
Appendix 4 – Response from entity

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Annex A Corrective Services NSW's response

6 March 2026

Dear Auditor General

Corrective Services NSW (CSNSW) appreciates the opportunity to provide a detailed response to the Audit Office of NSW's (AONSW) final report *Support for First Nations People in Custody and Post Release to Reduce Reoffending* (the Report), received 9 February 2026.

This attachment presents CSNSW's position on the key findings and recommendations of the Report and details the programs and reforms already implemented or in progress, in response.

Late last year, the NSW Government, in partnership with the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (CAPO), released the *Closing the Gap 2025–2028 Implementation Plan* (the Implementation Plan), creating clear outcomes to meet its Closing the Gap (CTG) targets and deliver priority reforms. The Implementation Plan reflects and embodies the shared responsibility across Government to improve the lives of Aboriginal people by driving systemic transformation and strengthening government and leadership accountability. It includes \$20 million for Aboriginal-led, culturally safe programs to support Aboriginal people leaving custody, to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

As the recently appointed Commissioner, I have been brought in to lead a significant reform agenda to improve outcomes across CSNSW. A central focus of this work is a commitment to achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal people in custody and post release, supported by culturally informed practice and guided by stronger collaboration with Aboriginal communities.

I am pleased to provide the below detail on work that is already underway, as we continue to work towards ongoing reform.

The NSW Government takes a whole-of-government approach to planning, monitoring, and coordinated delivery of CTG targets. Under the Government's CTG governance structure, strategic discussions are held on progress against the CTG targets across government and in partnership with Aboriginal communities.

CSNSW also has additional governance structures in place to monitor compliance with CTG targets. This includes the re-establishment of the Aboriginal Advisory Council as a shared governance body to oversee strategic direction and strengthen accountability for Aboriginal outcomes. CSNSW will also establish specialised Aboriginal oversight bodies to provide guidance on embedding cultural safety and Aboriginal leadership in reform design and delivery for several projects underway across the agency, including the inaugural *CSNSW Women's Strategy 2026-2036*; which is currently in its final stages of development.

In relation to your recommendation to implement a First Nations Healing Framework, last year our agency launched the *CSNSW Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework* for our staff, which articulates the CSNSW approach to healing, focused on culturally grounded ways of working with Aboriginal people in our care. The framework was co-designed in consultation with Aboriginal Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal staff, and has a focus on Aboriginal

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ways of knowing, being and doing. The framework will be the basis for a Healing Framework that is focussed on improvements for Aboriginal people.

As to your recommendation on establishing formal partnerships with Aboriginal stakeholders, as is evidenced above, CSNSW values ongoing, strategic partnerships with ACCOs and Aboriginal people, organisations and communities more widely, in all our work. These strong partnerships enable the building of a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal inmates and staff alike to feel safe, respected, heard and acknowledged.

I'd also like to address your recommendations relating to the need to review inmate classification, intake, and assessment tools to ensure cultural appropriateness. Late last year, at the Minister's direction, I commenced a review of the inmate classification system. As part of this comprehensive review, the needs and impacts of vulnerable cohorts are being closely considered. Through our ongoing discussions, CSNSW will continue to keep you updated on the progress of this work.

Last, I note that your report references relevant agency CTG strategies and policies that have been in place over time. I would like to clarify the current and proposed CSNSW strategy and governance in relation to CTG targets. CSNSW is currently developing its new *Closing the Gap Strategy*, which will be aligned with the aforementioned *CSNSW Aboriginal Cultural Safety Framework*. The Strategy will be guided by key principles, including leveraging existing governance and strategic architecture to coordinate delivery; adopting a phased, evidence-based approach; managing timeframe risks; and extending reform efforts beyond custodial settings to strengthen community partnerships and support sustainable outcomes. The new CTG Strategy will refine CSNSW's approach to its CTG targets, essentially incorporating the several previous strategies referenced in your report, for example, *Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment' (OCHRE)*, *NSW Government Aboriginal Affairs Plan (2013)*; *Strategy for supporting Aboriginal offenders to desist from reoffending, Corrective Services NSW (April 2014)*; *Reducing Aboriginal Overrepresentation in the Criminal Justice System 2018-2020, former Department of Justice NSW*.

The Audit office should also note that the previous *Towards 2030* strategic plan is being replaced with a new *CSNSW Strategy & Blueprint*, which is currently under development. The new comprehensive strategic framework will cement and incorporate the CSNSW vision, enterprise-wide initiatives and strategic priorities; of which improvement in outcomes for Aboriginal people in our care is a critical part.

Whilst we are proud of the work that is already underway, we are acutely aware that there is always more to be done. As the agency progresses significant reform throughout 2026, it remains steadfast in its commitment to culturally grounded, evidence informed practice and welcomes ongoing collaboration with the AONSW and sector partners to ensure reforms deliver meaningful, lasting change for Aboriginal communities. We look forward to continuing to work with AONSW to monitor progress of the implementation of recommendations.



Gary McCahon PSM
Commissioner
Corrective Services NSW

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Annex B

Youth Justice NSW response

4 March 2026

Youth Justice NSW (YJNSW) thanks the Audit Office for the insights provided in the performance audit of the agency.

YJNSW notes the Audit Office's acknowledgement of the agency's investment in strategies, programs and initiatives to provide support for First Nations people, an investment that aligns with YJNSW's commitment to Closing the Gap.

YJNSW would particularly like to acknowledge the work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees who now make up 22% of our total staff numbers and play a critical role in the organisation's systemic and structural transformation through direct service provision, formalised advice and leadership. This significant increase in the YJNSW Aboriginal workforce is a consequence of the Aboriginal Employment Plan that embeds system-wide supports to increasing the proportion of Aboriginal people in leadership positions, with all new recruitment opportunities being identified or targeted positions.

Several foundational initiatives which respond to the recommendations made by the Audit Office are underway. These include:

- The development of an agency-wide Outcomes Framework which will allow YJNSW to measure and evaluate the progress of our Strategic Plan 2024-2030 which is aligned with the Closing the Gap Agreement Priority Reforms and Target 11. The Outcomes Framework will enable business units and individuals to be accountable for their delivery of the Strategic Plan.
- Working with a First Nations consultancy to develop a framework for the agency's shared decision-making. This will inform YJNSW's approach to shared governance and decision-making with Aboriginal people and communities as relates to the agency's work.
- YJNSW has developed a Codesign Framework which provides guidance to all staff on how to codesign initiatives with Aboriginal families and communities to build competence and confidence to work in partnership.
- YJNSW and Aboriginal Legal Service co-chair and co-lead the planning and implementation of Target 11 responses, including development of a new throughcare program and a range of new therapeutic pathways to divert Aboriginal children from the justice system.
- YJNSW is investing significantly in Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to deliver early intervention and diversion so that there are Aboriginal-led decisions being made in relation to intervening and diverting Aboriginal young people from the criminal justice system in a way that is trauma informed and safe for Aboriginal children. Six of nine Youth on Track service providers are Aboriginal owned and managed organisations. One of the Rural Rehabilitation Facilities is run by an Aboriginal Organisation. The Short-Term Remand program (STRP) Initiatives have been co-designed and co-implemented with local Aboriginal Elders, community members and young people with lived experience. Local

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Aboriginal organisations and ACCOs share decision-making on local governance groups with police, youth justice, housing and homelessness, child protection, courts and NGOs.

- The Bail Accommodation Program in Moree was designed by Aboriginal stakeholders, following a co-design process. The work was developed and progressed in line with the Moree Governance committee and Moree ACCOs. YJNSW has been a member of the Moree Governance committee and has sought constant advice and guidance from this committee. The project partnered with Just Reinvest in the stages prior to the tender being sought. The tender panel was an all-Aboriginal panel which, on the recommendations of the Moree Governance Committee, included two local Aboriginal knowledge holders as voting members of the tender panel.
- The Safe Aboriginal Youth program is implemented by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in ten regional communities across NSW.
- While there is currently no validated youth justice risk assessment tool for Aboriginal young people in Australia, YJNSW is reviewing and redeveloping its Assessment Guide, a resource intended to support the current risk assessment tool (YLS/CMI-AA). One key aspect of this redevelopment is the inclusion of culture as a protective factor against criminogenic risk. This change is supported by co-development with Aboriginal staff around the State and is being led by an Aboriginal Senior staff member in the YJNSW Practice & Implementation team.
- Once children are in contact with Youth Justice Centres, YJNSW focuses significant resources on health, safety, care, family connection and treatment during that period of contact. It is important to note, however, that sporadic contact with YJNSW Centres is unlikely to stop offending in the short-term. Most children in detention are out on bail within 24 hours and returned to their community. YJNSW is not mandated, authorised or resourced to deliver or maintain cultural, healing and therapeutic supports when children are released on bail after short term remand.
- For children who are in detention for longer periods, YJNSW develops and runs intensive programs that deliver health, education, cultural connection, family work, therapy and healing inside the centres. These include programs such as Changing Habits and Reaching Targets, My Journey My Life, My Journey My Life (Yinnar), Dthina Yuwali, Encouraging Positive Improvement and Change. These rehabilitative programs are of equal importance to the obligation to keep young people, staff and service providers safe within Centres. YJNSW staff work hard to maintain a balance between safety, security, and rehabilitation in what is inherently a custodial environment.
- Providing access in detention to more psychologists, caseworkers and cultural practice officers than other jurisdictions in Australia or New Zealand. YJNSW also partners with NSW Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network which provides clinics in every Centre with highly trained nurses, and access to doctors and forensic adolescent psychiatrists. NSW Education operates schools in every centre with individualised learning for children ranging from basic literacy to tertiary and vocational education. Notwithstanding this great service mix, there will always be a need to balance safety, security and access to services.
- YJNSW has a strong culture and history of program development, quality assurance and evaluation, noting there is scope to undertake more evaluations as our culturally-led programs and Closing the Gap Strategic Plan take effect over time. YJNSW is deeply committed to expanding evaluations and improving quality assurance and is exploring ways to resource this growth. YJNSW is reviewing existing approaches to the evaluation of the effectiveness of programs for Aboriginal young people to ensure that they can demonstrate tangible outcomes for Aboriginal young people. The simple measure of recidivism is inadequate for an adolescent offending cohort. It is an overly simplistic measure of program success and rehabilitative efforts and assumes direct causation between program and behaviour. More sophisticated, nuanced and longitudinal evaluative methods are required to assess a relationship between interventions and improvements in the conditions that are

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related to long-term reductions in severity and frequency of crime, the shortening of a criminal career and, ideally, desistance. Aboriginal Impact Statements are required for all new initiatives and provide a vehicle for Aboriginal cultural oversight of the planning and implementation of all new initiatives. Since 2024, 26 or more Aboriginal Impact Statements have been completed and reviewed by the YJNSW Aboriginal Strategic Coordination Unit.

- YJNSW does not monitor the disaggregated expenditure attributable to First Nations young people but is able to estimate expenditure based on demographic statistics of young people in contact with YJNSW at a given point in time. Measuring individual expenditure is difficult noting as YJNSW does not deliver offence-based programs in discrete locations across the state, rather young people are transient and move in and out of custody and between community offices with regularity.
- YJNSW partners with and refers to a range of community-based organisations, including ACCOs, to support the release and reintegration of young people exiting custody. For young people serving a full-time custodial sentence, this release planning begins early and at least 8 weeks prior to release, where possible. However, YJNSW is not mandated, nor resourced, to deliver nor oversee reintegration of young people without a supervised mandate. For thorough and effective release planning for all young people, a whole of government, wrap around response is required. YJNSW caseworkers refer young people into voluntary reintegration programs such as the Casework Support Program that is delivered by NGOs and ACCOs, that provide a range of practical supports.

YJNSW looks forward to continued engagement with the Audit Office as we strengthen our support for Aboriginal young people's pathways to desistance, rehabilitation, healing and wellbeing.

Sincerely



Kelly-Anne Stewart
Executive Director, Youth Justice NSW