



**Aboriginal Peak
Organisations**
NORTHERN TERRITORY

**Submission to the
Remote Jobs and Economic Development Discussion Paper**

July 2024

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About APO NT

APO NT is an alliance of Aboriginal organisations working to promote and protect the rights of Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory (NT). The APO NT alliance comprises the Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), Tiwi Land Council (TLC), Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN), Aboriginal Housing Northern Territory (AHNT) and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the NT (AMSANT). The member organisations of APO NT are united in their commitment to improving conditions for Aboriginal people across broad political, economic, social, and cultural areas. Since APO NT's establishment in 2010, our members have been working to develop proactive and constructive policies on critical issues facing Aboriginal people in the NT and strive to influence the work of the Australian and NT Governments.

Underlining our collective work is the right to self-determination, which is detailed and expressed in the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). The significance of this cannot be overstated. As representatives from peak Aboriginal organisations in the NT, we share the aim of protecting and advancing the wellbeing and rights of Aboriginal people and communities in several key areas. Local involvement, ownership and control underpins APO NT's work in advocating for practical and sustainable solutions for Aboriginal people. These are then predicated on policy conditions that support Aboriginal self-determination, including commitments to needs-based funding, building the community-controlled sector and centring Aboriginal decisions in how national strategies are implemented on the ground

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: The replacement of CDP (through the funding, design and institutional arrangements around it) must explicitly serve to strengthen Aboriginal community-control.

Recommendation 2: The governance of RJED and remote employment service reform (remote employment reform) must be reviewed before consultations on a new remote employment service commence in August 2024.

This should include:

- i) Reviewing the Terms of Reference of the FNRG as soon as possible to more fully reflect the Strong Partnership Elements agreed under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- ii) Establishment of an overarching framework for remote employment reform as part of or in alignment with the First Nations Economic Policy Partnership.
- iii) Consideration of the institutional arrangements that will best support the achievement of the Closing the Gap priority reforms with respect to the RJED and new remote employment service program delivery at the national and local levels.
- iv) Consideration of legislative underpinning to the new programs.

Recommendation 3: That appropriate resources are allocated to the development and implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the RJED program. The framework should be developed in partnership with the First Nations Reference Group as a priority, to be finalised by the end of 2024.

Recommendation 4: That NIAA guarantee funding extensions for jobs currently funded under the *Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs* CDP trial and the *New Jobs Program* trial for the period of the RJED program (subject to appropriate performance measures for the employers).

Recommendation 5: Contingent on the resourcing of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework (see **recommendation 3** above), funding for the RJED program is increased to create more jobs and the funding period extended to 10 years in order to provide sufficient time to adapt and improve the program as lessons are learned. The 10-year timeframe would allow for jobs to be guaranteed for 5-years, with the possibility of 5-year extensions.

(See also **recommendation 6** re: funding increase and extension)

Recommendation 6: That an increase and extension of the current RJED investment is considered in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2024-2025 to facilitate:

- i) An increase in the number of available jobs nationally. APO NT has recommended a fund sufficient to create 12,000 part-time jobs.
- ii) Sufficient resources to support the participation and capacity-building of smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Recommendation 7: That government clearly and consistently communicates the objectives of the RJED program, including the objective to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Recommendation 8: That Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are prioritised for funding under the RJED, followed by other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations. Definitions should be consistent with the definitions in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Recommendation 9: Non-Aboriginal for-profit organisations should not be eligible to apply.

Recommendation 10: Free grant-writing assistance should be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who need it.

Recommendation 11: The regional allocation of jobs should reflect need and relative disadvantage. We would, therefore, expect around half of the 3,000 jobs to come to the NT.

Recommendation 12: Confirm that organisations can apply for funding for supervision and mentoring positions under the Community Jobs and Business Fund.

As outlined in **recommendation 6**, an increase and extension of the current RJED investment should be considered in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2024-2025 to accommodate this.

Recommendation 13: That NIAA work with key stakeholders, including the NT Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) to ensure remote employment reforms support the development of Aboriginal enterprises.

Recommendation 14: That the Australian Government demonstrates a more consistent and genuine commitment to the priority reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including – in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission’s 3-year review of the agreement – the recognition that the goal of priority reform one is *self-determination* and that the efforts to achieve self-determination extend beyond the policy partnerships and place-based partnerships prescribed in the agreement. They need to be embedded in all of government’s work with Aboriginal people.

Recommendation 15: That NIAA work with APO NT to develop a broader strategy to build the capacity and number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the NT, as well as Aboriginal businesses, as a complementary but distinct strategy.

Recommendation 16: The First Nations Economic Policy Partnership seeks to embed within the current policy agenda opportunities to increase the employment and the economic participation of Aboriginal people in remote communities.

The development of RJED and the new remote employment service need to align with the development of this policy partnership.

1. Introduction

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) welcomes the Australian Government's commitment to scrapping the Community Development Program (CDP) and replacing it with a program that creates real jobs, with proper wages and conditions – designed in partnership with First Nations people.

APO NT is a member of the First Nations Reference Group, established by the Minister for Indigenous Australians to provide advice on the design and implementation of the new Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program. APO NT is represented by Dr Josie Douglas from the Central Land Council, who co-Chairs the group.

APO NT's representation on the group acknowledges our long history of advocacy for a new approach to remote employment and community development, and the fact that Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory have a higher stake than any other group in this country in this reform.

The establishment of the RJED is a significant positive step forward. It recognises the reality of thin labour markets in remote Australia and provides funding for direct job creation.

APO NT is concerned, however, that the program is being introduced too quickly, without genuine partnership, with too few jobs and for too short a timeframe, and without the necessary focus on governance and capacity-building.

APO NT is concerned by limitations in both the RJED program design and the lack of meaningful change in the institutional arrangements that are supporting its development and that are likely to be in place for its delivery.

This submission to the discussion paper outlines:

- Why this reform matters so much in the NT
- APO NT's priorities for remote employment reform
- APO NT's feedback on the institutional arrangements around the RJED and the program design
- The importance of broader investment and strategies to build the capacity and number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the NT.
- Employment opportunities through the government's broader policy agenda.

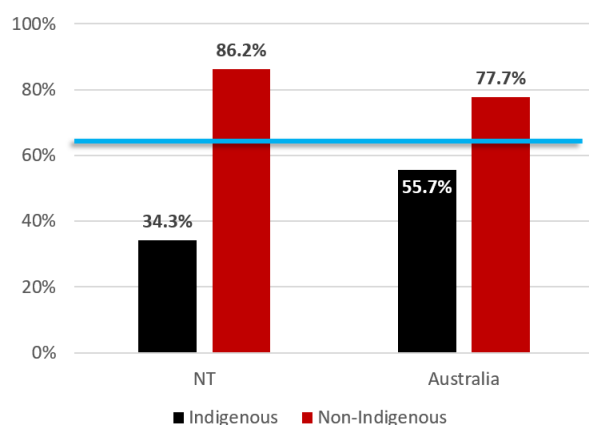
2. Why this reform matters in the NT

Aboriginal people in the NT comprise 44 per cent of the national CDP caseload. During the time that CDP has been in existence:

- **The employment gap in the NT has widened.**

The NT has the lowest level of Indigenous employment in the country. 2021 census figures show 34.3 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (25-64 years) are employed, compared to 86.2 per cent of non-Indigenous Territorians. Furthermore, the NT is the only jurisdiction where the employment gap is widening: Indigenous employment (25-64 years) decreased from 42.8 per cent in 2011, to 35.4 per cent in 2016, to 34.3 per cent in 2021¹, and is far below the Closing the Gap target to increase the proportion of Indigenous people aged 25-64 employed to 62 per cent by 2031. The gap is widest in remote communities.

Figure 1. Proportion of population employed (25-64 years)
(2021 ABS data)



- **Youth engagement has declined.**

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (aged 15-24) in the NT who are in employment, education or training has decreased from 40 per cent in 2016 to 34.8 per cent in 2021.

- **Income poverty has deepened – to a level unparalleled elsewhere in the country.**

The submission by Dr Francis Markham to the *Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia* completed earlier this year, presented a stark picture of the economic reality of Aboriginal people living in remote Australia. Based on Census data, at least 50 and possibly as high as 75 per cent of Aboriginal households in remote NT are living below the poverty line.² Even more concerning, this situation is not improving.

The figure below, copied from Dr Markham's submission, shows the change in Indigenous income poverty rates between 2016 and 2021. While in most parts of the country, Indigenous poverty rates are decreasing (albeit to a small degree), in remote NT, the poverty rates have escalated significantly – rising between 10-13 percentage points from 2016 to 2021:

¹ Productivity Commission Closing the Gao Socio-economic targets dashboard

² See Dr Francis Markham (2023) *Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia*, note on method p.1-2 and figure on p.6 ([weblink](#))

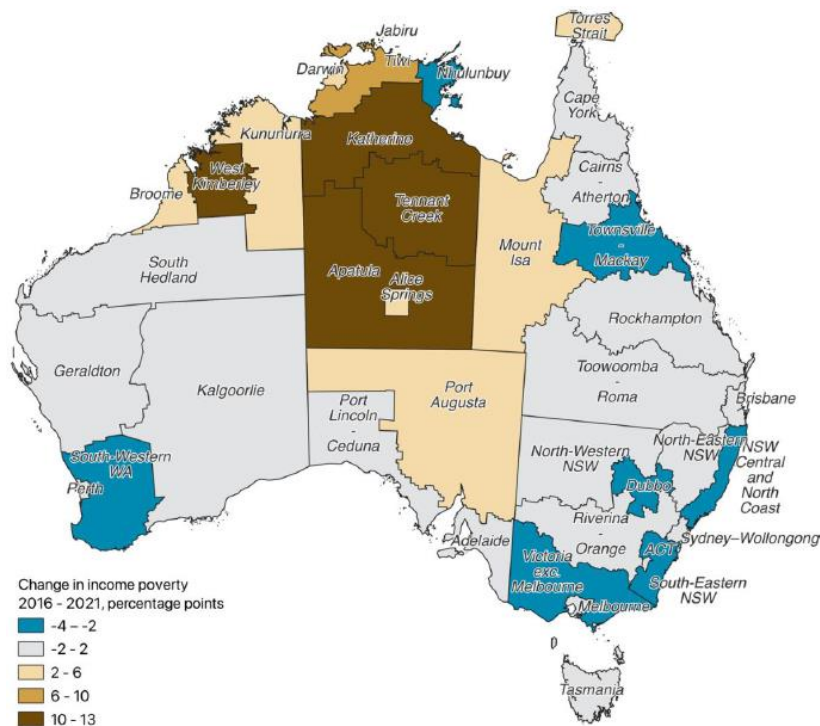


Figure 2: Change in Indigenous income poverty rates 2016-2021. **Source:** Dr Francis Markham, submission to the Inquiry into the extent and nature of poverty in Australia, p.7 ([weblink](#))

- **The cost of living has increased at a rate higher than the rest of the country – compounding poverty.**

In a separate piece of analysis, Dr Markham has estimated that the relative cost of living in remote Indigenous communities is 138.8 per cent of capital cities.³ That is, people in remote communities – the vast majority of whom are Aboriginal – are paying around 39 per cent more for the basics. The higher cost of living compounds the income poverty people are already experiencing.

- **There remains a jobs deficit.**

While a range of factors contribute to low employment in remote communities (including discrimination, health conditions, poor housing and inequality in access to, the appropriateness of and quality of education), the single most critical driver is a lack of available jobs. A snapshot of 28 remote communities in the NT prepared by the NT Government in 2017 showed that, on average, there are only 0.3 jobs available for every person in the community. Of the jobs that are available, on average, around half are filled by local people.⁴

This correlates with census analysis presented by Altman and Markham to the Senate Select Committee *Inquiry into the Future of Work and Workers* (2018) showing that 69 per cent of Indigenous jobseekers in remote Australia stated that their main difficulty finding work is that there are ‘no jobs in the local area or line of work’ (31 per cent) or that there are just ‘no jobs at all’ (30 per cent).⁵

³ Dr Francis Markham, ‘The poor pay more: Why the Remote Area Allowance needs urgent attention’, 12 February 2024, published by the Australian National University Tax and Transfer Policy Institute ([weblink](#))

⁴ Northern Territory Government, 28 Remote Town Jobs Profile Snapshot (2017) ([weblink](#))

⁵ Link to submission [here](#).

In short – CDP has done nothing to address the jobs deficit or improve life outcomes for Aboriginal people in remote Australia.

Imposed on our people without consultation or a robust policy making process, CDP has been:

- **Discriminatory.** More than 80 per cent of CDP participants are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Until 2018, participants in remote communities were expected to do more mutual obligation activities and were penalised more than people in other parts of the country.⁶
- **Ineffective.** CDP doesn't help create new jobs, and for most people, doesn't help them find long term work. Based on the latest publicly available figures, fewer than 5.4 per cent of CDP participants obtained a job outcome of 6 months or more.⁷
- **Inefficient.** CDP costs the Australian Government \$300-400 million annually to operate.⁸ This money goes to providers – not participants. The scheme has cost the Australian Government twice as much as the previous remote employment program (the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP)), with no greater benefit⁹
- **Caused permanent harm.** The Australian Government's evaluation of the scheme in 2019 estimated that 6 per cent of people who were financially penalised in 2016 dropped out and stopped receiving income support altogether — these were more likely to be men under the age of 30.¹⁰ Estimates by Dr Lisa Fowkes suggested the figure could be higher: estimating almost 6,000 mostly young people 'disappeared' from the remote work-for-the-dole scheme¹¹ — with ripple effects for families and communities.

⁶ Until 2018, CDP Work for the Dole participants were typically required to work 25 hours a week for 46 weeks a year, on all five week days, while during the same period Jobactive Work for the Dole participants were typically required to work 15 hours a week for 26 weeks a year, with work not having to take place on all five week days. See for example 'Federal government to pay out \$2 million to settle class action over 'racist' work for the dole program', L. Henriques-Gomes, The Guardian, 23 December 2021 (<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/dec/23/federal-government-to-pay-out-2m-to-settle-class-action-over-racist-work-for-the-dole-program>) and 'Indigenous communities slapped with more fines under Government work-for-the-dole scheme, data shows', D. Conifer and A. Kesper, ABC, 4 October 2018 (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-04/cdp-community-development-program-region-penalties-map/10329118>)

⁷ 2,218 26-week employment outcomes from 40,922 participants in June 2023. Given that claims can be made in cases where people find their own employment and multiple claims can be made in respect of one person, the figure of 5.4 per cent is therefore likely to overstate the actual number of people who were supported into employment through the CDP program. Source: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/community-development-program-regional-data-report>.

⁸ Hansard, Senate Estimates, Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee, 24 November 2022, page 11

⁹ The ANAO estimated total expenditure on CDP to be \$1.6 billion over four years from 2014–15 to 2017–18, compared to \$745 million for RJCP. Source: <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/the-design-and-implementation-the-community-development-programme>, p.41.

¹⁰ See 'Controversial remote work-for-the-dole scheme achieves 1pc improvement in job outcomes', J. Breen, ABC, 7 February 2018 (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-02-07/remote-work-for-the-dole-improves-one-per-cent/10789476>).

¹¹ See 'Work for the dole an 'intergenerational time bomb' for Indigenous communities', L. Allam, The Guardian, 12 October 2018 (<https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2018/oct/11/work-for-the-dole-an-intergenerational-time-bomb-for-indigenous-communities>)

3. APO NT's priorities for remote employment reform

For all of these reasons, APO NT has been calling for many years for an end to CDP and replacement of the failed scheme with a new approach to remote employment and community development – centred on twin goals of job creation and strengthening community-control.

Government is familiar with APO NT's *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal¹² that recommends a new path forward. The proposal was developed in 2017 by an alliance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations over several years and remains relevant today.

The *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal is explicitly a proposal not just for employment, but for **community development** – that is, a way of working that builds Aboriginal ownership and control, and strengthens communities through the achievement of their own social, cultural and economic objectives.¹³ A community development approach supports self-determination¹⁴ and, in APO NT's view, is the only way to achieve sustainable change for remote communities.

The four key elements of the proposal are:

Creating a minimum of 12,000 new jobs in remote communities across Australia in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector, including 1,500 paid training roles for young people. Communities should determine what jobs are needed and wanted – supporting communities' long-term aspirations for social, cultural and economic development.

Redesigning employment assistance so that it is not based on appointments and meaningless obligations, but delivers a mix of services and programs that are relevant to local conditions, led by local people and are culturally safe.

Establishing a framework based on the Closing the Gap partnership principles, to ensure that the development, implementation, monitoring and ongoing improvement of a new program is done in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representatives, and that, as far as possible, delivery is through local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations.

A new approach requires **genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making** at the local and national levels.

Making sure that the **programs and systems that are needed for a successful employment program** (like access to Centrelink, training and enterprise support) **are in place and working effectively**.

¹² APO NT *Fair Work and Strong Communities* 2023 (https://apont.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/APO-NT_FWSC-Refreshed-Proposal-2023.pdf)

¹³ See the Central Land Council's Community Development Framework (<https://www.clc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/CD-Framework-2021-26-FINAL-36-Pages-Version.pdf>)

¹⁴ The right of all people to self-determination is enshrined under Article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and codified for Indigenous peoples in Articles 3 and 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Self-determination is the right of peoples to freely determine their political status, and economic, social and cultural development.

In 2017, APO NT stated that “in our view, no changes to program design will make a difference if the process for making ongoing decisions about the policy and its implementation are not addressed.”¹⁵

For this reason, the *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal speaks not only to the program design, but the institutional arrangements that will support a new approach. As indicated above, APO NT is concerned by limitations in both the RJED program design and the lack of meaningful change in the institutional arrangements that are supporting its development and that are likely to be in place for its delivery.

These concerns are outlined below. Our feedback focuses on elements 1 and 4 of the *Fair Work and Strong Communities* proposal described above, noting that NIAA consultation documents indicate that consultation on the broader remote employment service reform is expected to start in August 2024.

Before doing so, we will provide some additional background to contextualise our recommendations.

3.1 National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Australian Government has committed to “building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.”

Formal partnerships and shared decision-making are the first priority reform under the agreement and the agreement outlines the elements required for strong partnerships (Clause 32). Pertinent to the issues outlined below, the agreement outlines what constitutes shared decision-making, including that:

- the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties hold as much weight as the governments, and
- decision-making is transparent, where matters for decision are in terms that are easily understood by all parties and where there is enough information and time to understand the implications of the decision.

We note in particular some of the essential actions recommended by the Productivity Commission in its 3-year review of the agreement:

- That all parties recognise the ultimate goal of Priority Reform 1 is self-determination (which Australia has committed to under UNDRIP) and that efforts to achieve self-determination extend beyond the policy partnership and place-based partnerships specifically prescribed in the agreement.
- That governments recognise the authority of Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations to represent the perspectives and priorities of their communities, and to determine how service systems and models of delivery can best meet these.¹⁶

¹⁵ APO NT *Fair Work and Strong Communities* 2017, p.4 (https://www.amsant.org.au/apont/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/RDES-Report_Online.pdf)

¹⁶ Australian Government Productivity Commission (2024) Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Study Report Volume 1, p.11-12

3.2 The importance of policy continuity

While Aboriginal people have always been (and continue to be) subject to policies imposed by government, since 2007, remote Aboriginal communities in the NT have experienced what has been described as a “hyperactive policy environment”¹⁷ – the ultimate effect of which has been one of disempowerment. This includes the Northern Territory Emergency Response (the ‘Intervention’), the abolition of Aboriginal community councils (and replacement with regional councils, or ‘super shires’), and the abolition of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) scheme and its replacement with the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) and then CDP in the space of six years. All of these changes have had a deleterious and lasting impact on community governance structures and decision-making autonomy in the NT.

The CDEP scheme was in place for around 30 years – a period of remarkable policy continuity that seems unimaginable today. While subject to degrees of change overtime, CDEP had been among the biggest and most influential programs in the Indigenous affairs portfolio, employing many thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and providing the catalyst for what have become key employment sectors for people on-country – namely Indigenous ranger programs and the Aboriginal art sector.

In contrast, when it comes to remote employment policy over the last 15 years, Aboriginal people in remote communities have been subject to:

- the abolition of CDEP (starting with new participants being placed on unemployment benefits instead of wages from 2007)
- the introduction of the Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) in 2013 to replace CDEP which by then no longer paid wages to participants
- the replacement of RJCP by CDP in 2015
- changes to mutual obligation requirements in 2018 because of concerns about racial discrimination (reduction in required work-for-the-dole hours)
- further changes to mutual obligation requirements in 2021 when activities became voluntary
- announcement in 2021 by the former Coalition Government that CDP would be replaced from 2023 and the commencement of the Remote Engagement Program trials in some regions
- announcement in 2022 by the Federal Labor Government that CDP would be replaced with a new program
- the commencement of the *Trialling Pathways to New Jobs* CDP trials and the *New Jobs Program* trials in 2023
- the announcement of the new Remote Jobs and Economic Development program in 2024 and of new employment services to replace CDP scheduled to start in the second half of 2025.

¹⁷ Smith D. 2008. ‘Cultures of governance and the governance of culture: transforming and containing Indigenous institutions in West Arnhem Land.’ In J Hunt, S Garling & W Sanders (eds), *Contested governance, culture, power and Institutions in Indigenous Australia*, (pp. 75–111). Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Review, Australian National University, Canberra.

The 2012 Australian Human Rights Commission’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report provided a sobering reflection on the cumulative and harmful impact of rapid and regular policy change imposed on Aboriginal people.¹⁸ The approach to developing and implementing any new policy, including remote employment policy, must take this into account.

3.3 Aboriginal community-control in the NT

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-control is an act of self-determination.”

National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020¹⁹

“Community control is the local community having control of issues that directly affect their community. Implicit in this definition is the clear statement that Aboriginal people must determine and control the pace, shape and manner of change and decision-making at local, regional, state and national levels.”

National Aboriginal Health Strategy 1989²⁰

As articulated above, Aboriginal community-control in the NT has been decimated by overlapping government policy shifts from 2007 onwards, including the ‘Intervention’, the abolition of CDEP and the abolition of Aboriginal community councils. All were done without the support of Aboriginal communities across the Northern Territory.

As a result of the imposed reforms during the ‘hyperactive’ policy period from 2007 onwards, services that used to be provided by local Aboriginal Community Councils (e.g. municipal services, outstation services and CDEP) are now delivered by subcontracted service providers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations), either through the regional councils, NT or Federal Governments. At that time, ‘Intervention’ powers were used to transfer buildings and municipal assets to the new shires, including critical plant and equipment.

While intended to support the delivery of “better and more reliable services” and stronger leadership and governance²¹, the centralisation of control over service delivery resulted in “a loss of community control, including the loss of the power to prioritise and make decisions regarding community needs” and a “diminished capacity of communities to deliver their own services in line with their own priorities”.²²

¹⁸ Australian Human Rights Commission (2012) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2012, see Chapter 3.4 Health impact of disempowerment (p.146) (<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/social-justice-report-11>)

¹⁹ National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020), Clause 44.

²⁰ Cited by Pintupi Homelands Health Service (<https://www.pintupihealth.com.au/about-us/aboriginal-community-control/>). The National Agreement on Closing the Gap defines an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation as one that delivers services, including land and resource management, that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and is a) incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit, b) controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, c) connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services, d) governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body (Clause 44).

²¹ E McAdam, Minister for Local Government, Minister’s speech (Speech delivered at the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory Conference, Alice Springs, 2006), cited in Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2012) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2012, p.130 ([weblink](#))

²² AHRC (2012) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2012, p.131 ([weblink](#))

The combined impact has been a collapse in local authority, employment and services, and the withdrawal of resources and erosion of Aboriginal community control continue to be felt today.²³

The impacts of these imposed reforms on our remote communities cannot be understated, and this reality must be foregrounded in considering the objectives, design and implementation of RJED and the new remote employment services to replace CDP.

CDP has been one of the most significant areas of expenditure by government in remote communities over the last decade. This expenditure has gone into the hands of a select few providers (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organisations, including for-profit companies), with little to no tangible benefit to Aboriginal people on the ground.

There has been no substantive parallel investment to rebuild Aboriginal community-control. **APO NT's position is that the replacement of CDP (through the funding, design and institutional arrangements around it) must explicitly serve to strengthen Aboriginal community-control.**

Recommendation 1: The replacement of CDP (through the funding, design and institutional arrangements around it) must explicitly serve to strengthen Aboriginal community-control.

3.4 Remote labour market conditions

Remote employment policy needs to reflect the reality of the labour market in remote Australia. Stubbornly high unemployment in remote Australia is a result of thin labour markets – not under-incentivised individuals.

As highlighted above, data from the NT Government indicates there are around 0.3 jobs available for every person in the community.²⁴ CDEP recognised this fact: it was designed to assist people in remote communities where labour supply greatly exceeded demand, operating as an employment *and* community development program. Its successors, RJCP and CDP, ignored this reality.

The introduction of RJED is therefore welcome: it is a step towards rebalancing remote employment policy to recognise the need for direct investment in job creation.

There is consideration in the development of RJED on transitioning jobseekers into other employment.²⁵ This is appropriate and important if being considered through the lens of supporting progression for the jobseeker. It is concerning, however, if government is viewing RJED only as a short term injection of funds. Growing remote economies is an important goal. But this will take time. Expecting the majority of jobseekers to transition to 'other employment' within the 3-year RJED timeframe will, in many cases, be unrealistic.

For example, during the *Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs* CPD trial, providers sought to establish 28 community enterprises, including cafes and kitchens, maintenance and cleaning for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) participants, art sales, and laundries. Due to the short period of the trial, all were set up as part of the CDP provider, rather than as standalone organisations. The 'synthesis of early learnings' from the trial noted that "more than half did not have sufficient time during [the first

²³ See the effects of the changes discussed in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner's report, 2021, p.130-131 ([weblink](#))

²⁴ Northern Territory Government, 28 Remote Town Jobs Profile Snapshot (2017) ([weblink](#))

²⁵ See First Nations Reference Group Communique, 13 June 2024 (<https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2024/communique-first-nations-reference-group-remote-jobs-and-economic-development-program-1>)

phase of the trial] to begin ongoing operations, and those that did tended to be smaller endeavours.”²⁶ The evaluators noted that “while enterprise is an important tool for change, the two organisations they reviewed were not operating optimally and were unlikely to be financially sustainable in their current form.”²⁷

Growing sustainable enterprises is important. But it takes time and skilled support – more than what appears will be provided by RJED. **In APO NT’s view, there is likely to always be the need for (and value to) some level of sustained government investment in job creation in remote Aboriginal communities, complemented by broader economic and enterprise development strategies.**

4. Feedback on the RJED program

4.1 Institutional arrangements

4.1.1 Mechanisms for genuine Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander decision-making

The government has consistently stated that it is committed to developing a new program to replace CDP in partnership with First Nations people. In March 2024, it established a First Nations Reference Group (FNRG) to provide advice to the Minister on the design and implementation of the RJED program.

APO NT is concerned, however, that although the terms of reference for the FNRG suggest that shared decision-making “is fundamental to the co-design of the new program”, the group is advisory only and its terms of reference fall short of the strong partnership elements articulated in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.²⁸

Further, while the FNRG meetings and design sessions have provided the opportunity for the members to provide advice on key elements of the program (and APO NT has played an active role), the role of the FNRG or its advice are not acknowledged in NIAA’s discussion paper. Of particular note, the program objectives agreed by the FNRG and outlined in the communique from the group’s meeting on 7 May 2024²⁹ are not included in the discussion paper. The lack of clarity of the status of and transparency regarding the FNRG’s advice risks undermining both FNRG member and broader community and stakeholder trust in the consultation process.

Of further concern, is the fact that – due to the belated establishment of formal governance arrangements³⁰ – elements of the program that are likely to be the biggest risk to the program’s success, have already been set. This includes the program’s short duration (3 years) and resources available to build organisational capacity (both discussed further below).

²⁶ NIAA (2024). Community Development Program: Phase 1 Trials, Synthesis of Early Learnings from ‘Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs’, p.4 (<https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/synthesis-early-learnings-trial-pathways-real-jobs>)

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020) Strong Partnership Elements, clauses 32-33 (<https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/6-priority-reform-areas/one>)

²⁹ <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2024/communique-first-nations-reference-group-remote-jobs-and-economic-development-program-0>

³⁰ ANAO Auditor-General Report No. 29 of 2023-24 Remote Employment Programs, paragraph 12 (<https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/remote-employment-programs>).

Recommendation 2: The governance of RJED and remote employment service reform (remote employment reform) must be reviewed before consultations on a new remote employment service commence in August 2024.

This should include:

- v) Reviewing the Terms of Reference of the FNRG as soon as possible to more fully reflect the Strong Partnership Elements agreed under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- vi) Establishment of an overarching framework for remote employment reform as part of or in alignment with the First Nations Economic Policy Partnership.
- vii) Consideration of the institutional arrangements that will best support the achievement of the Closing the Gap priority reforms with respect to the RJED and new remote employment service program delivery at the national and local levels.
- viii) Consideration of legislative underpinning to the new programs.

While the consultation materials indicate that NIAA heard through the 2023 consultations that “the new program should be planned and led by communities”, the reality of the process is that it has fallen far short of the partnership approach envisaged under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

4.1.2 Monitoring and evaluation

The recent report by the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) on the remote employment program reforms has presented concerning findings regarding the lack of formal and robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for the CDP program, the current trials and the new RJED. The report found:

- NIAA has a framework for monitoring CDP provider performance, but no CDP program monitoring and evaluation framework.³¹ Although “NIAA monitors CDP data and provides regular reports with program information to a key governance committee” (...) “monitoring is limited to caseload and shorter-term outcomes (...) that do not provide sufficient information on the achievement of CDP objectives.” Further, data quality and availability limits analysis possibilities, annual performance statements required under *the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* for NIAA Program 1.1 (Jobs, Land and the Economy) do not include CDP performance, and other reports published on the NIAA website are out of date despite the availability of recent data.³²
- As at January 2024, the NIAA did not have an evaluation plan for three of the four trials. Although “they involved some consultation and co-design” (...) “(t)he timing, design features and approach to evaluation of the trials meant they could not fully inform the design of a new employment program, which was meant to be brought to the government in 2023.”³³
- The NIAA does not fully meet commitments under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* to make CDP information accessible.³⁴
- There was no program logic or evaluation framework for the new remote jobs program at the time of announcement.³⁵

³¹ ANAO Report on Remote Employment Programs (2024), paragraph 16 (<https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/remote-employment-programs>)

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid, paragraph 11.

³⁴ Ibid, paragraph 16.

³⁵ Ibid, paragraph 12.

CDP is one of the most significant programs for remote Australia. Remote communities have suffered for at least a decade from poorly designed and insufficiently monitored policy that has failed to materially improve people's lives – despite significant government expenditure. These deficiencies must be rectified as a priority.

Recommendation 3: That appropriate resources are allocated to the development and implementation of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework for the RJED program. The framework should be developed in partnership with the First Nations Reference Group as a priority, to be finalised by the end of 2024.

4.2 Program design

4.2.1 Timeframes

Given the importance of policy continuity described above, it is concerning and disappointing that the RJED program is only committed for 3 years. The short timeframe for the program risks:

- being a barrier to community trust in the program and trust in government's genuine commitment to meaningful remote employment reform.
- being a barrier to the participation of communities and organisations with the least resources.
- setting individuals up to fail, providing insufficient time to develop in a new job.
- having insufficient time to adapt the program to lessons learned during implementation and prove the value of the underlying policy intent (strengthening communities through job creation).

The short timeframe for the current trials is equally, if not more, concerning. With all trials scheduled to finish in October 2024, and no guarantee that funding for the associated jobs will continue, the statement in the discussion paper that these trials will “empower First Nations people to choose their own destiny”³⁶ is disingenuous. A first step towards building trust in the new program will be to provide continuity for the individuals who have moved into work through these trials – not pulling the rug out from under their feet.

Recommendation 4: That NIAA guarantee funding extensions for jobs currently funded under the *Trialling Pathways to Real Jobs* CDP trial and the *New Jobs Program* trial for the period of the RJED program (subject to appropriate performance measures for the employers).

Recommendation 5: Contingent on the resourcing of a robust monitoring and evaluation framework (see **recommendation 3** above), funding for the RJED program is increased to create more jobs and the funding period extended to 10 years in order to provide sufficient time to adapt and improve the program as lessons are learned. The 10-year timeframe would allow for jobs to be guaranteed for 5-years, with the possibility of 5-year extensions.

(See also **recommendation 6** overleaf re: funding increase and extension)

³⁶ NIAA RJED Discussion Paper 2024, p.6

4.2.2 Number of jobs

The \$707 million attached to the RJED program is significant, overdue investment. APO NT is concerned however, that this investment is nowhere near sufficient to address the current jobs deficit.

APO NT has proposed the establishment of a Remote Jobs Fund (i.e. similar to the RJED) sufficient to fund the equivalent of 12,000 part-time jobs, including 1,500 paid youth traineeships. 12,000 jobs is equivalent to around 30 per cent of the CDP caseload – enough to make a substantial difference to closing the employment gap, while not absorbing the full capacity of the remote labour market.³⁷

An increase to the current investment should be considered to increase the number of jobs available across the country under the RJED program. The increased investment should also account for the resources required to embed capacity-building within the program, including providing grant-writing assistance to smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (see **section 4.2.3**) and funding supervision and mentoring (see **section 4.2.5**).

Recommendation 6: That an increase and extension of the current RJED investment is considered in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2024-2025 to facilitate:

- iii) An increase in the number of available jobs nationally. APO NT has recommended a fund sufficient to create 12,000 part-time jobs.
- iv) Sufficient resources to support the participation and capacity-building of smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

4.2.3 Eligibility

While the RJED program objectives agreed by the FNRG include ‘Strengthening Aboriginal community-controlled organisations’³⁸, neither this critical objective (nor any of the other objectives) are articulated in the Discussion paper.

The eligible entity types proposed in the Discussion Paper leave open the possibility that a non-Indigenous business (of any size) could be the employer.

The objectives of the RJED program should not just be to create jobs anywhere. It should not operate as a wage subsidy scheme for sectors that have the resources to employ Aboriginal staff but fail to do so. It should also not operate as a default funding bucket for government agencies who should be otherwise funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce development within their program areas (i.e. cost-shifting).

Particularly given the size of the program (only 3,000 jobs nationally), jobs in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations should be prioritised.

³⁷ APO NT *Fair Work and Strong Communities* 2017 and 2023

³⁸ FNRG Communique 7 May 2024 (<https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2024/communique-first-nations-reference-group-remote-jobs-and-economic-development-program-0>)

Recommendation 7: That government clearly and consistently communicates the objectives of the RJED program, including the objective to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Recommendation 8: That Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are prioritised for funding under the RJED, followed by other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations. Definitions should be consistent with the definitions in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap³⁹.

Recommendation 9: Non-Aboriginal for-profit organisations should not be eligible to apply.

Consideration also needs to be given to the capacity of smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to apply. To help even the playing field, APO NT supports the provision of free grant-writing assistance to Aboriginal organisations who need it.

Recommendation 10: Free grant-writing assistance should be made available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who need it.

4.2.4 Allocation

The allocation of jobs should reflect the need nationally. As noted earlier in this submission, NT participants make up around 44 per cent of the CDP caseload nationally. Additionally:

- the NT has the highest levels of Indigenous poverty, is the only jurisdiction where the employment gap is widening, and generally has the widest gap in other life outcomes.
- the NT Government is substantially less well-resourced compared to other state governments who are better able to generate jobs in their communities.

Recommendation 11 The regional allocation of jobs should reflect need and relative disadvantage. We would, therefore, expect around half of the 3,000 jobs to come to the NT.

4.2.5 Resources for mentoring and supervision

If the program is to support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, it will need to provide adequate resourcing to organisations for mentoring and supervision. Sufficient funding needs to be made available through the Community Jobs and Business Fund for this purpose.

³⁹ *Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation (Clause 44)* – an organisation that delivers services, including land and resource management, that builds the strength that builds the strength and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and people and is:

- a) incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit,
- b) controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people,
- c) connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services, and
- d) governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation – a business, charity, not-for-profit organisation, incorporated under Commonwealth, state or territory legislation that has at least 51 per cent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ownership and/or directorship and is operated for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Case study – Central Land Council Ranger Mentoring Program

The value of mentoring – as distinct from supervision – is evident in the Central Land Council’s Ranger Program. The ranger program provides important entry-level roles on-country, with a focus on on-the-job training and mentoring, as well as the provision quality, accredited training.

The Ranger Mentoring Program is a successful, integral and evolving component of the Ranger Program. Aboriginal mentors have been part of the program since 2012 and provide social and emotional wellbeing support and guidance to the rangers. Mentors sit separately to the rangers’ line reporting.

The foundation of these roles is the development of strong and trusting relationships with rangers. The mentoring relationship provides a safe and confidential space for rangers to think about their work and life aspirations, talk about things that might be affecting their work, think through solutions to challenges they are facing, and get the support they need to manage these challenges.

The importance of the mentoring role reflects the fact that rangers face a range of stressors that can impact on their work life. The [CLC Ranger Program Report](#) describes some of the most common challenges that rangers worked through with their mentors during 2020-21, including family wellbeing, community safety and domestic and family violence, physical and mental health issues, overcrowding and substandard and unstable living conditions that impede rangers’ ability to attend and perform well at work, as well as financial stress and income support. These stressors are not unique to rangers – they are likely to be experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living and working in remote communities.

The engagement of workplace mentors, supported by a strong framework to guide what can be complex roles, should be encouraged and appropriately resourced within the RJED program. They are an important component of strategies to support local Aboriginal workforce attraction, retention and development.

Recommendation 12: Confirm that organisations can apply for funding for supervision and mentoring positions under the Community Jobs and Business Fund.

As outlined in **recommendation 6**, an increase and extension of the current RJED investment should be considered in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) 2024-2025 to accommodate this.

4.2.6 Support for enterprise development

APO NT’s *Fair Work and Strong Communities* recommends more substantial and better tailored support for the development of Aboriginal enterprises (large and small). It is not clear the extent to which the RJED and Community Jobs and Business Fund will support this.

Recommendation 13: That NIAA work with key stakeholders, including the NT Indigenous Business Network (NTIBN) to ensure remote employment reforms support the development of Aboriginal enterprises.

4.3 Broader strategies and investment to rebuild Aboriginal community-control

“It is only when effective governance and holistic development strategies are in place that economic and other development projects have the chance of becoming sustainable [...] In other words, sustainable development is—fundamentally—a governance issue.”

M. Dodson and D.E. Smith 2003⁴⁰

As reiterated throughout this submission, the decimation of Aboriginal community-control in the NT (a result of successive government policies) is a barrier to self-determination. In the context of the RJED, it is a barrier to genuine community-led decision-making about the jobs that will be created, a constraint on the participation of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the program as employers, and – ultimately – a constraint on employment. It will further be a constraint to NIAA’s stated intention for the design of the new remote employment service to be “planned and led by communities”.

The communique from the FNRG meeting on 13 June indicated that the importance of building the capacity of community organisations was a key theme of NIAA’s consultations so far.⁴¹ It is very unclear what steps NIAA is taking through these reforms or other investment to address this.

4.3.1 Case studies of effective approaches

The Discussion Paper asks for examples of funding or services that are working on the ground. We have provided two examples below: the Central Land Council Community Development program (not to be confused with CDP), and Stronger Communities for Children. Both have **good governance** and a **community development approach** at their centre. They:

- a) allow Aboriginal people the time and authority to determine their own governance arrangements, and
- b) give those self-determined governance groups the autonomy and authority to make decisions about resources.

Case study – Central Land Council Community Development program

The Central Land Council’s (CLC) Community Development program, started in 2005. The program enables traditional owners to plan and implement community benefit projects with their collective income from royalty and rent payments.

Since the program started, traditional owner groups across 100 governance groups (including communities) have committed \$224.3 million to more than 2,540 projects, ranging from multi-million-dollar, multi-year initiatives to small infrastructure projects, providing substantial employment opportunities across the region.

In the 2022-23 financial year alone, traditional owners invested \$33.8 million of their own money through the Community Development Unit to 240 projects, which employed 634 local Aboriginal people for 34,983 hours on projects driven by and for the benefit of their local communities.

⁴⁰ Dodson, M. and D.E. Smith (2003) ‘Governance for sustainable development: Strategic issues and principles for Indigenous Australian communities’ Australian National University Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) No. 250/2003, p.12 (weblink: <https://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/governance-sustainable-development-strategic-issues-and-principles-indigenous>)

⁴¹ <https://ministers.pmc.gov.au/burney/2024/communique-first-nations-reference-group-remote-jobs-and-economic-development-program-1>

One of the strongest signs of success of the program is its rapid growth – as people increasingly choose to participate the program to pursue development projects.

Funds provided by NIAA since 2020 to match Aboriginal people’s investment have amplified the program’s impact.

Evaluation of the program has identified a number of factors contributing to its success. Those that are key in thinking about RJED and remote employment service design include:

- Strong Aboriginal leadership of the program at a regional level (by the CLC itself as an Aboriginal-governed organisation) and by local Aboriginal people willing to drive change.
- Development and refinement of locally appropriate and locally determined governance structures that are culturally legitimate, effective in contemporary circumstances and incorporate regional and local decision-making.
- Appropriate planning processes that are a good fit and can be adapted and deepened over time.
- Listening to and respecting Aboriginal people and their decisions.
- A culture of learning, reflection and adaptation between all those involved in the program, allowing the program (and individual projects) to improve over time.⁴²

Also pertinent to the design of RJED, evaluation of the program has also highlighted common ingredients for success in achieving local employment through CLC Community Development funded projects. They are that:

- Work is meaningful.
- The workplace is culturally safe.
- The contracted organisations is a relatively high-capacity organisation or business that can complete project reports on time and acquit executed contracts.

In the CLC region (southern half of the NT), there are some lower capacity Aboriginal community-controlled and businesses that can provide the first two elements – but without support, they struggle with the reporting and grant acquittals.

Where a governance group wants to continue working with these Aboriginal partners, significant work, therefore, goes into governance support and capacity building of that partner (by the CLC Community Development Unit, or external organisations including the APO NT Aboriginal Governance and Management Program (AGMP) or Community First Development) to ensure they can manage and deliver future projects.

While the RJED funding is intended to fund new jobs identified through community decision-making processes, APO NT is concerned that with the current timeframes and investment, there are relatively few Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and Aboriginal businesses operating in remote NT communities (particularly in Central Australia and the Barkly) who have the capacity to take on new staff and support them effectively. **This is a gap in the current program design and NIAA’s broader thinking.**

⁴² Hunt, J. and Campbell, D. (2016) Translating Aboriginal land rights into development outcomes: factors contributing to a successful program in Central Australia, Working Paper No. 107/2016, Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra and Campbell, D. and Kelly, L. (2020) Central Land Council Community Development Program Monitoring Report 2018-2019, Central Land Council.

Case study – Stronger Communities for Children

Stronger Communities for Children (SCfC) is a place-based community development program focused on the wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people. It began in June 2013 in five remote NT communities, with the addition of another five communities in June 2015.

The 2017 evaluation of the program stated that the program is “designed to ensure that people in communities have a real say in what services they need, and how they are delivered”.⁴³

Importantly, the resourcing of the SCfC model, “builds the capacity for the community to lead, plan and implement the locally designed service responses”, with the capacity strengthening “an important precursor to delivering positive outcomes for children and their families”.⁴⁴

The program provides pooled funding, administered by a locally determined governance group (Local Community Boards (LBCs)).

The evaluation highlighted the following elements that make SCfC work, pertinent to the RJED design:

- Locally-determined and culturally understood governance structures that can make decisions the ‘right way’
- Communities having a real say in the services delivered in their community (requiring trust on the part of government and other non-Aboriginal parties)
- Real ‘flexibility’ – key program design elements in place, without government overprescribing
- Community-control over resource allocation, with appropriate accountability mechanisms
- Allowing the community, not political cycles and machinery of government changes, to drive the agenda.

So far, the RJED consultation and design process has not allowed for any discussion of the institutional arrangements – i.e. including governance – to be meaningfully discussed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people. We note the findings of the Australian National Audit Office’s (ANAO) Report on Remote Employment Programs, that “key governance arrangements for the reform process, including the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups in decision making, were not formalised until January 2024.”⁴⁵

We reiterate **recommendation 2** and ask that the governance of RJED and remote employment service reform is reviewed as soon as possible. Time and space needs to be made for these discussions – outside the busy work of providing piecemeal feedback when many of the most significant policy and program parameters have already been set by government.

⁴³ Winangali/Ipsos (2017) Evaluation: Stronger Communities for Children (<https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/stronger-communities-children-evaluation-report>)

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.6 and 9.

⁴⁵ ANAO Auditor-General Report No. 29 of 2023-24 Remote Employment Programs, paragraph 12 (<https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/remote-employment-programs>).

In addition, in APO NT's view, the RJED program needs to be accompanied by:

- A more consistent and genuine commitment to the priority reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including – in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's 3-year review of the agreement – the recognition that the goal of priority reform one is *self-determination* and that the efforts to achieve self-determination extend beyond the policy partnerships and place-based partnerships prescribed in the agreement. They need to be embedded in all of government's work with Aboriginal people.
- NIAA's work with APO NT to develop a broader strategy to build the capacity and number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the NT, as well as Aboriginal businesses, as a complementary but distinct strategy.

Recommendation 14: That the Australian Government demonstrates a more consistent and genuine commitment to the priority reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including – in line with the recommendations of the Productivity Commission's 3-year review of the agreement – the recognition that the goal of priority reform one is *self-determination* and that the efforts to achieve self-determination extend beyond the policy partnerships and place-based partnerships prescribed in the agreement. They need to be embedded in all of government's work with Aboriginal people.

Recommendation 15: That NIAA work with APO NT to develop a broader strategy to build the capacity and number of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in the NT, as well as Aboriginal businesses, as a complementary but distinct strategy.

In making these recommendations we note the following observation by Associate Professor Janet Hunt, quoted by Mick Gooda, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner in 2012:

"It seems that many of the capacity 'problems' in Indigenous community [and organisational] governance stem from a disabling, rather than enabling environment or system."⁴⁶

Significantly more work needs to be done by government to create the enabling environment for Aboriginal people and organisations to succeed.

5. Employment opportunities in the broader policy agenda

In addition to the RJED program, there are a number of opportunities for the Australian Government to align its broader policy agenda with the goal of increasing employment and the economic participation of Aboriginal people in remote communities.

These include:

- Building the remote Aboriginal housing workforce through the new NPRHNT.
- Better government coordination to engage a local workforce on major infrastructure projects.
- Promoting strong agreement making in mining and energy projects for the renewables transition.
- Opportunities in education and the health and social care sectors.

⁴⁶ Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) (2012) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2012, p.113 (<https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-social-justice/publications/social-justice-report-11>)

- Ensuring a central role for traditional owners in ‘nature repair’.

Further detail on these opportunities are outlined in the Central Land Council’s submission to the *Inquiry into Northern Australia Workforce Development*.⁴⁷ As an example, a short case study of opportunities under the new National Partnership Agreement on Remote Housing NT is provided below.

Case study – Maximising training and employment opportunities offered through the new 10-year National Partnership for Remote Housing NT

The partnership agreement provides an unprecedented opportunity to re-build remote Aboriginal Community Controlled employers and Aboriginal workforce capacity in tenancy management and support and housing repairs and maintenance. Prior to the NT Intervention community housing-related work provided considerable local training and employment opportunities and pathways particularly for school leavers.

To maximise the employment opportunities under this agreement:

- A focused effort is needed to support trainees into on and off the job certificate and apprenticeship training with clear local jobs outcomes in the remote housing sector.
- Financial and technical support needs to be made available to support Aboriginal community-controlled organisations that want to play a role in housing.

Recommendation 16: The First Nations Economic Policy Partnership seeks to embed within the current policy agenda opportunities to increase the employment and the economic participation of Aboriginal people in remote communities.

The development of RJED and the new remote employment service need to align with the development of this policy partnership.

6. Conclusion

APO NT once again welcome’s the Australian Government’s commitment to replacing CDP and the introduction of the RJED as an important step towards this. This investment is incredibly important for our remote communities. Getting the governance right and providing funding that responds to all the needs will be critical to its success.

⁴⁷ <https://www.clc.org.au/clc-submission-to-the-inquiry-into-northern-australia-workforce-development/>