, ALG and YRT require greater supports, direction, and certainty in their advisory roles to be able to effectively continue to represent community and effect change. Working with service providers was identified to support the ALG to increase subject knowledge on areas, and to provide informed advice on subject matter issues, such as DFV.

Current interest and value of input from youth representatives is high, however stakeholders indicated that their engagement could be increased. YRT members indicated that they require greater supports and opportunity to facilitate representative participation. This could look like :

- expanding the YRT membership to communities within the entire CAP boundary (currently members are limited to a smaller number of communities than those that cover the CAP)
- more input of YRT into areas of interest, such as justice responses, education investments and mental health
- travel and commitment requirements were identified as a barrier for YRT members, with the suggestions of the use of online meetings and meeting in remote communities presented as ways to improve YRT participation
- meeting outside of the NIAA office was also identified as desirable.

Planning, feasibility and sustainability

More coordination and planning are required to ensure the effectiveness of CAP funding. While service providers were generally positive regarding received funding, CAP funding has been insufficiently planned to always adequately complete projects, account for maintenance, or create impactful change in remote communities. Approved infrastructure projects or small-scale safety programs were not believed to be projects that would address the core issues faced by communities.

Without addressing the core issues of workforce training and housing supports, service providers noted certain projects were limited in their efficacy. Non-government stakeholders indicated a need to consult community intentionally and in a guided way to better inform longer-lasting, generational investments that still meet community needs while offering better value and sustainability. This includes consulting of local government meaningfully to assess viability and sustainability of projects, and realigning funding and project scope to better meet community needs.

ALG members agreed that it is important to resource project supports, and that this role could be supported by government. Aligning CAP with National Agreement was seen by some non-government stakeholders as an opportunity to strategically align CAP projects and investment with clear direction, and form more respectful and easier conduits for decision-making between the ALG and government. Greater planning for projects could also result in opportunities to connect with other funding opportunities outside of government that could enhance projects and support service providers.

Funding processes also require supports, with a need to increase CAP funding, adjust cyclical funding processes, and improve funding guidelines flexibility, to improve certainty for service providers and community members, to allow them to build trust and reliability of the provision of programs. Some services expressed a need to allow CAP grant recipients to roll over underspends especially where workforce challenges have meant roles haven't or can't be filled. Fund supports based on need rather than population, particularly for DFV supports. Make funding reporting processes less burdensome including a portal that is easier to navigate, less frequent progress updates (weekly is too frequent, quarterly site visits are fine) and having KPIs that are relevant to the activity that is being funded.

Implementation

In the next phase of the CAP implementation, stakeholders raised the importance of a strong focus on delivery of those initiatives that have been agreed to date and ensuring the sustainability of measures beyond the life cycle of the CAP. This includes a focus on building community leadership and strengthening governance and ensuring those organisations tasked with delivery, including regional councils and ACCOs, have support to improve their project management, delivery and governance capabilities. Ensuring government stakeholders maintain their own capabilities in the people working to deliver the CAP is also critical given the high levels of staff turnover and the specialised set of skills and knowledge required to work effectively in partnership with First Nations communities in Central Australia.

Outcome monitoring, communication and accountability

In relation to outcome monitoring, tracking the impact of the various initiatives under the CAP will be critical, particularly as funding agreed under the six-year Plan approaches its end date. Ensuring all initiatives funded under the CAP have a monitoring, learning and evaluation plan in place (including a clearly articulated program logic) would help to identify the impact of this funding at the community level. Noting the challenges with evaluating the impact of projects aimed at long term, community-level changes, departments overseeing delivery of the CAP-funded initiatives could explore identifying short term indicators which capture service availability, quality and participation established in the Murdoch Children's Research Institute 'Restacking the Odds' framework.⁶⁴ These indicators will thereby provide information on whether services are on track to achieve their intended long-term outcomes. Government stakeholders also raised the importance of improving transparency around outcomes under the CAP and sharing success stories.

⁶⁴ Molloy C, Perini N, Harrop C (2025) *'Evidence-based Lead Indicators to Drive Equitable Early Years Services: Findings from the Restacking the Odds Study'*. *Child Indicators Research*, 3:1-35

Most non-government stakeholders agreed on the need to track and implement outcomes monitoring of projects, and communicate outcomes to community. Non-government stakeholders also emphasised the need for improved community data sharing and government accountability in line with National Agreement , which includes keeping service providers and the greater community informed of CAP investments. This requires more close alignment between NTG and leadership group to better ensure cross-agency and service accountability.

Improved communication processes should also be established to improve engagements with service providers, to ensure clarity around funding allocations and limit community confusion and improve social cohesion.

Case studies

The case studies below explore three distinct examples of activities undertaken as part of the CAP. While these activities fall under the CAP, it is important to note that the CAP itself is not a single, unified program. Rather, it is a multi-measure, multi-government agency response comprising a range of initiatives, each with different scopes, objectives, and delivery partners. As such, the case studies do not reflect a single approach or model rather they illustrate a diversity of responses aligned with the CAP's overarching intent.

Given that all three activities are in the early stages of implementation, the case studies focus on emerging success or key features in the implementation process, rather than definitive outcomes or long-term impact. They include analysis of opportunities for improvement to help guide the ongoing implementation.

It is acknowledged that the Success Case Method is a Western-derived evaluation approach, which may not fully align with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. Care was taken to ensure that the method was adapted in culturally appropriate ways. The definition of "success" used in the study was developed in consultation with the NIAA and the ALG. Additionally, during interviews and conversations with participants, questions were intentionally left open-ended to allow individuals to define success in their own terms. This approach aimed to centre Aboriginal perspectives and experiences, while still meeting the requirements of an evaluation framework that speaks to government.

In aggregate, these case studies illustrate the factors that are contributing to project success in addition to the opportunities for improvement.

The factors across the three case studies that enable project success are:

- First Nations-Led Programs and Decision-Making – First Nations leadership across programs and decision-making ensures that community voice, priorities, and cultural knowledge are embedded throughout implementation and project delivery.
- Diverse and Inclusive Engagement – Engagement with diverse voices supports planning and initiatives that reflect the breadth of community perspectives.
- Collaborative working between various partners – Genuine and ongoing collaborative between various partners including government, community, organisation, service providers and local leaders supports projects and initiatives that reflect local priorities, avoid duplication and foster a focus on holistic and sustainable outcomes.
- Long-Term Relationships and Trust – Strong, sustained relationships between government and First Nations communities foster trust, dialogue, and collaborative ways of working.
- Strengths-Based and Community-Defined Success – Initiatives and project grounded in the strengths, knowledge and aspirations of local community, and enabling community to define success on their own terms, support initiatives to be locally relevant.
- Government Capability and Cultural Competency – Government agencies with strong cultural competency can engage respectfully and effectively with First Nations communities. Governments with competency in working in a place-based and coordinated approach can strengthen initiatives and projects under the CAP.
- Feasibility and Evidence-Informed Planning – Initiatives should be realistic, locally informed, and grounded in evidence to support sustainable and effective outcomes.
- Shared Accountability and Transparent Data Practices – Co-designed data-sharing processes promote transparency, joint accountability, and trust between communities and government.
- Respect for Data Sovereignty – Upholding data sovereignty ensures Aboriginal communities retain control over how information about them is collected, used, and shared.
- Flexibility and Responsiveness – Flexible approaches enable government and services to respond to evolving community needs and priorities.

The opportunities for improvement that are highlighted across the three case studies are:

- Doing things differently – These opportunities for improvement reflect a broader call to “*do things differently*” to embed ways of working that are genuinely community-led, place-based, and culturally grounded. This involves building long-term trust, and designing systems that are flexible, transparent, and accountable to communities. By embracing these shifts, government and partners can foster more respectful, responsive, and sustainable outcomes that align with what communities know works best for them.
- Coordination and governance across governments and community – The case studies highlight that coordination between different levels of government and community organisations could be improved through more consistent and structured engagement practices. Community governance arrangements are often complex, and to support effective engagement and reduce delays in project delivery, more staged and collaborative planning processes are needed. This includes involving services, organisations or local councils who will be delivering projects to be involved in all stages of planning.
- Stronger planning to reflect community priorities – There is an opportunity to build on community strengths by deepening their involvement in feasibility and strategic planning processes. Opportunities exist to guide planning in conjunction with feasibility assessments, to support long-term sustainability. Feasibility studies and strategic assessments could enhance more effective projects. Community, including services and organisations who will be delivering projects should be included in these planning phases.

Case Study 1: Oonchiumpa Consultancy and Services – Alternative service delivery model

Oonchiumpa is an alternative service delivery model. It is a grassroots, Aboriginal-led initiative based in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), Central Australia. The primary focus is to support the most at-risk young people in the region facing significant challenges such as disconnection from family, community, culture, or education and who are coming into contact with the police and/or child protection systems.

Implementation

The program was established in 2023 with funding from NIAA through the CAP. Funding from NIAA was secured after a sustained period of advocacy by the organisation’s directors to several government agencies and ministers, which had long recognised the urgent need for culturally-led, community-driven support for young people in Central Australia.

The funding enabled the formal launch of the project, building on years of grassroots work, cultural authority, and trusted community relationships. Since its establishment, the program has been steadily growing, laying strong foundations, engaging with community, and developing place-based, culturally safe responses tailored to the needs of at-risk Aboriginal young people. The program continues to be shaped by Aboriginal leadership, community voices, and the lived realities of the young people it supports.

To date the program has:

- Maintained 100% employment of local Aboriginal people with around 10 staff working across the program.
- Supported a consistent case load of between 18 and 24 at-risk young people.
- Enabled significant referrals to other programs. In the July-December 2024 period, 32 referrals for female participants and 39 for male participants were recorded.

What results are being achieved by the project

Oonchiumpa has commissioned one external and one internal evaluation. Both evaluations have indicated early success of the initiative. The 2024 internal evaluation reported a range of positive behavioural and engagement outcomes among program participants, particularly those with high and complex needs. Key observed outcomes included:

Reduction in justice system involvement:

Several young people who were previously engaged in regular offending (including repeated vehicle theft) had no further contact with the justice system since engaging with the program.

Personal growth and leadership:

Oonchiumpa supported two young people to receive youth allowance promoting independence and boosting confidence.

High retention rates:

Strong retention rates with 90% of participants consistently engaging with the program. Key factors supporting strong retention included:

- **Cultural Connection:** incorporating Aboriginal cultural practices like camps, art, and connection to Country helped participants feel respected and engaged.
- **Trusted Relationships:** consistent guidance and mentorship from Aboriginal staff fostered trust and a sense of security.
- **Comprehensive Support:** practical assistance such as transport, meals, and mental health services helped remove barriers to ongoing participation.

Improved school attendance and employment:

- At the outset of the project, 95% of participants were no longer engaged in school. Since becoming involved with Oonchiumpa, 72% have re-engaged through school or alternative education options.
- Teachers have reported noticeable improvements in students' motivation and engagement because of participating in the program.
- Three young people who had not previously shown interest in work or career pathways are now actively inquiring about employment and training opportunities.
- One in three eligible participants is now applying for jobs.
- 70% of participants indicated they are interested in continuing their education, with many attributing their motivation to the support and encouragement provided by the program.
- 40% of participants expressed a goal of attending boarding school, and the program is actively assisting them in pursuing this pathway.

Improved behaviour in public spaces:

Young people who were previously known for antisocial behaviour were rarely seen engaging in inappropriate activities when sighted in the community at night.

Successful engagement of high-risk individuals:

The program successfully engaged a young woman previously turned away by all other services. Through culturally safe and consistent support, she was connected to Centrelink, attended health and mental health appointments, and began receiving care that had previously been inaccessible despite years of attempted engagement by other providers.

High levels of trust and relational engagement:

Participants regularly requested support from Oonchiumpa staff in contexts such as school interviews, counselling sessions, and health appointments even when linked with other services, demonstrating deep trust and connection.

Culturally grounded accountability and behavioural change:

The First Nations-led model fostered a sense of belonging and responsibility among young people. This connection was contributing to increased self-awareness and more respectful behaviour, driven by a desire not to let the program or its staff down.

Positive feedback from external stakeholders:

Other service providers have reported noticeable changes in the young people's behaviour and engagement levels. The program's impact has also been acknowledged in inter-agency forums and by broader community members, who are now reaching out to refer other at-risk youth.

What factors have enabled or hindered success (outcomes)?

Seeking out and listening to community voice

A key factor identified in the program's success is that it is 100% First Nations-owned and led by Arrernte staff. This is supporting the work to be grounded in cultural knowledge, lived experience, and genuine community connection. The leadership team brings deep understanding of the local context, language, and kinship systems, allowing them to engage young people in ways that other services (mainstream services)

cannot. Their cultural authority and trusted relationships have meant that they can intervene early, respond with cultural integrity, and hold young people accountable in a way that is both firm and respectful. Because young people see themselves reflected in the program's leaders, it was identified that they feel safe, understood, and more willing to engage.

The strength and credibility of the organisation's governance structure is another key factor identified in its success. The board is made up of members from two pioneering Aboriginal families who were foundational in establishing the Central Australian Aboriginal Legal Aid Service, demonstrating a long legacy of advocacy, justice, and leadership in the region. The inclusion of elders from diverse communities and language groups (e.g. Yuendumu, Utopia, and Tennant Creek) in advisory roles brings deep cultural authority and broad regional knowledge. Many of these Elders have held senior roles in government and community organisations, extending the organisation's reach, strengthening partnerships, and building trust with stakeholders across Central Australia. The board is chaired by a respected Mbantua Traditional Owner and comprises strong Aboriginal women leaders with longstanding experience in justice and advocacy. Their presence is supporting the organisation to remain grounded in local lore culture, and community priorities. This culturally informed leadership is promoting the program's legitimacy and accountability and ability to navigate complex cultural and political landscapes.

Many of the staff bring lived experience, strong community ties, and a deep understanding of the challenges facing local young people. Their credibility and cultural competence enable them to engage with participants in a way that is authentic, respectful, and effective, fostering trust, consistency, and real behavioural change.

A core strength of the program is its role as a cultural broker helping young people navigate between the expectations of their Aboriginal cultural world and the demands of the Western or "town" world. Many of the young people supported by the program face challenges in understanding and meeting the requirements of systems like education, justice, health, and social services, which are often culturally unsafe or unfamiliar. The program helps bridge this gap by walking alongside young people in both worlds, supporting them to access services, meet obligations, and communicate with mainstream systems, while also staying grounded in culture, kinship, and community values. It was identified that it is this cultural brokerage that makes the program effective in reaching young people who have otherwise fallen through the cracks.

Working relationship between NIAA and Oonchiumpa

A strong and constructive working relationship has been established between the Oonchiumpa and NIAA, which has become an important enabler of the program's success. While the relationship faced some early challenges particularly around NIAA's initial emphasis on structured oversight and standardised processes, the organisation remained committed to open communication and mutual respect. Over time, through consistent delivery, transparency, and demonstrated cultural leadership, trust has grown significantly. NIAA has increasingly recognised the value of this First Nations-led, place-based approach and has shown greater willingness to listen, adapt, and allow the organisation to lead in ways that reflect local needs and cultural context. This growing relationship of trust has enabled more flexible, responsive program delivery and strengthened the foundation for long-term collaboration.

Case Study 2: Strengthening Families and Community Partnership (SFCP)

The Strengthening Families and Communities Partnership (SFCP) is a \$30 million, five-year initiative established under the Australian Government's Better, Safer Future for Central Australia *Central Australia Plan* to support place-based initiatives across regional and remote Central Australia in the Northern Territory. This initiative is delivered by DSS and was developed in response to community consultation, which underscored the need for more flexible, responsive, and culturally grounded approaches to service delivery. Funding is intended to support community-led solutions to improve family and community safety in communities across Central Australia.

Implementation

The Partnership was announced in December 2023 and is in the early phases of implementation. At April 30 2025, \$8.7 million has been committed until 2027, including \$3.5 million already paid to 4 organisations based in Alice Springs and nearby remote communities to deliver projects identified by the community to help address family, domestic, and sexual violence. In June 2024, a further \$1.4 million was paid to Central Desert Regional Council and MacDonnell Regional Council to establish a brokerage arrangement to support the development of place-based and community-led initiatives that support Indigenous families and communities in Central Australia. This \$1.4 million is intended to target small projects on the ground in Central Australia, begin relationships with key stakeholders, and target ad hoc requests by communities to improve family safety. There will be further opportunities for funding under the Partnership for services relating to family, domestic and sexual violence in the Central Australia region, as well as funding for community-led grassroots solutions for community safety, which will be developed in partnership with communities and the ALG.

What results are being achieved by the project

Given that the partnership is still in the early implementation phase, outcomes will have not yet been seen in any of the funded projects. This case study will focus on results in terms of 'doing things differently' through the inclusion of Aboriginal voices in the implementation of the partnership.

The CAP was born out of the opportunity that by 'doing things differently' or looking at the system as a whole^{65, 66, 67} and engaging the community in developing solutions^{68, 69}, issues such as crime and health outcomes can improve. This is endorsed in the CAP Theory of Change.

There are indications of 'doing things differently' in the project compared to 'business as usual' approach in government, including the ongoing involvement of the ALG in the SFCP. There is an ongoing relationship between DSS and the ALG to ensure that Aboriginal input and endorsement is obtained throughout the process. A key output of this collaboration is the community engagement principles developed by DSS and endorsed by the ALG comprising:

- **Being flexible and responsive:** adapting the approach based on evolving community needs, preferences, and feedback.
- **Being culturally appropriate:** ensuring engagement processes are designed and delivered in a way that respects cultural protocols and promotes safety for participants.
- **Recognising diversity:** tailoring approaches to reflect the distinct identities, strengths, and contexts of different communities.
- **Willing to learn:** embedding learning loops and openness to adapt based on what is heard from communities.
- **Enhancing awareness of existing work:** identifying and building on community-led efforts and strengths, rather than duplicating or displacing them.

⁶⁵ Arthur MW, Hawkins JD, Brown EC, Briney JS, Oesterle S and Abbott RD (2010) 'Implementation of the Communities That Care prevention system by coalitions in the Community Youth Development Study', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 38(2):245–258.

⁶⁶ Bath R and O'Moore E (2019) 'A whole-system multi-agency approach to serious violence prevention: A resource for local system leaders in England', London: Public Health England.

⁶⁷ Krug E (2002) 'World report on violence and health', World Health Organization, 12.

⁶⁸ Desmond Dawes G and Davidson A (2019) 'A framework for developing justice reinvestment plans for crime prevention and offender rehabilitation in Australia's remote indigenous communities', *Journal of offender rehabilitation*, 58(6):520–543.

⁶⁹ D'Inverno AS and Bartholow BN (2021) 'Engaging communities in youth violence prevention: Introduction and contents', *American journal of public health*, 111(S1): S10–S16.

- **Creating feedback loops:** ensuring that information flows back to community, showing how their input has influenced decisions and maintaining trust through transparency.

In line with the advice of the ALG, there has been broader community engagement throughout the process to support informed decision-making by DSS. Projects under the SFCP have been decided by DSS with input from community engagement, input and endorsement from the ALG.

As highlighted in the evaluation findings, feasibility was identified as an important factor in supporting projects to be both implementable and sustainable. DSS has developed an evidence base to ensure projects align with best practice approaches and are likely to be effective in addressing family, domestic, and sexual violence.

What factors have enabled success or hindered success (outcomes)?

Seeking out and listen to community voices

The staged, place-based, and evidence-informed design of the program combined with ongoing community input is a key factor of the partnership. By tailoring implementation to the specific needs, priorities, and contexts of each community, the program is seeking to avoid a one-size-fits-all approach and instead build on local strengths and knowledge. Embedding community input at each phase is likely to support cultural legitimacy and local ownership and ensure that the program continues to reflect lived experience and evolving priorities. This integrated approach is fostering community engagement, and a higher likelihood of achieving sustainable outcomes.

While this case study highlights positive examples of community engagement, interviews also pointed to a need for greater transparency around funding allocations to recipients, to support more effective service delivery and minimise duplication. Additionally, stakeholders noted the importance of involving service providers and organisations identified for funding earlier in the process, to ensure alignment, coordination, and shared understanding from the outset.

Collecting and sharing regional data

DSS have consistently provided information and data to the ALG throughout the planning and implementation phases. This includes ongoing and regular progress updates, information and regional data. The initiative is supporting the sharing of data from and with Aboriginal community members, reflecting a reciprocal exchange where community knowledge informs decision-making and, in turn, communities are kept informed about progress and outcomes.

Case Study 3: Community and Regional Infrastructure Projects (DITRDCA \$50m)

Under the CAP, DITRDCA received an allocation of \$50 million for the Community and Regional Infrastructure Projects. This funding is provided to the NTG through a bilateral agreement (FFA). The NTG is responsible for delivering the projects through the MacDonnell and Central Desert Regional Councils. The infrastructure projects are to be delivered in 3 Tranches (Tranche 1 - short-term projects; Tranche 2 - medium term projects; and Tranche 3 - long term projects) over the 2023-24 to 2026-27 financial years. \$30 million of the total funding is projected to be spent over the 2025-26 to 2026-27 financial years.

Implementation

At 30 April, 2025 \$33.4 million of the of the \$50 million has been committed through financial arrangements with providers to Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 projects, which is just under the planned total of \$35.3 million for the first 2 Tranches estimated in the FFA. The remaining funding can be spent on Tranche 3 projects⁷⁰ committed through financial arrangements with providers, 20 are being delivered by the Central Desert Regional Council. Twelve are planned for Anmatjere, four for southern Tanami and four for The Plenty remote clusters. Macdonnell Regional Council is implementing twelve projects, one in Iyarrka, two in Ljirapinta, five in Luritja Pintubi and four in Rodinga.

The implementation process for the project has faced significant challenges, including delays to project implementation, with many projects not commencing as scheduled due to factors such as prolonged planning and approvals processes, contractor availability, and logistical issues resulting from undertaking work across vast distances in areas with fewer services including construction. This has resulted in only nine of the 32 projects commencing at the time of the evaluation, with each of the nine receiving half its total committed financial arrangement funding, totalling \$2.6 million.

ALG input

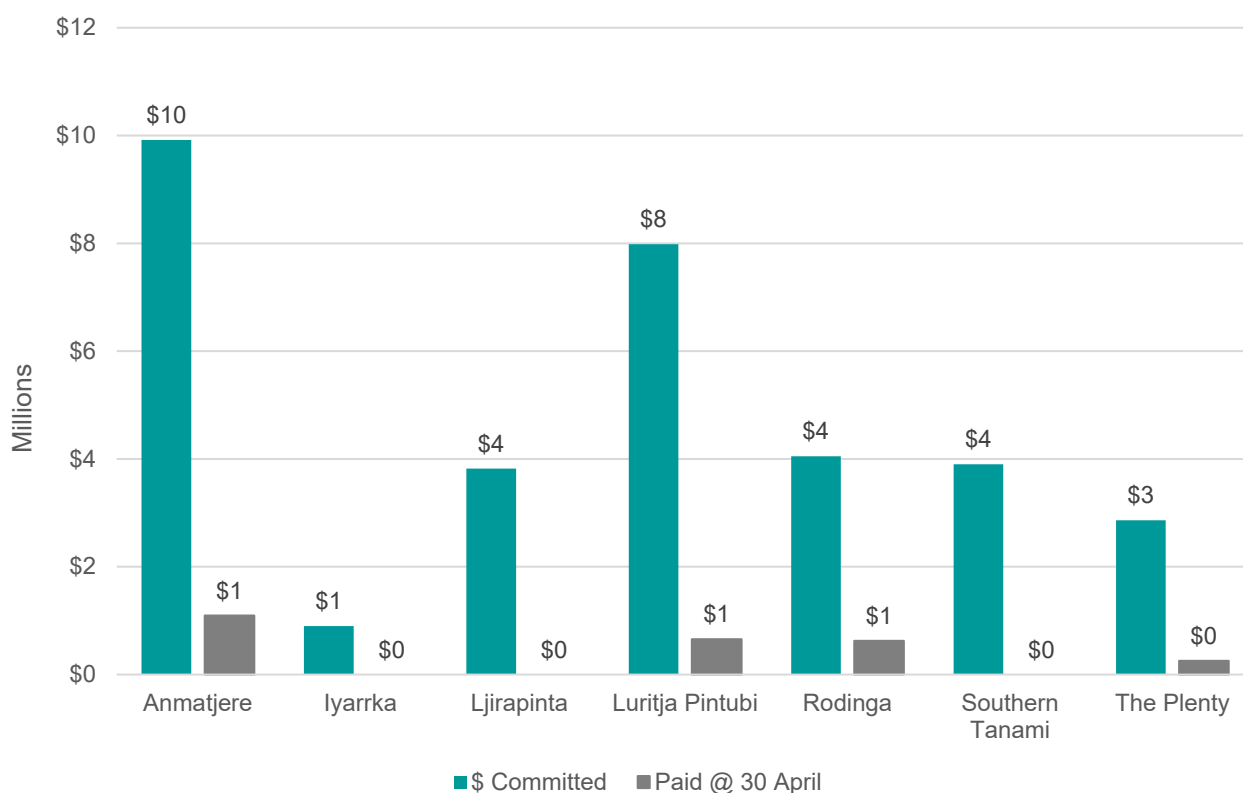
The infrastructure projects that have been chosen to receive Regional Infrastructure have been largely influenced by the ALG. Early in the establishment of the ALG, the ALG discussed how the Regional Infrastructure funding should be allocated i.e. choosing between allocation based on a population basis, needs basis or equally. The ALG suggested the funding be equally distributed across the seven community clusters in Central Australia (see Figure 3 for a map of the community clusters).

The ALG requested the DITRDCA work with a sub-group of the ALG to refine draft advice to government on what to consider in developing the 'Community Infrastructure' package, and community infrastructure priorities. The sub-group's discussions were informed by all community infrastructure priorities identified through consultations, including remote community engagements by OCARC, the Australian Government and NTG; input from the MacDonnell Regional Council and Central Desert Regional Council; input from the Central Land Council; and discussions with ALG. Advice prioritised funding of remote community projects over Alice Springs projects, also prioritising projects that were to be of mixed-use and therefore have broader community impact. The ALG recommended working with and in support of regional councils and recommended that supports for 'out of scope' works, such as project maintenance, needed to be examined. The ALG sub-group advice also identified specific projects that the ALG supported for investment in line with the above recommendations.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Federal Financial Relations. *Central Australia Plan: Central Australian Plan: Community Infrastructure Package*. July 2024.

⁷¹ ALG, Agenda Item 5, \$50 million community infrastructure investment, Internal document.

Figure 10. Funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider and paid as at 30 April 2025 for Community Infrastructure projects in Tranche 1 and Tranche 2 represented by location of project.



What results are being achieved by the project?

As at May 2025, only four of the seven planned community clusters have had projects commence (see Figure 10 above and the list below). The following projects have commenced at the time of the evaluation:

Table 3: Projects completed at the time of evaluation:

Project	Status	Cluster
Playground upgrade - Atitjere	Project completed.	The Plenty
New playground - Engawala	Project completed.	The Plenty
Oval lights (training) – Laramba	Works have been completed except for the electrical connection. The electricity connection is on hold due to unforeseen circumstances requiring additional funding for the Power and Water Corporation's transformer upgrade.	Anmatjere
New Play System - Nturiya	Project completed.	Anmatjere
Change Rooms - Pmara Jutunta	Construction commenced.	Anmatjere
Oval Lights - Ti Tree	Works completed except for electrical connection.	Anmatjere
Oval Lights - Kintore	Completion expected July 2025	Luritja Pintubi
Oval Lights – Titjikala	Completion expected July 2025.	Rodinga

The apparent unequal dispersion of funds across community clusters in the Tranche 1 and 2 of the infrastructure investments was noted with concern by some ALG members, who were keen to ensure that Tranche 3 funding considered remote communities that had received less funding in previous rounds to achieve the funding parity that was originally planned. NIAA confirms that in tranche 3 the distribution of funds will be focused towards clusters that received less funding in Tranche 1 and 2 such as Iyarrka.

What factors have enabled or hindered success?

Seeking out and listen to community voices

Throughout the project, community voice has been actively sought through various avenues including the ALG and through the consultations of the OCARC. The ALG were consulted on projects under Tranches 1 and 2 and will feed into Tranche 3. These engagements have helped shaped projects and priorities under the community infrastructure project. In interviews, it was raised that there were differences in priorities identified through different consultation processes (through the CAP and by local councils). The diversity of opinion reflects the richness and complexity of communities. It also highlights the challenge government faces when seeking to "do things differently", as different groups can have differing opinions.

In addition, it was raised that councils who would hold responsibility for delivering projects should have been included in discussions from the outset. This was also highlighted by ALG members in early ALG meetings where the infrastructure projects were discussed. It is unclear how this information was utilised by government.

This highlights a need for broad and inclusive engagement from the outset including bringing all relevant stakeholders into the conversation early to build trust, surface differing perspectives, and co-design solutions that are more likely to gain broad community support.

Collecting and sharing regional data

DITRDCSA, NTG and the regional councils have consistently provided information and data to the ALG. This includes ongoing and regular progress updates, information and regional data including data on existing infrastructure and services in Central Australia. This is supporting accountability to the ALG and ensuring that local community members are provided with relevant information to inform ongoing decision-making.

Other key highlighted elements:

The capability of local councils was identified as a key factor contributing to project success, with local knowledge and commitment to community supporting implementation of projects.

A concern highlighted by stakeholders interviewed for this case study, and identified in the evaluation, is a need for feasibility assessments. It was noted that infrastructure projects, in particular, require early and thorough feasibility planning to ensure they are realistic, appropriately scoped, and aligned with community needs and capacity. For example, it was highlighted that a lack of feasibility assessment has led to projects risk delays, risk of underutilisation, and potential challenges in long-term sustainability. There is currently no ongoing funding for maintenance for some projects, and it is unclear who will be responsible for maintenance, raising issues of sustainability.

Conclusions & recommendations

The evaluation findings evidence that governments and First Nations communities can work together effectively in ways that are different to conventional practices of the past, in order to address complex and longstanding challenges. The CAP demonstrates the importance of partners committing to “doing things differently” while bringing this commitment to life in its design and implementation. The inclusion of a diversity of First Nations voices, including the voice of young people, through a range of governance structures within the CAP is one of its core strengths. The cross-government collaboration – particularly within the Australian Government and with local governments – is another strength.

These governance structures have laid important groundwork for more and deepened collaboration with governments as well as the direction of funding to the priorities, locations and initiatives that represent the greatest need as articulated by communities. In turn, this has led to early evidence of improvements in outcomes in the areas within the focus of the CAP.

As the CAP moves from design into full implementation following the allocation of the remaining funds, the evaluation findings illustrate the need for the CAP to:

- **Build on its strengths**, including clarifying its approach to “doing things differently”, strengthening the existing governance mechanisms, and continuing the learning through the government community of practice.
- **Address implementation gaps** specifically in accelerating investment in the community safety initiatives that include justice, alcohol and other drugs, and strengths-based, early supports for young people.
- **Ensure policy alignment** at the national level with the National Agreement and addressing any misalignments between CAP objectives and NTG policy settings.
- **Engage with the Central Australia** community to share and promote the CAP, its progress and achievements.

Recommendations that respond to these broad themes are outlined below.

Build on the CAPs strengths

Recommendation 1: Develop and implement a comprehensive set of guidelines for “doing things differently”.

The evaluation has found that governments and communities can work together in a different way and this different way does achieve outcomes. This recommendation involves NIAA and ALG, in partnership, developing and publishing guidelines that further embed and strengthen this approach by:

- clearly defining what “doing things differently” means in the CAP context
- explaining why doing things differently is important
- setting out the commitments that all CAP stakeholders must make and uphold when engaging with / investing in the CAP
- outlining the practical measures all CAP stakeholders will implement in order to do things differently while also aligning to the National Agreement Priority Reforms
- outlining mechanisms to hold all CAP stakeholders to account for upholding their commitment to do things differently.

These measures aim to build a shared understanding of “doing things differently” across CAP stakeholders, align the CAP’s implementation more strongly to the National Agreement Priority Reforms, and provide a mechanism for accountability.

Recommendation 2: Continue and strengthen the current CAP governance mechanisms.

The current CAP governance mechanisms are the ALG, YRT and IDC and they are a strong foundation for the continued implementation of the CAP. This recommendation involves continuing these three governance mechanisms while strengthening each in the following areas:

- enabling the ALG and YRT to seek expert external advice (e.g. subject-matter expertise and/or community-specific, place-based knowledge) to enable evidence-informed advice on future funding, policy directions and implementation
- updating the ALG’s process and criteria for advising on funding and implementation to include the evidence on the need as well as the evidence on what is most effective

- seeking advice from NTG, local councils and community organisations on the feasibility and viability of existing and future funding allocations, especially regarding infrastructure investments
- ensuring the ALG and YRT both continue to provide advice for the extended life of the CAP
- ensuring senior First Nations' representation of Australian Government agencies on the IDC
- holding ALG and YRT meetings in communities outside of Alice Springs.

These adaptations must be supported by:

- a continuous and consistent NIAA team at the CAPI Taskforce and Regional Network levels that has the knowledge, experience and relationships required for the implementation phase of the CAP and to build trust with the ALG and YRT over time
- internal reporting and handover processes between NIAA, ALG and YRT where NIAA staff changes are unavoidable
- an investment approach that examines the feasibility and ongoing sustainability of initiatives funded under the CAP and ensuring that projects elected are the most impactful for funding.

These measures aim to strengthen the viability and sustainability of funding decisions while supporting participation and informed decision-making.

Recommendation 3: Continue and strengthen the community of practice for government agencies.

The current community of practice comprises Australian Government agencies and shares lessons on collaboration, working across agencies, and broader government alignment. This recommendation involves expanding the current community of practice to focus on practical actions that can be undertaken by agencies and the NTG to “do things differently” based on the learnings from this evaluation. These measures aim to accelerate the uptake of learnings on how to do things differently while involving the NTG in these learnings.

Address gaps in CAP priority implementation

Recommendation 4: Accelerate and strengthen the investments in community safety initiatives.

The evaluation found the community safety priority was the least progressed in terms of funding allocations and early evidence of improvement in outcome. This recommendation involves:

- the ALG and YRT having a dedicated focus on community safety initiatives that address the root cause of social unrest and crime to form advice to NIAA on the evidence-informed projects should be funded over the next three months with a view to allocating all remaining funds committed to this priority stream
- IDC assessing this advice with a view to quickly commissioning First Nations-led organisations to deliver community safety projects
- the Australian Government negotiating with the NTG arrangements for jointly supporting evidence-informed, community-led community safety initiatives.

These measures aim to address the underlying root causes that led to the CAP as they relate to community safety, justice and social cohesion.

Align CAP priorities and other policy settings

Recommendation 5: Review and align CAP implementation to the National Agreement Targets.

The CAP priority streams and the data collection process related to the CAP funding do not explicitly relate to the National Agreement Targets. This makes it challenging to establish the connection between CAP investments, outcomes achieved and contribution to CtG targets. This recommendation involves NIAA leading a comprehensive stocktake of the CAP priority streams, funding allocations and funded initiatives/projects to identify their relationship to CtG outcomes and targets. The result of this stocktake is to:

- develop a CAP Outcomes Framework that establishes a clear connection between CAP priorities and CtG Outcomes and Targets
- develop a data collection and reporting system for CAP that aligns to the Outcomes Framework.

These measures will ensure that NIAA collects the required data to evidence the relationship between CtG and CAP.

Recommendation 6: Address misalignments between CAP priorities and relevant NTG policies.

The evaluation found the NTG plays a limited role in the implementation of the CAP and in some instances has adapted policy settings that work against the objectives of the CAP. Given the influential and significant role of the NTG in Central Australia, it is imperative that any misalignments between the priorities of the two levels of government and community are addressed. This can help to achieve the intent of the CAP for the Australian Government to work in partnership with the NTG.

This recommendation involves the Australian Government and NTG working together to:

- identify areas of alignment and misalignment between CAP priorities and NTG policy settings
- agree arrangements for embedding areas of alignment including any funding arrangements, accountabilities, and roles and responsibilities of the NTG versus the Australian Government
- negotiate how and on what terms the areas of misalignment between CAP priorities and NTG policy settings will be resolved and consequences if they can't be resolved.

These measures aim to resolve any inconsistencies between the priorities and policy settings are understood and addressed, in order to support the overall success and intent of the CAP.

Share information about the CAP

Recommendation 7: Frequently share information with the Central Australia community about the CAP.

The CAP has made significant progress since the \$250m investment was announced, however the Central Australian community and service providers specifically report being unaware of its progress and what it is achieving. This recommendation involves the CAPI Taskforce, in partnership with the ALG and YRT, establishing and coordinating a CAP Communication Plan that, at a minimum, shares information with the Central Australian community including service providers and other stakeholders about what the CAP aims to achieve, what has been funded under the CAP, and what has been achieved so far. This information should be:

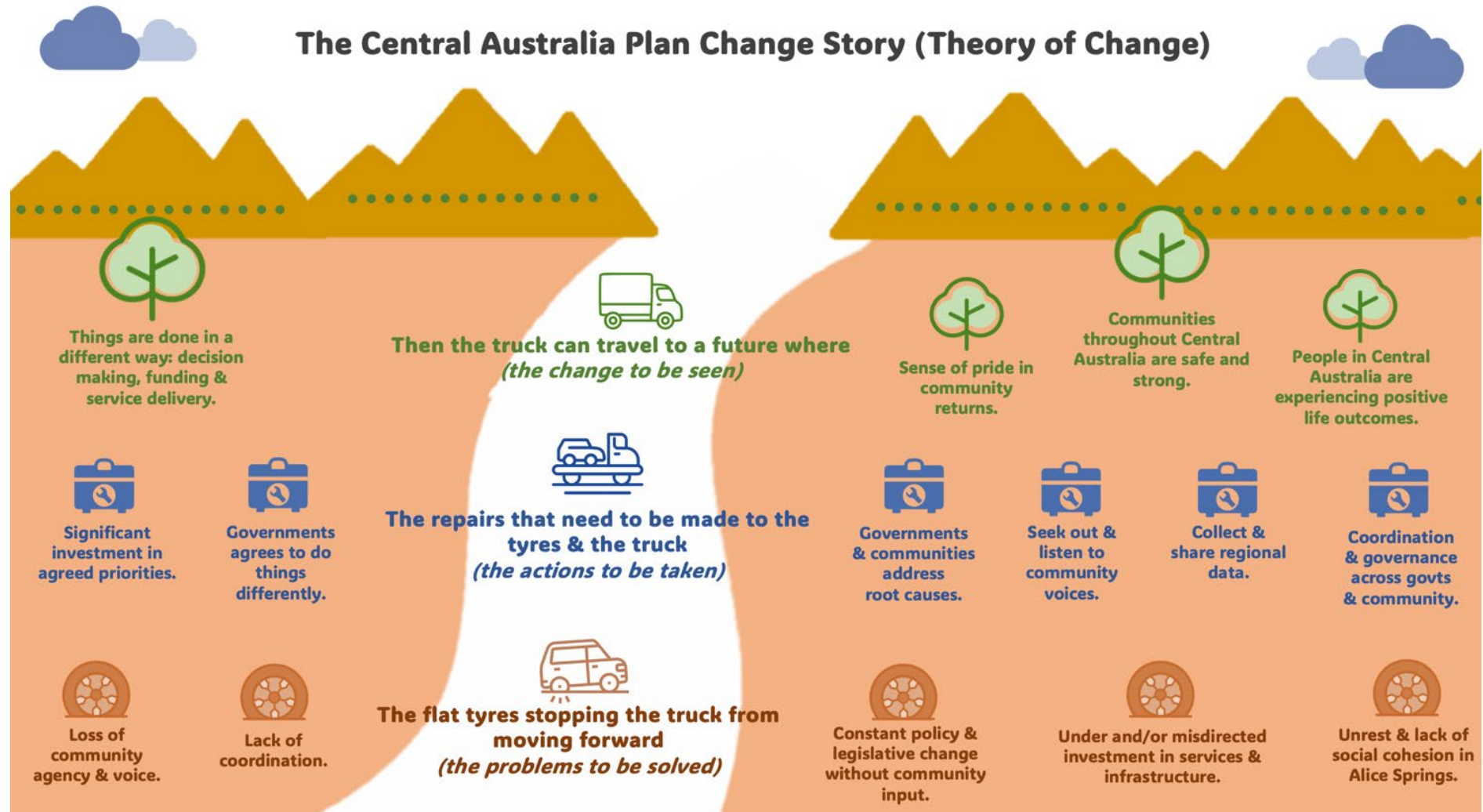
- shared every six months
- accessible and easy to understand
- disseminated through a range of channels including social media, local radio, posters or newsletters.

These measures aim to improve the Central Australian community's understanding of the CAP, its progress and the outcomes it is achieving.

Appendix A: References

- Aboriginal Leadership Group, Meeting 14 Slide Pack Day 1 and Media and Communications- Status of CA Packages (end of August)', NIAA, [internal document], 2024, accessed September 2024.
- ABS, Alice Springs, (online content), Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021, accessed April 2025.
- AIATSIS, Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research, (online content), Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2020, accessed June 2025.
- AIATSIS (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies) and the Lowitja Institute, 'Researching Right Way (2013) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research Ethics: A Domestic and International Review', 2013, NHMRC, accessed June 2025.
- Arthur, M, Hawkins, J, Brown, E, Briney, J, Oesterle, S & Abbott, R, 'Implementation of the Communities That Care prevention system by coalitions in the Community Youth Development Study', *Journal of Community Psychology*, 2010, 38(2):245–258.
- Australian Government, National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Australian Government, 2020, accessed February 2025.
- Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology, (online content), Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2022, accessed August 2024.
- Budget NT Government, Central Australia Fact sheet, NT Government, 2024, accessed June 2025.
- Coalition of Peaks, Priority Reforms, (online content), Coalition of the Peaks, n.d., accessed February 2025.
- Coffman, J, 'A Framework for Evaluating Systems Initiatives', *Build – Strong Foundations for Our Youngest Children*, 2007, accessed March 2025.
- Donaldson, S, 'Program Theory-Driven Evaluation Science: Strategies and Applications', Routledge., 2007, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203809730>
- Feinberg, M, Damon, J, Greenberg, M, Osgood, D, & Bontempo, D, 'Effects of the Communities That Care Model in Pennsylvania on Youth Risk and Problem Behaviors', *Prev Science*, 2007, 11(2):163-171. doi.org/10.1007/s11121-007-0073-6
- Fry, R, 'Simple rules for place-based approaches addressing disadvantage', The University of Melbourne, 2019, accessed June 2025.
- Krug, E, Mercy, J, Dahlberg, L, & Zwi, A, 'The world report on violence and health', *Lancet*, 2002, 5;360(9339):1083-8. doi: 10.1016/S0140-6736(02)11133-0.
- Molloy, C, Perini, N, & Harrop, C 'Evidence-based Lead Indicators to Drive Equitable Early Years Services: Findings from the Restacking the Odds Study', *Child Indicators Research*, 2025, 3:1-35
- NAIF, Investing Impact Across the North, (online content), Northern Territory Infrastructure Facility, n.d., accessed February 2025.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia, (online content), NIAA, (2023) accessed June 2025.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, Central Australia Response Theory of Change, Commonwealth Government, 2023, accessed June 2025.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, Central Australia Plan Taskforce CEO Brief, 2025, Australian Government, [internal document], accessed June 2025
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, Closing the Gap Annual Report, (online content), Australian Government, 2022, accessed March 2025.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, 'Historical timeline and key decisions associated to the Central Australia Plan', Australian Government, n.d., accessed June 2025.
- National Indigenous Australians Agency, 'Item 5a. Investment by cluster, presentation to the Aboriginal Leadership Group', [internal document], 2025, accessed May 2025.

Appendix B: CAP Theory of Change



Appendix C: Focus areas of the final report

Evaluation questions and areas of focus for this final Report.

Evaluation objective	Key evaluation question	Areas of focus	Final report data sources
Process: understanding how the CAP is being implemented, including the process of delivery including 'doing things differently'.	1. What is the current state of CAP implementation?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CAP intent • Level of investment • Priorities • Mechanisms to support implementation • Roles & responsibilities 	All stakeholder views – all levels of government and community stakeholder views. Review of funding data. All documents reviewed.
	2. How has the CAP been implemented differently?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decision-making processes - • Location and focus of investment • Alignment of funding- • Alignment to advice of the ALG/YRT/community 	All stakeholder views – all levels of government and community stakeholder views. Success case studies. Review of funding data. All documents reviewed.
Outcome: identifying any early short-term outcomes so far in relation to 'doing things differently' and positive life and community outcomes.	3. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of 'doing things differently'?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Level and nature of changes made • Priority Reforms • Leadership development • Focus on Alice Springs and remote communities 	All stakeholder views – all levels of government and community stakeholder views. Success case studies. Review of available outcome data.
	4. What early short-term outcomes from the CAP are we seeing in terms of positive life and community outcomes?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remote community progress • Alice Springs progress 	All stakeholder views – all levels of government and community stakeholder views. Success case studies. Review of available outcome data.

Evaluation objective	Key evaluation question	Areas of focus	Final report data sources
<p>Future: identifying lessons learnt that can inform future implementation of the CAP.</p>	<p>5. What are the lessons learnt from the CAP process so far?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enablers • Barriers • Future areas of focus (for implementation) 	<p>All stakeholder views – all levels of government and community stakeholder views.</p>

Appendix D: Government stakeholder interview guide

Introductory questions

Please state your name, role and organisation and how you have been involved in the Central Australia Plan .

Current state of implementation of the CAP (KEQ1)

1. How is the CAP implementation process going from your perspective?

Prompts (how is the CAP going in terms of:)

2. How decisions are made
3. The role that governance mechanisms play in implementation
4. Accountability and communication of decisions
5. Clarity of roles and responsibilities

Implementing the CAP differently (KEQ2)

6. Has being involved in the CAP implementation had any benefits for your role/your agency/your government? Conversely, has it presented any challenges? Have you observed any benefits or challenges in your agency/role that have arisen with the implementation of the CAP?

Prompts:

- Prioritising investment - How did you prioritise investment?
- Focusing on National Agreement (including Priority Reforms)
- Focusing resources and effort
- Coordination
- What are the biggest changes you have implemented or witnessed in your role/your agency/your government?
- What support, if any, has your government/agency provided to ACCOs that have received funding under the CAP?

Early outcome changes (KEQ3)

7. When it comes to implementing the CAP, what does 'doing things differently' mean to you?
8. Are you starting to see any change in the areas of the Priority Reforms in Alice Springs and remote communities?

Prompts – changes in terms of:

- Formal partnership and shared decision making
- Building the community-controlled sector
- Transforming government organisations
- Shared access to data and information at a regional level.

Early outcome changes (KEQ4)

9. Have you started to see any indications of positive changes in the Alice springs community as a result of CAP?

Prompts – for example:

- community self-determination
- community safety
- relevant closing the gap targets in remote communities
- Have you started to see any indications of negative changes in the Alice springs community as a result of CAP?

10. Have you started to see any indications of positive changes in the remote communities as a result of CAP?

Prompts (for example):

- community self determination
- community safety
- relevant closing the gap targets in remote communities
- Have you started to see any indications of negative changes in the remote communities as a result of CAP?

Enablers, Barriers and future focus (KEQ5)

11. What do you think has helped decision making and implementation for the CAP? What has made it more difficult?
12. What has helped and/or hindered achievement of early outcomes of the CAP?
13. What should be areas of focus in the next phase of the CAP?
14. Based on what you have been involved in/witnessed, is there anything you would recommend be done differently to optimise implementation of the CAP?
15. Is there anything else you want to add?

Appendix E: YRT and ALG interview guide

Please state your name, role and/or organisation and how you have been involved in the Central Australia Plan. Is your community in Alice or remote?

1. What is the point / purpose of the CAP? Can you tell me a bit about how it works?

Prompts:

- How do you think it's going?
- Do you feel the role of the ALG/YRT is clear? Is the role of the other people in CAP clear? Do you know who's responsible for what? (what the ALG/YRT are responsible for and what the government are responsible for) (roles and responsibilities)
- Who is making the decisions? (decision making structures/processes)
- Are you being told what decisions are made and who made them and how the projects are going? (communication)
- Support being given to ACCOs and ACCHOs (is there enough tangible and financial support going to organisations (they might now know this)

2. What does 'doing things differently' mean to you? Are you starting to see things being done differently in Government because of the CAP or the ALG?

Prompts:

- What role does the ALG/YRT and your communities play in making things happen in the CAP?
- Are the government listening to you and the needs of your communities? Is that different to before CAP?
- Is the funding going to where it needs to because of CAP?

3. Has being part of the CAP or ALG/YRT made a difference (good or bad) for you or Aboriginal organisations in your community since the start (change in the areas of the Priority Reforms in Alice springs and remote communities)?

Prompts:

- Are people working together well in the CAP?
- Has CAP changed the way that Government works with Aboriginal people?
- Has the CAP or the ALG/YRT made things harder in any way?
- Are you starting to see changes in Aboriginal organisations?
- Shared access to data and information at a regional level.
- Leadership in the community?

4. Have you heard or seen any changes (good or bad) in your community since the start of CAP?

Prompts:

- Have you seen or heard of any changes in Alice Springs or remote communities because of the CAP or the ALG/YRT?
- Do you think the community and young people are having more say in what happens because of the ALG/YRT or the CAP?
- Any changes to safety?

5. What has helped or made it hard to put the CAP into action?

Prompts:

- What has helped things go well?

- What's been getting in the way?

6. What should be done differently or focused on next?

Prompts:

- What do you think should happen next?
- Is there anything you'd change about how things are going?
- What do you think would make the CAP or the ALG/YRT work better?
- Is there anything else you want to say?

Appendix F: Case study interview guide

Introductory questions

Please state your name, role and organisation and how you have been involved in the Central Australia Plan (including how much funding your organisation has received, and which department administered the funding to your organisation)

Background questions

1. Can you please describe the program that your organisation received CAP funding to deliver and its aim?
2. Does your organisation receive other funding from other sources to deliver programs or services?

Process question

3. Can you please describe the process of receiving the CAP funding and implementing the project? Was it different to other times you have received funding for projects from Government?

Outcome questions

4. What is/was the project aiming to achieve? What does success look like?
5. What early signs of success (if any) are you seeing?
6. What were some of the key challenges you were facing before this success? (or that prevented success)
7. What were some of the key actions taken to produce this success/implement this program?

Prompts

- Who were the key stakeholders involved?
- What resources were required?
- How could the process for receiving CAP funding and implementing projects under the CAP initiative be improved?

Appendix G: Financial information tables

Table 2. CAP funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider and paid to specific projects in either Alice Springs or remote locations in Central Australia as at 30 April 2025. Note that this table includes both departmental and project related funding (\$19 million of the 'other' location funding is departmental).

Location	CAP Committed	Funding Paid ¹
Alice Springs	\$69,379,803	\$46,096,496
Remote	\$95,839,138	\$22,874,530
Other	\$24,807,316	\$15,783,316
Location not yet decided	\$63,612,430	\$0
Grand Total	\$253,638,687	\$84,754,342

¹Funding paid at 30 April 2025.

Table 3. CAP funding allocation, funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider, and funding paid at 30 April 2025 by priority stream. Shows key funding agency for each priority stream.

	Funding Allocated	Funding Committed	Funding Paid ¹	% committed funding that has been paid
1 - Improved community safety & cohesion	\$53,300,000	\$14,063,022	\$6,826,870	49%
AGD	\$10,000,000	\$3,212,555	\$393,069	12%
NIAA	\$43,300,000	\$10,850,467	\$6,433,801	59%
2 - Job creation	\$31,400,000	\$17,013,460	\$4,542,227	27%
DEWR	\$30,200,000	\$12,690,000	\$2,666,000	21%
NIAA	\$1,200,000	\$4,323,460	\$1,876,227	43%
3 - Better services	\$60,300,000	\$40,512,088	\$5,847,398	14%
DITRDSCSA	\$60,000,000	\$39,927,365	\$5,262,675	13%
DSS	\$300,000	\$584,723	\$584,723	100%
4 - Preventing and addressing the issues caused by FASD	\$23,400,000	\$23,400,000	\$17,200,000	74%
DHDA	\$23,400,000	\$23,400,000	\$17,200,000	74%
5 - Investing in families	\$33,900,000	\$13,523,316	\$7,095,126	52%
DSS	\$30,000,000	\$10,106,000	\$4,877,810	48%
NIAA	\$3,900,000	\$3,417,316	\$2,217,316	65%
6 - On Country learning	\$40,400,000	\$40,372,721	\$38,372,721	95%
DoE	\$40,400,000	\$40,372,721	\$38,372,721	95%
NIAA	\$7,500,000	\$7,500,000	\$7,500,000	100%
Grand Total	\$250,200,000	\$156,384,607	\$87,384,342	56%

¹Paid at 30 April 2025

Table 4. CAP funding linked to ALG advice at 30 April 2025 ⁷²

ALG input to decision making	Funding allocated	% total allocated	Funding paid ¹
Category 1: ALG did not provide advice on any parameter of this funding.	\$87,137,221	34%	\$70,573,221
Category 2: ALG discussion influenced implementation and/or design	\$20,780,561	8%	\$4,544,409
Category 3: ALG provided advice on a parameter related to implementation or policy advice. NOT funding allocation or commitments	\$54,323,460	21%	\$4,508,902
Category 4: ALG advice shaped funding allocation by Government and implementation through design / location other advice	\$84,610,000	33%	\$5,127,810
To Be Determined	\$6,787,445	3%	
Grand Total	\$253,638,687	100%	\$84,754,342

¹ As at 30 April, 2025.

⁷² As advised by NIAA implementation team via CAP implementation tracker

Table 5. CAP funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider and paid by alignment with Closing the Gap Outcome areas at 30 April, 2025.

National Agreement Outcome area	Funding committed to specific projects	Funding Paid
Outcome 1	\$23,400,000	\$17,200,000
Outcome 13	\$10,106,000	\$4,877,810
Outcome 17	\$7,078,738	\$584,723
Outcome 9	\$33,433,350	\$2,632,675
Outcomes 10 & 11	\$7,518,146	\$2,691,994
Outcomes 5, 6 and 7	\$40,372,721	\$38,372,721
Outcomes 6, 7	\$12,690,000	\$2,666,000
Outcomes 6, 7, 8	\$4,323,460	\$1,876,227
Outcomes 6,7,11,12, 15	\$1,888,836	\$1,888,836
Outcomes 7, 11, 13	\$710,000	\$250,000
Outcomes 7, 11, 13, 17	\$3,417,316	\$2,217,316
Outcomes 7, 13, 14, 15	\$3,546,040	\$1,996,040
Outcomes 7, 8, 17	\$400,000	\$0
NIAA CAP Governance	\$7,500,000	\$7,500,000
Grand Total	\$156,384,607	\$84,754,342

Table 6. CAP funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider to specific projects in remote clusters and paid at 30 April 30, 2025

	Funding committed to specific projects	% total remote committed	Funding Paid
Remote - total	\$61,762,488		\$22,874,530
Anmatjere	\$15,498,109	25%	\$3,962,611
Iyarrka	\$2,704,137	4%	\$1,664,137
Ljirapinta	\$6,235,623	10%	\$2,415,623
Luritja Pintubi	\$14,090,377	23%	\$4,685,291
Rodinga	\$6,946,526	11%	\$2,168,375
Southern Tanami	\$7,969,405	13%	\$3,329,405
The Plenty	\$4,191,824	7%	\$1,486,324
Multiple clusters	\$4,126,487	7%	\$3,162,764

Table 7. Amount of CAP funding committed through a financial arrangement with a provider to specific projects and paid by project type at 30 April 2025.

	Funding committed	Funding paid	% of committed that has been paid
Governance	\$18,890,000	\$11,866,000	63%
Infrastructure	\$45,762,088	\$8,467,398	19%
Youth Services Action Plan	\$1,017,316	\$1,017,316	100%
Service Delivery	\$43,715,166	\$25,670,310	59%
Workforce Development	\$47,000,037	\$37,733,318	80%
Grand Total	\$156,384,607	\$84,754,342	100%

Appendix H: Stakeholders interviewed

Stakeholder group	Organisation
Australian Government	<p>Attorney-General's Department</p> <p>Department of Education</p> <p>Department of Employment and Workplace Relations</p> <p>Department of Health, Disability and Aging</p> <p>Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts</p> <p>Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet</p> <p>Department of Social Services</p> <p>National Indigenous Australians Agency</p> <p>Services Australia</p>
Northern Territory Government (NTG)	<p>Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet</p> <p>Department of Children and Families</p> <p>NT Police</p>
Service providers	<p>Atyenhenge Atherre Aboriginal Corporation (AAAC)</p> <p>Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Aboriginal Corporation (Congress)</p> <p>Central Australian Women's Legal Services (CAWLS)</p> <p>Central Desert Regional Council</p> <p>Children's Ground</p> <p>MacDonnell Regional Council</p> <p>Mutitjulu Community Aboriginal Council (MCAC)</p> <p>Oonchiumpa Consultancy and Services</p> <p>Southern Tanami-Kurdji Indigenous Corporation</p> <p>St Phillips School</p> <p>Tangentyere Council Aboriginal Corporation</p> <p>Women's Safety Services of Central Australia (WoSSCA)</p>
Aboriginal Leadership Group (ALG)	<p>Alice Springs Town Council</p> <p>Central Australian Aboriginal Congress</p> <p>Central Desert Regional Council</p> <p>Central Land Council</p> <p>Strong Grandmothers Group of the Central Desert</p> <p>Lhere Artepe Aboriginal Corporation</p> <p>MacDonnell Regional Council</p>
Youth Roundtable	Three members

