



# Budget

## 2025–26

### **REGIONAL MINISTERIAL BUDGET STATEMENT 2025–26**

#### **BUILDING REGIONAL AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE**

A Statement by

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For the information of honourable members  
on the occasion of the Budget 2025–26

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## **Acknowledgment of Country**

The Australian Government pays its respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia.

We acknowledge the ongoing strength and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in sustaining the world's oldest continuing cultures and the contributions that continue to enrich the Australia we have today.

We share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' aspirations for self-determination and work in partnership across all portfolios to strengthen the economic, social and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.



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# Foreword

Through the 2025–26 Budget, the Albanese Government is continuing to provide regional Australians with the support they need today, while helping them to build a better future.

From delivering cost-of-living relief including tax cuts for every Australian taxpayer and energy bill relief, strengthening Medicare, investing in every stage of education and training, and creating more regional jobs through our Future Made in Australia plan – the Albanese Government is rebuilding our regions after a decade of neglect.

Through the 2025–26 Budget, we reaffirm our commitment to taking the needs of our regions seriously, and to investing in the hard work and the potential of regional people.

Across our first term in Government, we have shown our regions that postcodes should not be a barrier – by delivering more regional health services, making it easier to buy and rent a home, delivering thousands of local road safety upgrades, and rolling out record funding to improve regional telecommunications and disaster resilience.

The 2025–26 Budget builds on around 480 regional initiatives introduced through our first three Budgets – guided by our Regional Investment Framework – with new packages and initiatives in this Budget including:

- **Delivering the services regional Australians deserve and helping with the cost of living.**

As Medicare enters its fifth decade, the Albanese Government is investing \$7.9 billion to strengthen Medicare with more bulk billing for all Australians – further improving accessibility and lowering costs, and we will expand on our existing 87 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics around Australia with funding for an additional 50 clinics, 17 of which will be supporting regional Australians. We continue to invest to grow and strengthen the healthcare workforce across regional Australia, and to ensure regional Australians have access to mental health services. This Budget includes measures that will relieve cost-of-living pressures, with additional energy bill relief for all households and around one million small businesses, assistance for regional students and apprentices, and support for people and families in remote locations. Additionally, we are continuing to support Australians to purchase a home of their own, with new investment to continue the Regional Home Guarantee and the Family Home Guarantee, expand the Help to Buy scheme, and accelerate the uptake of modern methods of construction.

- **Keeping regional Australia connected.**

We are a Government committed to keeping regional Australia connected. Major investment in regional infrastructure includes \$7.2 billion towards upgrades to the Bruce Highway in Queensland, with significant investment for duplication and upgrades of key regional roads in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Tasmania. Strengthening digital connectivity across Australia, funding to complete the NBN fibre network is expected to provide improved access to over 334,000 premises located across regional Australia, and introduction of a Universal Outdoor Mobile

Obligation will require mobile providers to provide access to mobile voice and SMS almost everywhere across Australia. The Government also continues work to ensure regional Australia remains connected through aviation, recognising its fundamental role in facilitating economic and social activity, and access to services.

- **Investing in strong economic futures for regional Australia.**

The Government is investing to support sustainable, prosperous economies and businesses across regional Australia – through emerging and traditional sectors. This includes forging a green metals future for Australia as part of the Future Made in Australia agenda, with a \$1.0 billion Green Iron Investment Fund, and joint funding with the South Australian Government to stabilise and support the long-term future of the steelworks, and support workers and the community, in Whyalla. Support for the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors includes initiatives to promote innovation and investment, reduce impacts of established feral animals, pests and weeds, and develop a National Food Security Strategy. Additionally, investment will encourage consumers to buy Australian-made products, including those from regional, rural and remote businesses.

Regional investment needs to be much more than grants programs. It should make life better for people, with access to the services they need and targeted help with cost of living.

Investments through the 2025–26 Budget strengthen the Albanese Government’s track record of delivering better outcomes for regional people and regional communities – after a failure of follow-through from the former Government.

Our regions are great places to live, to work and to invest, and are at the centre of Building Australia’s Future – which is why we are unlocking more regional jobs, ensuring regional people can train and reskill across in-demand and emerging industries, and supporting regional businesses to grow and diversify.

This is on top of relieving pressures on families and businesses, improving access to the services and support regional people need, and ensuring people outside of our big cities have better access to opportunities – because the Albanese Government will always deliver for regional Australia.

**The Hon Catherine King MP**  
**Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government**

**The Hon Kristy McBain MP**  
**Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories**

**25 March 2025**

# Guiding our Investments: Regional Investment Framework in action

The Regional Investment Framework continues to make investment work better for regions. Guiding the Australian Government's investments in regional areas, the Framework ensures an approach that values local voices and priorities, is informed by evidence, operates with flexibility, integrity and transparency, and coordinates across governments to leverage and maximise outcomes.

Introduced in the 2023–24 Budget, the Framework is firmly embedded in decision-making across government. It supports a joined-up approach to regional investment across people, places, services, and industries and local economies – recognising that action across the breadth of Government portfolios is essential to meeting the needs and opportunities of Australia's diverse regions. As the Government works to build Australia's future, the Framework will help guide investment that ensures regional communities and local economies are engaged and empowered – building on existing local strengths to seize the opportunities of the future.

Consistent with the Framework, the Government's approach to regional investment is informed by, and responds to, the voices and views of regional Australians – drawing on the knowledge and experience of local governments and regional bodies. Strengthening links between government and on-the-ground knowledge and priorities, the Government continues to work closely with the Australia-wide network of Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees, with over \$117.0 million to flow to RDAs over the next five years. The Government has also forged strong partnerships with local councils through record engagement, re-establishing the Australian Council of Local Government, and working together on sustainable national funding to deliver the services and infrastructure communities need most.

The Framework also supports regional investment that responds to knowledge, data, trends and opportunities. For example, through the 2025–26 Budget the Government is extending support for research by the Regional Australia Institute. This evidence-based approach to informed decision-making helps ensure regional investment meets the Government's commitment to high standards of merit, integrity and transparency.

## Investing in Services

Quality services are essential to liveable and sustainable regional communities. Enhancing the accessibility, connectivity and equity of services – including across health and aged care, Early Childhood Education and Care, and telecommunications – is fundamental to making regions increasingly better places to live, work and invest.

Across the Government's October 2022–23, 2023–24 and 2024–25 Budgets, the Government has invested in the services regional Australians rely on, including: making healthcare more accessible and affordable, such as through establishing Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, with 87 clinics already operating across the country – including in regional locations like

Devonport and Launceston (Tasmania), Maningrida and Lajamanu (Northern Territory), Tamworth (New South Wales) and Townsville (Queensland) – and the historic \$3.5 billion investment to triple the bulk billing incentive, which commenced in November 2023 and has seen more than 2.49 million additional incentives claimed across regional, rural and remote Australia to December 2024; investing in Early Childhood Education and Care, including through new rural and remote community child care services that will support more people to return to work in locations and occupations where they are needed most; investing \$2.8 billion in Services Australia to deliver safe, effective and efficient government services for every Australian, alongside investment to rebuild the Australian Public Service, helping to ensure delivery of services Australians expect; \$2.2 billion to strengthen regional digital connectivity, including the ambitious Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia, and investment to enhance connectivity and digital inclusion outcomes in remote communities; and a range of initiatives to keep regional, rural and remote Australia connected through air services. For Australians doing it tough, the Government continues to support vital homelessness services through the 5-year \$9.3 billion National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness. Additionally, more than 450,000 regional, rural and remote households are receiving Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

The 2025–26 Budget builds on these foundations, ensuring regional Australians have access to the services they need and deserve.

- The Government is investing \$7.9 billion to strengthen Medicare with more bulk billing for all Australians. Rebates for Bulk Billing Incentive items will continue to scale based on the location of the provider, with practitioners in regional, rural and remote areas able to claim items with higher rebates compared to those working in metropolitan areas. This means any Medicare-eligible patient bulk billed for a standard general practitioner (GP) consult would be eligible for a tripled incentive of \$32.50 in regional areas and up to \$41.10 in very remote areas – compared to an incentive of \$21.35 in metropolitan areas.
- The Government has committed \$644.3 million over three years from 2025–26 to expand the Medicare Urgent Care Clinics program by an additional 50 clinics. This builds on previous investments to establish 87 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics around Australia, of which 31 are located in regional, rural and remote areas. Additionally, the Government has committed funding to extend the opening hours of the Batemans Bay (New South Wales) and Launceston (Tasmania) Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.
- The Government is committed to growing Australia’s healthcare workforce. \$606.3 million over four years from 2025–26 will strengthen Medicare by delivering more Australian doctors. This package will increase capacity across the General Practitioner and Rural Generalist training pipelines – with 50 per cent of the additional General Practitioner trainee places to be in regional and rural areas. Additionally, \$10.5 million over two years from 2025–26 will expand scholarships for nurses and midwives, increasing the future nurse practitioner and midwife workforce to help meet current and future demands for healthcare, including in regional, rural and remote Australia.

- With more than one-third of residential and home aged care services located across regional, rural and remote Australia, quality aged care is important for regional people, families and communities. To properly reflect the value of work performed by aged care workers, the Government is providing \$2.6 billion to fund further increases in the minimum award wage for aged care nurses, commencing from 1 March 2025 – building on the \$15.1 billion invested to support earlier award wage increases since 30 June 2023. Additionally, \$60.3 million over five years from 2025–26 will deliver culturally appropriate aged care assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through First Nations organisations.
- Demonstrating the Government’s commitment to improving mental health outcomes, \$46.0 million over four years from 2024–25 will ensure the continuity of essential digital mental health services, including targeted services for cohorts who experience higher levels of stigma and associated lower utilisation of mainstream mental health services. \$24.7 million over four years from 2025–26 will enhance investment in First Nations social and emotional wellbeing and mental health responses, with the Government working with First Nations stakeholders to deliver the support. Additionally, the Government is providing \$1.4 million from July 2025 to December 2025 to the Black Dog Institute for its National Emergency Worker Support Service, which provides mental health supports to emergency service workers and volunteers.
- \$364.5 million over five years from 2024–25, and \$150.0 million ongoing from 2029–30 will help deliver a more robust, equitable ecosystem of general supports for people with disability outside of the National Disability Insurance Scheme, including addressing local needs for people with disability living in regional, rural and remote communities.
- On 7 February 2025, the Government announced \$842.6 million over six years from 2025–26 to deliver the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment, ensuring First Nations people living in remote communities have equitable access to mainstream services in ways that are relevant to their communities. The Australian Government will work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory to oversee delivery.
- The Government has committed \$21.4 million over three years from 2025–26 to address the Australian Law Reform Commission’s Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence, with funding supporting immediate measures to improve victim and survivor experiences in the justice system, recognising different needs, opportunities and challenges faced by diverse communities across Australia. Additionally, the Government has committed \$21.8 million over two years from 2025–26 to continue the successful delivery of critical prevention, early intervention and response services to address family, domestic, and sexual violence in First Nations communities.
- The Government is strengthening digital connectivity across regional Australia. This includes continuing to build on its previous commitment of \$2.4 billion for Fibre to the Node (FTTN) upgrades by providing up to an additional \$3.0 billion in equity funding to NBN Co over seven years from 2024–25, with funding used to complete upgrades for all remaining FTTN premises. At the end of the upgrades in 2030, around 94 per cent of the NBN fixed-line footprint will be able to access gigabit broadband speeds. NBN Co is

expected to provide improved access to over 334,000 premises located in regional Australia. Additionally, the Government has announced it will introduce a Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation that will require mobile providers (Telstra, Optus, TPG) to provide access to mobile voice and SMS almost everywhere across Australia. The obligation is expected to commence by late 2027, with framework legislation to be brought to Parliament in 2025.

- The Government is keeping regional Australia connected through aviation services. The Government has purchased \$50.0 million of debt owed by Rex to Rex's largest creditor, in addition to providing an \$80.0 million loan facility to the Administrators of Rex, to support Rex to continue operating its regional network through the voluntary administration period. The Government is committed to securing regional aviation by working with the Administrators of Rex, and shortlisted bidders, to maximise the chance of a successful sale of the business run by the Administrators. These commitments recognise the critical role of the Rex network in supporting connection to regional economies, tourism, and access to vital medical and other services.

## Investing in People

Investing in people is an investment in the future of regional communities and the nation's long-term prosperity. Australia's diverse regions are home to millions of unique people, and it is the skills, abilities, ambitions and drive of these people that make regions great.

Since the October 2022–23 Budget, major initiatives supporting regional Australians include helping people and families through responsible cost-of-living relief, such as tax cuts for every Australian taxpayer, initiatives to keep the cost of medicines down, and energy bill relief for households and businesses; significant investment in education and skills development, including through the Regional University Study Hubs program, which has supported over 15,000 students since its establishment – with 56 Hubs now located across regional Australia (including in locations like Broome and Albany in Western Australia, Innisfail and Goondiwindi in Queensland, Wonthaggi in Victoria and Port Augusta in South Australia), and growing investment in Free TAFE; working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in advancing the Closing the Gap agenda; delivering increased investment in arts and culture across Australia – supporting community vitality, cohesion and economic opportunities; and funding for a range of initiatives to support workers to participate in opportunities across emerging and evolving sectors, including to significantly increase women's participation across industry sectors such as construction and clean energy.

The 2025–26 Budget continues to invest in the people of regional Australia through initiatives that help with cost-of-living pressures, support access to education and training, and strengthen social supports.

- The Government is easing cost-of-living pressures for energy consumers by delivering up to \$1.8 billion in additional energy bill relief. This means all households and around one million small businesses – right around the country – will receive an additional \$150 in rebates on their electricity bills through the six-month extension to 31 December 2025.

- The Government recognises cost-of-living concerns can have a significant impact on students from regional, rural and remote areas, undermining educational attainment. To support Free TAFE, the Government has introduced legislation that will establish it as an enduring feature of the national Vocational Education and Training system. Currently, 35 per cent of existing Free TAFE enrolments are in regional locations, and it is anticipated that ongoing Free TAFE will have a positive impact on regional Australia by providing high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity and build a skilled workforce in sectors of national priority.
- The Government is also committing \$7.0 million over four years to increase the Living Away from Home Allowance to \$120 per week for first-year apprentices, \$90 per week for second-year apprentices, and \$45 per week for third-year apprentices, boosting apprentices' wages, easing cost-of-living pressures, and attracting the critical workforce needed to get more regional homes delivered. Funding of \$11.0 million over four years will also be committed to increase the Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Support subsidy to \$216.07 per week to support employers taking on apprentices with disability.
- The Government is supporting students across Australia to access learning opportunities. The Government will provide \$407.5 million over four years from 2025–26 (and \$7.2 billion from 2029–30 to 2035–36) to jurisdictions that have signed Better and Fairer Schools Agreements – with the Government increasing its share of the Schooling Resource Standard to 25 per cent by 2034, putting schools on a path to full and fair funding. The Government is also investing a further \$33.6 million in the Clontarf Foundation, enabling it to support up to 12,500 First Nations boys and young men across 164 academies in 2026, and \$1.5 million in 2025–26 will extend the Making Up Lost Time in Literacy program for an additional year.
- The Government is supporting people in remote communities. \$50.0 million over four years from 2025–26 will provide access to low-cost products for remote stores and lift remote food security governance in remote retailers, supporting remote cost of living and food security. \$21.4 million over three years from 2025–26 will resume and expand a successful store-based Nutrition Workforce, supporting consumers in around 100 remote stores. \$11.4 million over four years from 2025–26 will establish new laundries, or upgrade existing laundries, and maintain and operate them in up to 12 remote First Nations communities across northern and central Australia – helping to reduce the rate of preventable infections.
- To ensure regional, rural and remote communities have a reliable and inclusive way to pay for essential goods and services, and assist with payment system resilience – for example, during natural disasters or digital outages – the Government will mandate that businesses must accept cash when providing essential items, with appropriate exemptions for small businesses.
- The Government has committed \$3.4 million over three years from 2025–26 to establish a place-based business coaching and mentoring program for First Nations businesswomen. The program will provide First Nations businesswomen greater access to the resources, networks and support they need to launch a viable business, commercialise a viable business or grow an existing business. This commitment will be

delivered in partnership with up to 15 First Nations female led businesses or organisations who have existing programs and networks on-Country.

## Investing in Places

The places that make up regional Australia are varied – from remote communities, to the nation’s agricultural food bowls, to centres of industry and manufacturing, and to vibrant regional urban hubs. A broad range of investments, tailored to the unique circumstances of each place, are required to unlock potential and underpin strong, sustainable communities.

Since the October 2022–23 Budget, the Government has recognised and responded to the importance of place in impactful regional investment, including through establishing transparent regional community infrastructure programs like the \$600.0 million Growing Regions Program and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships Program; investing in regional infrastructure including through the Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program, increased support to local councils to maintain local roads by doubling Roads to Recovery funding – which is progressively increasing from \$500.0 million per year to \$1.0 billion per year – and increasing road Black Spots funding; supporting housing availability and affordability, including through the \$10.0 billion Housing Australia Future Fund, which is delivering thousands of new homes across the regions – with far more to come, the Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee which has helped more than 32,000 people in the regions buy a home, the \$1.5 billion Housing Support Program, which is funding enabling infrastructure, social housing and community amenity, and significant investments being made to improve housing in remote Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory. The Government also continues to invest to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate-related natural hazards like bushfires, heatwaves, storms and floods.

The 2025–26 Budget continues the Government’s targeted approach to making regions better places to live, work and invest.

- Through the 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline of over \$120.0 billion, the Government is delivering a sustainable program of nationally significant transport infrastructure projects across Australia, with substantial investment in the 2025–26 Budget improving productivity, resilience, liveability and sustainability in regional Australia. This includes \$7.2 billion towards safety upgrades on the Bruce Highway in Queensland, \$200.0 million towards duplication of the Stuart Highway (Darwin to Katherine) in the Northern Territory, and \$40.0 million for the Main South Road Upgrade – Myponga to Yankalilla in South Australia. The Government has also committed \$1.1 billion towards upgrades along the Western Highway in Victoria, which will include upgrades in regional areas.
- The Government is continuing to support Australians to purchase a home of their own. Around \$800.0 million in equity financing to increase the property price and income caps under the Help to Buy scheme will make the scheme more accessible, including for Australians wishing to purchase a home in a regional area, and \$4.9 million over four years from 2025–26 will continue the Regional Home Buyer Guarantee and the Family



Home Guarantee, which support regional and single-parent first home buyers to purchase a home with a smaller deposit.

- The Government is also supporting the development of modern methods of construction (MMC), such as prefabricated and modular homes – which can offer advantages in regional, rural and remote areas where building homes can be more challenging, time consuming and expensive. \$49.3 million will support states and territories to scale up existing MMC projects, and \$4.7 million will support the Australian Building Codes Board to develop national voluntary certification and rating schemes for MMC to provide regulatory certainty. \$120.0 million from the National Productivity Fund will incentivise states and territories to remove red tape preventing the uptake of MMC.
- \$212.0 million over four years from 2025–26 (and an additional \$50.0 million in 2029–30) will protect more of Australia’s natural environment and help to meet the Government’s commitment to protect 30 per cent of Australia’s landmass and territorial waters by 2030. This includes \$200.0 million (with an additional \$50.0 million in 2029–30) for the Saving Australia’s Bushland program – supporting conservation measures and management practices that reduce the impacts of invasive species and other threats, and \$12.0 million to further protect Australia’s marine parks while supporting strong and sustainable marine industries.
- \$55.2 million over four years from 2025–26 and \$14.1 million per year ongoing from 2029–30 will finalise new financial lease arrangements with Traditional Owners of the three jointly managed Commonwealth national parks – Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee – supporting increased investment in Traditional Owner priorities and business and employment opportunities.
- The Government has committed up to \$850.0 million in partnership with Kongsberg Defence Australia to manufacture and service missiles at Williamstown, near Newcastle in New South Wales. The new manufacturing facility will create more than 500 jobs in the construction phase in the Hunter region and will provide \$100.0 million in economic benefits. Once complete, the factory is expected to employ approximately 100 people. \$590.0 million will address condition, capacity and compliance issues with facilities and infrastructure at RAAF Base Wagga in New South Wales – with construction activity providing increased economic opportunities for local staff and suppliers, and \$518.3 million will provide facilities and infrastructure to support new helicopter capability at RAAF Base Townsville and Townsville Field Training Area, Queensland.
- The Australian Government has provisioned, subject to co-contribution from the Queensland Government, \$41.2 million over five years from 2025–26 for urgent community infrastructure works and \$36.2 million over five years from 2025–26 for climate resilience in the Torres Strait.
- The Australian Government is entering into a joint-funded Federation Funding Agreement with the South Australian Government to support the community of Port Augusta. Both parties will contribute \$6.0 million, providing a total of \$12.0 million to

support community-led investment where it is needed most, including improving safety and wellbeing in the region.

## Investing in Industries and Local Economies

Across regional Australia, strong industries and local economies provide jobs, underpin prosperity and support national economic security. Targeted, strategic investment supports regions to make the most of their existing economic strengths, while ensuring regions are on the front foot in harnessing diversification and growth opportunities in new and emerging sectors.

Since the October 2022–23 Budget, the Government has worked to support the long-term strength of regional industries and economies – recognising the importance of Australia’s regions in transitioning to a net zero economy, and in continuing to provide the produce and resources that feed and strengthen the nation. This includes through the Government’s \$22.7 billion Future Made in Australia agenda, which is building new clean energy industries, and in turn, ensuring national security and prosperity – including through the \$1.7 billion Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund, which supports innovation and pre-commercial activities in eligible priority sectors, many of which will support the creation of new industries and economic opportunities in regional Australia; establishing the Net Zero Economy Authority to ensure workers, industries and communities can seize the opportunities of Australia’s net zero transformation; the \$15.0 billion National Reconstruction Fund and the \$1.9 billion Powering the Regions Fund; the Future Gas Strategy which sets out how the gas in Australia’s energy systems will support the transition to net zero; significant support for the growth of emerging sectors like critical minerals and hydrogen, through initiatives including the Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive, the Critical Minerals National Productivity Initiative, the Hydrogen Production Tax Incentive, extension of the Hydrogen Headstart program and the \$3.4 billion Resourcing Australia’s Prosperity initiative; and driving growth and productivity across traditional regional sectors like agriculture, such as through the \$1.0 billion investment towards a strong and sustainably funded biosecurity system, and support to deliver more sustainable and climate-smart agriculture.

The 2025–26 Budget continues the Government’s strategic support for strong and sustainable regional economies and Australian businesses across the country.

- The Government is forging a green metals future – supporting regional employment, accelerating decarbonisation, and helping Australia’s metals industry to remain competitive, sustainable and a source of well-paid jobs for decades to come. This includes committing \$1.0 billion to the Green Iron Investment Fund over seven years from 2024–25, to boost green iron manufacturing and unlock private investment at scale, and jointly committing with the South Australian Government up to \$2.4 billion to stabilise and support the long-term future of the steelworks, and support workers and the community in Whyalla – including up to \$500.0 million of the Green Iron Investment Fund earmarked to support the longer-term transformation of the Whyalla Steelworks. The Government has previously committed \$2.0 billion over 19 years from

2024–25 for a Green Aluminium Production Credit to support Australia’s aluminium smelters to transition to renewable energy and become competitive in green metals.

- Supporting strong futures for the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors, \$23.8 million over three years from 2025–26 will promote innovation and investment in the sectors by funding sponsorship of regional trade events and forums, and \$11.0 million in 2025–26 will help farmers, foresters and rangers reduce and prevent the impact of established pests and weeds on agriculture, regional communities, the environment and First Nations cultures. Additionally, \$6.8 million in 2025–26 will sustain the Government’s work to enable and protect international market access for agricultural goods, represent Australia’s agricultural interests, and contribute to global standards for free and fair trade, and \$3.5 million over two years from 2025–26 will support development of a new National Food Security Strategy, positioning Australia as a food superpower.
- The Government is delivering \$250.0 million to accelerate the pace of Australia’s growing domestic low carbon liquid fuels industry. Provided as grants to support pre-commercial innovation, demonstration and deployment, this funding is part of the \$1.7 billion Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund. Low carbon liquid fuels can be produced sustainably from waste, biomass such as agricultural feedstock, or renewable hydrogen. The development of low carbon fuels will drive economic growth and jobs in regional areas, including supporting diversification and value-adding opportunities in agriculture, and making good use of excess feedstock from crops, sugarcane and waste products such as tallow.
- The Government has committed \$20.0 million in 2025–26 for initiatives to encourage consumers to buy Australian-made products, supporting Australian-owned businesses, including those in regional, rural and remote Australia.

## Regional Investment Framework

### Purpose

The Framework is a new approach to how the Australian Government delivers regional investment – valuing local voices and priorities, being informed by and building the evidence, operating with flexibility, integrity and transparency, and coordinating across governments to make investments work better for regions. It provides an integrated and coordinated framework for regional development regardless of a region’s economic circumstances.

### Guiding principles – *applied across all Australian Government investments in regions*

- Realising the Government’s ambition of ‘no one held back and no one left behind’ requires specific regional investment across portfolios.
- Australia’s regions and their economies are diverse, with each having unique strengths and challenges.
- Delivering on the potential of regional Australia requires building on each region’s unique strengths, including helping regions undergoing significant economic change to transition or adapt to specific structural challenges.
- Place-based decision-making that draws on the experience of local government alongside regional bodies must guide investment in our regions.

### Priority focus areas – *our key objectives across government*

✓ Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people. ✓ Supporting the transformation to a net zero economy and decarbonisation. ✓ Achieving gender equality.

Investing in People	Investing in Places	Investing in Services	Investing in Industries and Local Economies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Listening to local voices and partnering with communities.</li> <li>✓ Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Supporting adaptive, accessible, sustainable and liveable regions.</li> <li>✓ Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Enhancing connectivity, accessibility and equity of services.</li> <li>✓ Investment including across communications, health, water, and transport.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Investment to help activate economic and industry growth.</li> <li>✓ Supporting the conditions needed for regional industries to diversify and grow.</li> </ul>

### Implementation

- The Government will embed engagement with communities – for example through Regional Development Australia committees – into decision-making processes.
- Data and trends from across a range of sources will contribute to evidence-based decision-making and delivery of regular State of the Regions reports.
- Regular and collaborative engagement with all states and territories will share information and work to leverage investments across governments.
- Across diverse policy and program areas, the Government will work together to ensure investment is delivering optimal, joined-up outcomes for regions.

## 2025–26 Budget: Portfolio investments in regional Australia

This section of the Regional Ministerial Budget Statement outlines how each portfolio across government plays a part in supporting regional Australia and implementing the principles and objectives of the Regional Investment Framework.

### Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio supports a more sustainable and prosperous future for Australia's regions by supporting agricultural production and trade, and protecting Australia's people, environment, economy and lifestyle from biosecurity threats.

The Australian Government recognises the critical role agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries play in the prosperity of regional Australia. The overall production value of the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors is projected to reach \$98.0 billion in 2025–26. This is the third highest production value on record and demonstrates the Australian agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors are resilient to changes in international markets, seasonal conditions and input costs.

With approximately 70 per cent of Australian agricultural goods exported, agricultural trade and exports are a source of direct economic, job and skill security in regional and remote Australian communities where agricultural goods are predominantly produced. The Government is continuing to support agricultural exports and Australia's international position in a more uncertain geopolitical and international trading environment through investment in sustaining technical market access services and supporting the delivery of international engagement.

Australia's food security and resilience is more important than ever, particularly in regional communities where the risk of food insecurity is increasing. The Government is strengthening Australia's food security and resilience through investment in regional industries and the development of a National Food Security Strategy. These initiatives will increase agricultural productivity and supply chain resilience, as well as promote investment and innovation in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors. This will help strengthen Australia's food security, drive sustainable and ongoing agricultural growth, and minimise price volatility and costs at the checkout for Australian households.

Australia's biosecurity system is essential for domestic food security and resilience, the long-term profitability of our agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries, and the sustainability of agricultural production, tourism, and Australia's unique environment. The Government is continuing to invest in Australia's biosecurity across multiple measures including the provision over \$100.0 million from 2024–25 to enhance national preparedness and response capability for H5 High Pathogenicity Avian influenza (bird flu). Additionally, the Government is investing in new and redeveloping seaports and airports to maintain

Australia’s biosecurity standards. Combined with the Government’s existing investment in biosecurity, these measures will contribute to protecting Australia from pests and diseases, secure Australia’s position as a supplier of choice in an increasingly competitive international trade environment, and maintain the security and resilience of regional industries and local economies.

## **New initiatives**

### **Securing Agricultural Exports**

The Government is investing \$6.8 million in 2025–26 to sustain the Government’s work to enable and protect international market access for agricultural goods, represent Australia’s agricultural interests, and contribute to global standards for free and fair trade by participating in multilateral standard-setting bodies. These trade functions, inside the department, are critical in supporting Australia’s agricultural, fishery and forestry exporting businesses in accessing overseas markets and ensuring the smooth flow of trade in Australian food and fibre products. These functions support the stability of Australia’s international agricultural trade position in a more uncertain geopolitical and international trading environment. This provides job security for regional and remote communities where agricultural goods are predominantly produced.

### **Showcasing Australian Agriculture – Regional Trade Events**

The Government is increasing its investment in regional trade events by committing \$23.8 million over three years from 2025–26. The measure will promote innovation and investment in the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors in Australia by funding sponsorship of regional trade events and forums, including a doubling of funding to \$12.0 million for Beef Australia.

Government support for, and presence at, regional trade events secures a vibrant and diverse trade event calendar for Australia’s agricultural producers, who are primarily based in regional, rural and remote locations. Trade events bring regional communities together and enable remotely located producers to share innovative ideas and attract economic activity, with Beef Australia 2024 delivering a value-added impact of \$92.0 million for the Greater Rockhampton Region. Trade events facilitate economic opportunities in the long term by supporting trade, investment and productivity enhancements. This initiative builds on the 2022–23 October Budget measure Support for Regional Trade Events.

### **National Food Security Strategy – Feeding Australia**

The Government has committed \$3.5 million over two years from 2025–26 for the development of a new National Food Security Strategy. The National Food Security Strategy will position Australia as a regional food superpower, ensuring the success of our agricultural sector and supply chains while securing our regions by supporting farmers.

The strategy will aim to deliver improved agricultural productivity and supply chain resilience, which in turn will provide insights into food price volatility, improve food security, and provide cost-of-living relief for Australian households. A food-secure Australia will ensure we are a nation that can support our regional and remote communities, and promote sustainability and ongoing productivity for our agriculture sector.

**Biosecurity – for reduction and prevention activities to reduce the economic and environmental burden of established feral animals, pests and weeds**

The Government is investing \$11.0 million in 2025–26 to help our farmers, foresters and rangers to reduce and prevent the impact of established pests and weeds on Australian agriculture, regional communities, the environment, and First Nations culture. This funding is an extension of the 4-year (2021–22 to 2024–25) \$49.1 million Supporting Communities Manage Pest Animals and Weeds Program, to continue national coordinated action on the worst pests and weeds, research and development to improve control tools, and strategic on-ground action (including through co-funding with state and territory governments) to contain species and drive down impacts. Improved pest and weed management will increase agricultural productivity, boost farm profitability and resilience, and have flow-on effects on the prosperity of our environment and regional communities.





## Attorney-General's

The Attorney-General's portfolio delivers programs and policies to improve law and justice outcomes, ensuring all Australians have access to services supporting their safety and security regardless of where they live.

The portfolio's work spans a range of significant areas such as safeguarding vulnerable Australians who are experiencing abuse, keeping the justice system accessible, and delivering culturally appropriate and responsive services that support the Closing the Gap agenda. Regular public consultations on policy matters such as a national point of referral for child sexual abuse, the National Firearms Register, and options to prevent elder abuse were held by the department to inform policy decisions and drive meaningful collaboration across governments and the public. By putting local voices at the forefront to influence decision making, the department is committed to delivering services that are accessible, equitable and adaptive to the needs of all Australians.

The department continues to maintain strong links with regional Australia through a range of policies supporting the Closing the Gap agenda. For example, the Australian Government provided funding for the Justice Policy Partnership and Justice Reinvestment Programs to tackle over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and youth through empowering community to develop local, tailored initiatives that address the underlying causes of incarceration. In addition, the Government committed ongoing funding to a suite of measures to improve outcomes for native title holders through a more efficient, culturally safe resolution of native title claims. Approximately 45 per cent of Australia's landmass, including a significant proportion of regional Australia, has been determined to be covered by native title.

At the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2024-25*, the department supported regional Australia through several initiatives including:

- \$3.9 billion for the National Access to Justice Partnership 2025-2030 (NAJP) (with ongoing funding beyond the term of agreement), which will benefit Australians living in outer regional and remote areas, a national priority client group of the NAJP, with increased access to legal assistance services
- \$19.6 million over five years from 2024-25 to go towards specialist services, including some services operating in rural and regional areas, to provide much-needed, accessible supports to children affected by family violence, victims and survivors of child sexual abuse, and children at risk of or engaging in harmful sexual behaviour.

### New initiatives

#### Strengthening justice system responses to sexual violence

The Government has committed \$21.4 million over three years from 2025-26 to address the Australian Law Reform Commission's Inquiry into Justice Responses to Sexual Violence. The measure funds immediate measures to improve victim and survivor experiences in the

justice system and sets out an approach to put in place longer term measures to drive a nationally coordinated approach to complex law reform. The department recognises the different needs, opportunities and challenges faced by diverse communities across regional, rural and remote Australia.

A public consultation will be conducted with legal experts, victim survivors, law enforcement and other relevant stakeholders.

Aspects of this proposal, particularly trials and reviews of existing systems and the expansion of the legal services pilots, will benefit people living in regional or remote areas, through consideration of services targeted to victims and survivors from a diverse range of areas across Australia.

# Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

The Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water portfolio supports sustainable, liveable and resilient regions across Australia with community and Country at the heart of our actions. The portfolio's work drives climate action; transforms Australia's energy system to deliver cheaper, more reliable power; establishes Australia as a renewable energy superpower; conserves, protects and sustainably manages Australia's environment and water resources; and protects Australia's cultural, historic and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' heritage. The portfolio partners with communities to address the nation's diverse needs and meet community expectations for regional investment. A strong and resilient environment and local industry underpin regional prosperity and support Australia's economic security.

Regional Australia is uniquely placed to harness the opportunities from the net zero transformation given our abundant renewable energy resources. Transforming Australia's electricity grids is a prerequisite for capitalising on our comparative advantage in producing cleaner, cheaper energy. This transformation will enable the opportunities of a net zero economy for regional areas, including creation of new jobs and opportunities for new investment and industries, while simultaneously reducing emissions here and around the world. Successful programs such as Rewiring the Nation and the Capacity Investment Scheme continue to support investment in new renewable energy systems that secure reliable and lower cost electricity, while modernising electricity grids across Australia.

The sustainable management of Australia's environment and water resources is essential to the culture and prosperity of regional communities and economies. Supporting sustainable land use is vital to our regions, with our agriculture and rural industries underpinning regional employment and economic growth. Our work to minimise climate-based threats is also pivotal in protecting the natural capital we depend on. Key achievements of the portfolio include cracking down on feral animals and weeds, increasing private investment in nature, expanding Australia's National Reserve System and marine parks, protecting our iconic nature and ecosystem services that benefit regional communities, and improving water security.

Safe and reliable water underpins the resilience and productivity of regional and remote Australia and provides the foundation for industries and communities to diversify and grow. Demand for this precious resource is increasing. The National Water Grid Fund supports projects that improve regional water security to increase local productivity and access to reliable drinking water. Developing a new National Water Agreement and future-proofing the Murray-Darling Basin with the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023* will provide more time, more options, more accountability, and more transparency to deliver stronger water management and planning.

The portfolio continues to support First Nations groups to protect precious land and sea through the expanded Indigenous Protected Areas program, ongoing support for our beloved National Parks, and protecting cultural heritage through national and world

heritage protections. These initiatives deliver increased opportunity to First Nations peoples to participate in an economy that recognises the value of First Nations knowledge and connection with Country, and increase job opportunities to protect and manage these important places and values. The Australian Government is negotiating updated lease arrangements with Traditional Owners on the jointly managed Commonwealth national parks and rolling out the Parks Infrastructure packages, which will see new and upgraded facilities to increase and enhance tourism opportunities in regional Australia.

## **New initiatives**

### **Protecting Our Environment**

The Australian Government has provided \$212.0 million over four years from 2025–26 (and an additional \$50.0 million in 2029–30) to protect more of Australia’s natural environment and to help meet the Government’s commitment to protect 30 per cent of Australia’s landmass and territorial waters by 2030. This includes \$200.0 million for the Saving Australia’s Bushland program (with an additional \$50.0 million in 2029–30) and \$12.0 million to build on the Government’s investment to deliver increased ocean protection.

The Saving Australia’s Bushland program will further deliver on the commitment to protect 30 per cent of Australia’s land and secure millions of hectares of quality, iconic natural bushland. The program will support conservation measures and management practices that reduce the impacts of invasive species and other threats. The program will provide targeted investment through the Government’s Nature Repair Market for increased private land conservation, opportunity for targeted purchase of high-value biodiversity areas from willing sellers, recognition of land management practices delivering biodiversity protection, and the establishment of new Indigenous Protected Areas. It provides an opportunity to diversify income streams for landholders across regional Australia and support First Nations communities to care for their Country.

Building on existing ocean protection measures, this initiative provides a balanced approach to further protecting Australia’s beloved marine parks, while supporting strong and sustainable marine industries. This program will ensure Australians can continue to sustainably use and have pride in our marine parks for generations to come. Increased protections will allow habitats to thrive, providing increased breeding zones for more fish which will benefit regional marine industries and tourism around our beautiful coasts.

### **Protecting Australia’s Iconic National Parks – continuing delivery**

The Government has committed \$55.2 million over four years from 2025–26 and \$14.1 million per year ongoing from 2029–30 to finalise new financial lease arrangements with Traditional Owners of the three jointly managed Commonwealth national parks: Kakadu, Uluru-Kata Tjuta and Booderee.

The new leases will see increased investment in Traditional Owner priorities such as housing for local communities, Traditional Owners investing their own capital into

economic opportunities, and employment opportunities relating to tourism, infrastructure and conservation activities. The updated leases will strengthen partnerships between the Government and Traditional Owners, boosting certainty and stability for those who wish to visit the parks and for the regional tourism sector. Regional environmental benefits will also accrue as additional funds will support improvements in land management including weed and feral animal control, and improved fire management.



## Defence

The Defence portfolio includes the Department of Defence, the Australian Signals Directorate, the Australian Submarine Agency and Defence Housing Australia. The portfolio is responsible for protecting Australia and its national interests, promoting security and responding in times of crisis.

The 2024 National Defence Strategy identified a sovereign defence industrial base is vital for developing higher levels of military preparedness and self-reliance. It also accelerates innovation and capability delivery, drawing on defence industry across the country including in regional areas.

Defence delivers regional employment opportunities, supports local businesses and suppliers, and invests in new technologies and industry capabilities. Defence support provided to regional, rural and remote Australians includes economic activity from Defence exercises and major training activities; Defence industry development; support for significant public events; engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, predominantly through employment and First Nations procurement activities; Defence youth programs; and environmental management and cooperation on heritage issues.

The portfolio has a significant footprint across Australia, with extensive bases, Defence housing, and associated employment and community engagement activities, which fosters strong ties with local regions and contributes to building strong and sustainable communities. Defence members and their families are an integral part of regional communities, interacting on official duties and at community activities and events. Defence recognises the economic impact engaging local staff and suppliers has on regional communities, where there is capacity and capability available in the local market.

Defence also maintains strong links with regional and rural Australia through Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel undertaking reserve service. While many reserve units are headquartered in regional centres with staff and ADF personnel based in surrounding districts, there are also options for some reserve service personnel to live in rural or regional locations and work remotely. The ADF has a total of 31,463 reserve service members, with 11,995 (38 per cent) located in regional or rural areas.

The Defence estate consists of 360 owned properties and approximately 497 domestic leases. Facilities include 70 major bases, training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation, including Defence Force recruitment centres. In addition, Defence Housing Australia manages more than 17,000 properties in capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations of Australia where the ADF has a presence, and has residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. Construction and maintenance activity associated with Defence facilities and housing in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

## New initiatives

### Domestic Missile Production Facility

The Australian Government has committed up to \$850.0 million in partnership with Kongsberg Defence Australia, to manufacture and service missiles at Williamstown, near Newcastle in New South Wales. The new manufacturing facility will create more than 500 jobs in the construction phase in the Hunter region and will provide \$100.0 million in economic benefits. Once complete, the factory is expected to employ approximately 100 people.

### Army Long-Range Fires Capability

In February 2025, the Government committed a \$272.0 million investment to buy up to 14 multi mission phased array radars for the Australian Army. These phased array radars aim to provide support to the Army's long-range fires capability, ensuring an integrated, focused Defence Force can continue to monitor potential threats. CEA Technologies will produce these radars, sustaining over 700 jobs in Canberra and across the country. It is expected an initial batch of radars will be delivered from 2027.

### Additional Bushmasters for the Australian Army

Across 2024–25, the Government announced investments totalling \$145.0 million to buy at least an additional 55 Bushmaster Protected Mobility Vehicles for the Australian Army. These Bushmasters will be used by the Army's long-range fires regiment, and based at the 10th Fires Brigade in the Edinburgh Defence Precinct in South Australia. These Bushmasters will be built by Thales Australia in Bendigo, supporting the retention of hundreds of jobs locally.

### Maintenance Contract for the Seahawk Helicopter Fleet

In February 2025, the Government announced the award of a \$313.5 million contract with Sikorsky Australia to maintain the MH-60R Seahawk helicopter fleet. The MH-60R fleet is fundamental to anti-submarine, anti-surface warfare and utility missions undertaken by the Royal Australian Navy. This contract is anticipated to generate 75 new jobs (including 20 apprenticeships), sustaining up to 275 highly skilled, well-paid jobs at the company's maintenance and logistics facility in Nowra (Yerriyong). Approximately 83.5 per cent of the contract value will be delivered through support activities undertaken in Nowra (Yerriyong). Additionally, this contract will enable the Nowra (Yerriyong) facility to become a future maintenance hub that could be used by the United States Navy for repair, overhaul and upgrade support, enhancing supply chain resilience in the Indo-Pacific region.



## **New enterprise estate and infrastructure projects in regional areas in 2025–26**

Defence estate and infrastructure investment is funded through the Defence Integrated Investment Program. Construction and maintenance activities associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provide considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities. During 2024–25, a total of 64 subcontractor packages, with a total value of about \$95.1 million, were awarded to First Nations subcontractors, with a further \$62.0 million awarded to First Nations prime contractors. Newly approved projects with works at one or more regional locations are outlined below.

### **RAAF Base Wagga Redevelopment**

This project is addressing condition, capacity and compliance issues with facilities and infrastructure at RAAF Base Wagga New South Wales, for \$590.0 million. This includes upgrading and constructing new infrastructure, and demolishing aged facilities. Construction activity will provide increased economic opportunities for local staff and suppliers, with completion scheduled for mid-2031.

### **Army Aviation Program of Works**

This program of works is providing facilities and infrastructure to support new helicopter capability at RAAF Base Townsville and Townsville Field Training Area, Queensland, for \$518.3 million. Construction is scheduled for completion in late 2028.

### **Albury-Wodonga Military Area Redevelopment**

This project will invest \$395.7 million to construct new living-in accommodation and a multi-user depot, renovate existing living-in accommodation, refurbish messes and demolish redundant facilities at the Albury Wodonga Military Area, New South Wales and Victoria, for \$395.7 million.

### **Facilities to Support AIR 5349 Phase 6 Advanced Growler**

This project is providing storage, maintenance and working accommodation facilities at RAAF Base Amberley, Queensland, and Delamere Air Weapons Range, Northern Territory, for \$228.1 million. Construction is scheduled for completion in late 2026.

### **RAAF Base Learmonth Redevelopment Enabling KC-30A Operations**

In 2024 the RAAF Base Learmonth Redevelopment invested \$662.2 million to upgrade the airfield at RAAF Base Learmonth to support KC-30A aircraft operations. Works will include strengthening the runway and taxiways, constructing new connecting taxiways, and constructing dedicated parking aprons with in-ground hydrant refuelling points.

**Airfield Capital Works P0013 (Curtin and Learmonth)**

This project is maintaining aircraft pavements and aeronautical ground lighting at RAAF Base Curtin and RAAF Base Learmonth, Western Australia, for \$237.2 million. Construction is scheduled for completion in mid-2027.

**Airfield Capital Works P0012 (RAAF Townsville)**

This project is maintaining aircraft pavements and aeronautical ground lighting at RAAF Base Townsville, Queensland, for \$127.6 million. Construction is scheduled for completion in late 2026.

# Education

Providing opportunities and access to education for all Australians, regardless of their location, is fundamental to building a better and fairer education system.

The Australian Government is committed to improving outcomes for students from early childhood education and care through to schools and tertiary education, no matter where they live. The Government has built on previous initiatives and structural reforms to provide targeted support to equity cohorts, invest in the capability of Australians, and deliver essential services in regional communities.

In 2025, the Government will provide an estimated \$31.1 billion in recurrent funding to Australian schools, of which around \$6.9 billion is benefitting students in regional and remote schools. Additionally, the Choice and Affordability Fund will provide \$124.4 million in 2025–26 in support for non-government schools, including an estimated \$22.8 million in regional and remote locations.

A number of programs have been extended to support education outcomes for students.

- The pilot rebates provided under the Parliament and Civics Education Rebate (PACER) program will be extended for the 2025 calendar year. The PACER program provides financial assistance for students to visit national democratic, historical and cultural institutions in Canberra. The extension will continue the higher rebate levels for outer regional, remote and very remote schools, those in socio-educationally disadvantaged schools, and schools less than 150 km from Canberra.
- The Aurora Education Foundation’s Redefining Indigenous Success in Education (RISE) initiative will be extended to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students through activities such as tutoring and mentoring programs, and undertake a comparative analysis of the impacts of these supports.

The Government is committed to improving the accessibility and affordability of early childhood education and care (ECEC). From January 2026, the existing Child Care Subsidy activity test will be replaced with a 3 Day Guarantee. Families will be eligible for three days per week (72 hours per fortnight) of child care subsidy, and families with First Nations children will have a greater entitlement of 100 hours per fortnight of subsidy, regardless of parents’ level of work, training, study or other activity.

To increase ECEC places across Australia and drive supply of high-quality care, the Government has established the Building Early Education Fund. It includes:

- \$529.6 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$1.2 million in 2028–29) for targeted capital grant rounds to establish new child care services and to increase the capacity of existing services in under-served and unserved areas, including in the outer suburbs and the regions

- \$2.3 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Department of Education to undertake a business case for the Commonwealth to invest in owning and leasing a portfolio of ECEC centres to increase the supply of ECEC services, with \$500.0 million provisioned for future investments.

The Government is taking further steps to respond to the Australian Universities Accord (the Accord), including through significant funding reforms to ensure more students can access, participate in and succeed in higher education.

- A new Managed Growth Funding System for Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) will be implemented through a staged approach, with a transition year in 2026 and full commencement in 2027, to better meet future skill and employment needs and increase opportunities for students from under-represented backgrounds, including regional and remote students. In 2035, the new system is expected to deliver an additional 82,000 fully funded CSPs, in comparison with current system projections.
- A new approach to equity funding including demand-driven Needs-based Funding will provide more support to publicly funded higher education providers to help students from low socio-economic status backgrounds, First Nations students, and students studying at regional campuses to successfully complete university. Dedicated outreach funding will also be available to support initiatives that engage people from under-represented backgrounds, including those from regional and remote areas, in higher education and to grow the future student pipeline.

The responsibility for the Indigenous Student Success Program will also be transferred from the National Indigenous Australians Agency to the Department of Education to align with other funding measures in response to the Accord Final Report.

The Regional University Study Hubs Program helps students in regional and remote areas, including First Nations students, access higher education without having to leave their community, with 56 hubs located across the country and over 15,000 students supported by Hubs since the program's establishment in 2018–19.

The Government's commitment to regional, rural and remote education is supported through the work of Australia's Regional Education Commissioner, the Honourable Fiona Nash.

## **New initiatives**

### **Additional supports for families and early childhood education and care providers impacted by ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred**

The Government has provided additional early childhood and care (ECEC) supports for those affected by ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. This will provide relief to Child Care Subsidy (CCS) approved services attended by more than 200,000 families and more than 300,000 children. This includes \$2.5 million in 2024–25 and 2025–26 to enable ECEC services that

closed or partially closed for eight days or longer, and waived families' gap fee payments, to access an ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred support payment of \$10,000.

This builds on existing supports provided to Australians residing in cyclone-affected regions under CCS period of emergency arrangements, including:

- Enabling services to continue to receive CCS even if they are closed
- Enabling services to waive families' gap fee payments
- Providing families with unlimited additional paid absences.

### **Better and Fairer Schools Agreement – fully and fairly funding Australian schools**

The Government is delivering better and fairer public schools through an updated school funding and reform agreement. The new agreement will see public schools put on a path to full and fair funding.

The Government will provide \$407.5 million over four years from 2025–26 (and \$7.2 billion from 2029–30 to 2035–36) to jurisdictions which have signed Better and Fairer Schools Agreement 2025–2024 – Full and Fair Funding Bilateral Agreements. The agreement sees the Commonwealth increase its share of the Schooling Resource Standard to 25 per cent by 2034, putting schools on a path to full and fair funding.

The 10-year Better and Fairer Schools Agreement ties new Commonwealth Government funding for public schools to reforms to help lift education standards across the country. This includes mandating evidence-based teaching practices, Year 1 phonics and early years of schooling numeracy checks to identify students who need additional help, more individualised and intensive supports for students, more mental health support in schools and more support for teachers. Under this agreement, jurisdictions will also end their use of the 4 per cent provision which allowed them to claim things like capital depreciation.

The Government has provisioned funding for these reforms and negotiations with jurisdictions who are yet to sign the heads of agreement or bilateral agreements, with funding being held in the Contingency Reserve pending finalisation of negotiations.

### **More opportunities for regional students to study medicine**

There is a persistent shortage of doctors practising in regional Australia, leading to longer wait times and poorer health outcomes for local communities. Evidence shows that giving more regional students and First Nations Australians the chance to live, train and work in regional areas will lead to more doctors for regional communities.

This is why the Government is providing \$35.7 million over four years from 2025–26 for 100 new commencing Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) a year in medicine from 2026, increasing to 150 per year by 2028, and providing demand-driven places for First Nations students to study medicine. This investment is a cross-portfolio initiative led by the

Department of Health and Aged Care, with a total investment of \$48.2 million. Further detail about this initiative is included in the Department of Health and Aged Care chapter of the Regional Ministerial Budget Statement.

### **Closing the Gap – education**

The Government is investing a further \$33.6 million in the Clontarf Foundation, enabling it to support up to 12,500 First Nations boys and young men across 164 academies in 2026. Participants are provided with a range of supports to improve wellbeing, discipline, life skills, self-esteem, and further education and employment prospects.

Additionally, \$1.5 million will be provided in 2025–26 to extend the MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) program for an additional year. This funding extension will allow the continuation of this phonics-based program to First Nations students in 42 regional and remote primary schools until the end of the 2026 school year.

These measures seek to drive school attendance and engagement, contributing towards the Government’s efforts to close the gap in Year 12 attainment (Closing the Gap Target 5).

# Employment and Workplace Relations

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations supports people in Australia to have safe, secure and well-paid work with the skills for a sustainable future. The department provides advice and implements Australian Government policies and programs to help deliver secure jobs with strong wages and contribute to a dynamic and inclusive labour market.

The department contributes to the delivery of the Government's Regional Investment Framework by promoting and supporting investment in people, industries and local economies across Australia. The department works collaboratively with other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments, international organisations, regulators, businesses, peak bodies, employment providers, unions, employers and the community.

The 2025–26 Budget includes measures that support regional employers and employees and addresses skills and workforce needs. Initiatives are focused on assisting with cost-of-living pressures, supporting the construction sector to ease housing pressures, and improving pathways and processes to build a skilled future workforce, building on the Government's Future Made in Australia plan.

## New initiatives

Vocational education and training (VET) students in regional and remote Australia make up 26.8 per cent of all VET students and have strong employment outcomes upon completion. However, cost-of-living concerns, including the costs associated with travelling long distances to undertake training, can have a significant impact on students from regional and remote areas, undermining educational attainment. Enhancing access to VET for students in regional and remote communities will improve this. Supporting people to access Free TAFE, and apprenticeships through the apprenticeship incentives programs, will strengthen local economies facing workforce shortages and help build prosperous communities across Australia.

## Free TAFE

In the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2024–25*, the Government committed \$253.7 million over two years from 2026–27 and around \$177.0 million each year from 2028–29 (an additional \$1.4 billion from 2028–29 to 2034–35) to build on the success of Free TAFE by providing ongoing funding to remove tuition fees for 100,000 TAFE and VET places per annum from 1 January 2027, indexed to population growth. To support Free TAFE, the Government has introduced legislation that will establish it as an enduring feature of the national VET system. Places will be focused on national priority industries. Currently 35 per cent of existing Free TAFE enrolments are in regional and remote locations. It is anticipated that ongoing Free TAFE will also have positive impacts on regional Australia by providing high-quality, responsive and accessible education and training to boost productivity and build a skilled workforce in sectors of national priority.

## Increased support for apprentices

On 24 January 2025, the Government announced additional investments in Australia’s apprenticeship system as an initial response to the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System. The Government will maintain the 2025 Priority List and extend current Australian Apprentice Training Support and Priority Hiring Incentive payment settings by six months until 31 December 2025. This will provide consistency for employers and cost-of-living relief to apprentices in priority occupations, including those in regional and rural areas, while the Government considers the review’s findings and consults with stakeholders on longer-term reforms.

The Government has committed \$626.9 million over four years to support the skilled workforce development required to help achieve Australia’s housing commitments, through additional supports for apprentices working in housing construction. From 1 July 2025, eligible apprentices will receive \$10,000 in incentive payments, on top of their wages, over the life of their apprenticeship through the new Housing Construction Apprenticeship stream of the Key Apprenticeship Program. This reflects the importance of the construction sector by encouraging the growth of this critical workforce and expanding the pipeline of workers training in housing and construction apprenticeships.

The Government is also committing \$7.0 million over four years to increase the Living Away from Home Allowance to \$120 per week for first-year apprentices, \$90 per week for second-year apprentices and \$45 per week for third-year apprentices, so apprentices can meet the costs associated with moving to take up an apprenticeship. Funding of \$11.0 million over four years will also be committed to increase the Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Support subsidy to \$216.07 per week to support employers taking on apprentices with disability. This increase in funding will encourage greater participation from people in regional and rural areas, who are more likely to be living away from home to complete an apprenticeship due to distance. Increasing the Disability Australian Apprentice Wage Support subsidy will support employers taking on apprentices with disability. Annual review checks for apprentices with permanent disability will also be removed to reduce administrative burden. This funding increase will positively impact all Australians living with disability, including those living in regional and rural areas facing additional barriers to completing an apprenticeship.



## Foreign Affairs and Trade

The Foreign Affairs and Trade portfolio works to promote and protect Australia's international interests to support Australia's security and prosperity. The portfolio comprises the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the Australian Trade and Investment Commission (Austrade), Export Finance Australia, the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research, Tourism Australia, and the Australian Secret Intelligence Service.

The portfolio works across the Australian Public Service, with Australian organisations and businesses, and with international partners and institutions to build the conditions for a peaceful, open, stable, and prosperous regional and global environment in which sovereignty is respected. The portfolio has a critical role in providing timely and responsive consular and passport services to Australians overseas, as well as supporting the growth of Australia's regional economies back home, including through promoting Australia internationally as a compelling tourism destination for leisure, business events travel, and building business capability to meet visitor needs.

The portfolio works with other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments and businesses to reduce barriers to trade for Australian exporters and importers, and leads in coordinating and representing Australia's interests to the world. Through trade and investment services, Australian businesses are able to grow and diversify into new markets, further expand into existing markets, and benefit from investment opportunities.

The portfolio also supports the Future Made in Australia plan, which focuses on creating new jobs and opportunities for our country by maximising the economic and industrial benefits of the move to net zero. This will help secure Australia's place in a changing global economic and strategic landscape. Through the new initiative announced in the 2025–26 Budget, the portfolio will continue to boost trade, investment and tourism opportunities with India.

The portfolio will continue to build on the success of the THRIVE 2030 strategy, which aims to achieve total visitor expenditure of \$230.0 billion by 2030, with a visitor expenditure target in regional Australia of \$100.0 billion by 2030. In the 12 months to June 2024, THRIVE 2030 visitor spend was tracking ahead of schedule, reaching \$213.5 billion, of which \$82.0 billion (38 per cent) was in regional areas.

### New initiative

#### Boosting Australia's Economic Ties with India

The Government has committed \$20.0 million over four years from 2025–26 for a package of new funding commitments to deliver on the New Roadmap for Australia's Economic Engagement with India (the Roadmap). The Roadmap supports Australian businesses to develop their expertise and literacy in the Indian market, and boost Australia's trade and investment with this fast-growing market.



## Health and Aged Care

The Department of Health and Aged Care develops and delivers evidence-based policy, well-targeted programs, and best practice regulation to achieve better health and wellbeing for all Australians, now and for future generations. The Budget will advance the Australian Government's agenda to strengthen Medicare through reforms to deliver affordable, high-quality primary care for all Australians, especially for those living in regional, rural and remote communities.

Strengthening Medicare will support people across regional, rural and remote Australia to get the care they need close to home, while taking the pressure off hospital emergency departments and easing cost-of-living pressures. New investments of \$7.9 billion to strengthen Medicare through increased access to bulk billing, \$644.3 million for additional Medicare Urgent Care Clinics and \$662.6 million for the health workforce will ensure Australians can access care whenever they need it.

Further investments to improve and grow the primary healthcare workforce will continue to ensure that Australians have access to high-quality, affordable healthcare. Investments in this Budget will encourage more junior doctors to become general practitioners (GPs) and rural generalists (RGs), including in regional, rural and remote locations.

The Budget will build upon the transformational reform to the aged care system that the Australian Government has undertaken. It will ensure that there is dignity and equitable access for older Australians in regional and rural communities. Investments will also ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations can deliver culturally informed aged care assessments.

There is also a focus on prevention, early intervention and management of communicable diseases that will improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and regional communities.

The Government is delivering \$135.0 million over six years from 2024-25 through the First Pharmaceutical Wholesaler Agreement, to ensure Australians in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia maintain access to high-quality medications when they need it.

The Government will work with state and territory governments through the National Health Reform Agreement to respond to the challenges facing public healthcare in regional, rural and remote communities. This includes through an uplift to the Commonwealth's contribution to the Northern Territory.

### New initiatives

#### Restoring Bulk Billing for Australians

The Government is investing \$7.9 billion to strengthen Medicare with more bulk billing for all Australians. This measure will improve access to bulk billed GP care by expanding eligibility for Bulk Billing Incentive items to all Australians and introducing the Bulk Billing

Practice Incentive Program (the Program). As a result, nine out of ten GP visits will be bulk billed by 2030, with patients saving \$859.0 million a year.

Bulk Billing Incentives are additional payments made to medical practitioners when they bulk bill patients for un-referred consultation services (including most general practice services). Incentives are currently only available where a patient is under the age of 16 or holds a Commonwealth Concession Card. This measure extends eligibility to Bulk Billing Incentive items to the 15 million Australians aged 16 and older who do not hold a Commonwealth Concession Card.

Rebates for Bulk Billing Incentive items will continue to scale based on the location of the provider, with practitioners in regional, rural and remote areas able to claim items with higher rebates compared to those working in metropolitan areas. This means that any Medicare-eligible patient bulk billed for a standard GP consult would be eligible for a tripled incentive of \$32.50 for regional areas and up to \$41.10 for very remote areas. This compares to an incentive of \$21.35 in metropolitan areas.

In addition, the Program will provide a 12.5 per cent loading on Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebate revenue when GPs and their practices agree to bulk bill all patients for all GP non-referred attendance (GP NRA) services. GP NRA services include GP consultations, health assessments, mental health planning and chronic disease management. The total Medicare payment available for a standard consult at a regional or rural practice will scale up to \$86.91 depending on location.

Through this initiative, the Government is playing a crucial role in addressing cost-of-living pressures by supporting GPs and GP clinics to provide inclusive, equitable bulk billed primary care services. This will help support all Australians, including those living in regional, rural and remote areas, to access the primary care they need without facing cost as a barrier.

### **Establishing 50 more Medicare Urgent Care Clinics**

The Government has committed \$644.3 million over three years from 2025–26 to expand the Medicare Urgent Care Clinics Program. This will include an additional 50 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics across Australia, which will take the total number of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics to 137.

There will be a total of 48 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics supporting communities in regional, rural and remote Australia, including 17 of the additional Medicare Urgent Care Clinics funded in this Budget, and 31 of the existing Medicare Urgent Care Clinics. This will mean that more Australians in regional, rural and remote areas will live closer to a Medicare Urgent Care Clinic. The exact sites for each Medicare Urgent Care Clinic will be determined through independent commissioning processes conducted by Primary Health Networks or state and territory governments.

These Medicare Urgent Care Clinics will reduce pressure on hospital emergency departments by supporting Australians to access care for urgent, but not life-threatening,

conditions. Medicare Urgent Care Clinics are open during extended business hours with no appointments or referrals required, and with no out-of-pocket costs for patients.

In this Budget, the Government has committed funding to extend the opening hours of the existing Batemans Bay and Launceston Medicare Urgent Care Clinics. It also continues to support the operations of the Mparntwe (Alice Springs) Medicare Urgent Care Clinic. The extended opening hours will support the availability of urgent healthcare services in these communities.

**Medicare Urgent Care Clinics in regional, rural and remote areas**

Jurisdiction	Medicare UCC Clinic Name	Modified Monash Model classification
<b>Established</b>		
NSW	Albury	MM2
NSW	Batemans Bay	MM4
NSW	Cessnock	MM3
NSW	Coffs Harbour	MM3
NSW	Lismore	MM3
NSW	Tamworth	MM3
NT	Ali Curung	MM7
NT	Alyangula	MM7
NT	Galiwinku	MM7
NT	Lajamanu	MM7
NT	Maningrida	MM7
NT	Mparntwe	MM6
NT	Palmerston	MM2
NT	Wurrumiyanga	MM7
QLD	Bundaberg	MM2
QLD	Cairns South	MM2
QLD	Hervey Bay	MM2
QLD	Rockhampton	MM2
QLD	Toowoomba	MM2
QLD	Townsville	MM2
SA	Mount Gambier	MM3
TAS	Bridgewater	MM2
TAS	Devonport	MM3
TAS	Hobart (Bathurst Street)	MM2
TAS	Hobart (Liverpool Street)	MM2
TAS	Launceston	MM2
VIC	Ballarat	MM2
VIC	Bendigo	MM2
VIC	Shepparton	MM3
WA	Broome	MM6
WA	Greater Bunbury	MM2
<b>Announced</b>		
NSW	Bathurst	MM3
NSW	Bega	MM5
NSW	Nowra	MM3
NT	Darwin	MM2
QLD	Cairns	MM2
QLD	Gladstone	MM3
QLD	Mackay	MM2
SA	Victor Harbor	MM3
SA	Whyalla	MM3
TAS	Burnie	MM3
TAS	Kingston	MM2

TAS	Sorell	MM2
VIC	Torquay	MM2
VIC	Warragul	MM4
VIC	Warrnambool	MM3
WA	Geraldton	MM3
WA	Yanchep	MM2

### **Strengthening Medicare by building general practice workforce**

The Government will strengthen Medicare with an investment of \$606.3 million over four years from 2025–26 to deliver more Australian doctors. This package increases capacity across the general practitioner (GP) and rural generalist (RG) training pipelines and removes barriers faced by junior doctors who wish to pursue GP or RG training. Fifty per cent of the additional GP trainee places will be in regional and rural areas.

#### **Additional GP training places**

The Government will provide \$265.2 million over four years to expand GP and RG training through the Australian General Practice Training Program and the Remote Vocational Training Scheme, to deliver an additional 200 GP and RG training places per year from 2026, increasing to an additional 400 places per year from 2028.

When added to the over 1,600 training places currently funded each year, these extra places will mean the Government will fund over 2,000 GP training places each year from 2028.

Fifty per cent of the additional GP trainee places will be in regional and rural areas. More doctors training in these areas will mean more are likely to practise in them, which will support greater access to healthcare for these communities.

#### **Additional medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs)**

The Government has committed \$48.2 million over four years for an additional 100 medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) per year from 2026, increasing to an additional 150 CSPs per year from 2028.

Universities that receive the additional medical CSPs will be required to demonstrate evidence-based strategies that encourage medical students to pursue a career in general practice, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia.

The Government will uncap medical CSPs for First Nations students, to support the growth of more First Nations doctors.

### **Improved incentives and employment conditions for GPs in training**

The Government has committed \$248.7 million over four years for salary incentives for junior doctors to specialise as GPs or RGs, and to provide Paid Parental Leave and study leave for trainee GPs and RGs.

This will ensure that junior doctors that choose general practice or rural generalist as their specialty will receive fairer incentives, with entitlements more in line with those of their hospital colleagues.

### **Supporting medical professionals who assist with maternity services**

The Government will provide \$1.3 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend the Obstetrics and Gynaecology Education and Training Program by 12 months to upskill and provide training opportunities for a range of medical professionals who assist in the provision of maternity or maternity-related services, particularly in rural and remote areas.

### **Expanding scholarships for nurses and midwives**

The Government has committed \$10.5 million over two years from 2025–26 to expand the Primary Care Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship Program, to deliver an additional 400 scholarships for nurses and midwives to undertake postgraduate study to extend their skills and qualifications and become a nurse practitioner or endorsed midwife.

This program will continue to expand the future nurse practitioner and endorsed midwife workforce, to help meet current and future demands for healthcare, including in regional, rural and remote Australia.

### **Mental Health Supports for Natural Disasters**

Natural disasters are continuing to have devastating effects on regional communities, which are most at risk of experiencing natural disaster events. The Government is working with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to ensure culturally appropriate, targeted mental health supports can continue to be available to disaster-affected First Nations communities across Australia.

Emergency service workers and volunteers are critical to Australia's emergency management arrangements strategy, particularly in regional areas. Being at the front line of these events to protect Australians, emergency service workers and volunteers are more likely to be exposed to potentially traumatic and distressing incidents, and consequently suffer higher than average rates of mental distress. This is why the Government is providing funding of \$1.4 million from July 2025 to December 2025 to the Black Dog Institute for their National Emergency Worker Support Service, which provides timely and effective mental health supports to emergency service workers and volunteers.



### **Continuity of Essential Digital Mental Health Services**

The Government has committed \$46.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to ensure the continuity of essential digital mental health services, including targeted services for cohorts and sub-populations who experience higher levels of stigma and associated lower utilisation of mainstream mental health services. Funding will be provided directly to nationally available digital mental health services to provide critical mental health support to all people living in Australia, including people living in rural and remote communities. All services are free or low cost and do not require a referral. Additionally, many digital mental health services are tailored for cohorts at a higher risk of mental ill health, including gender diverse individuals, children, young people, women and men, First Nations Australians, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities.

### **Uplifting the Northern Territory Commonwealth Contribution for the 2025–26 National Health Reform Agreement**

The Government will increase the Northern Territory’s National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) funding in 2025–26. Increasing the Northern Territory’s NHRA funding will address historical funding inequity and support efforts to address key healthcare challenges in the Northern Territory, many of which disproportionately impact people living in regional and remote areas.

### **Hobart Maternity Services**

The Government is investing \$6.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to support the Tasmanian Government with the expected increase in demand for maternity services across the public and private systems. The funding will support infrastructure and equipment upgrades in the Tasmanian hospital system to ensure that new mothers can access the care they need at this most important time of their lives.

### **Central Coast Maternity Services**

The Government is investing \$10.0 million over four years from 2025–26 to support the New South Wales Government to manage the expected increase in demand for maternity services on the Central Coast. This funding will support workforce and training pathways development for professionals working in maternity and maternity-related services; as well as upgrades to the Central Coast public hospitals to improve ante-natal and post-natal services. The Central Coast region has the fourth fastest growing First Nations population in Australia and is currently experiencing a shortage of culturally appropriate maternity services.

### **Deadly Choices**

The Government is investing \$3.5 million to extend the 2023–24 Budget measure ‘Increase Uptake of First Nations Peoples’ Health Checks and National Rollout of Deadly Choices’ by one year to 30 June 2026. This additional investment will maintain current delivery of the national Deadly Choices Program, which focuses on increasing the uptake of free annual

715 health assessments by First Nations people. Increasing uptake of these health assessments is critical to improving health and life outcomes for First Nations people through early detection, diagnosis and intervention for common and treatable conditions.

### **Rheumatic Fever Strategy – ARF and RHD Prevention and Early Intervention**

The Government is investing \$9.2 million over three years from 1 July 2025 to 30 June 2028 to improve the detection, monitoring and management of acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD) in First Nations communities. ARF and RHD are entirely preventable conditions that disproportionately affect First Nations people living in regional and remote areas. The funding will support the continuation of the Federation Funding Agreement between the Commonwealth, Queensland, Western Australian, South Australian and Northern Territory Governments to support coordinated disease register and control programs, enhancing efforts to reduce the prevalence of these conditions.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Assessment Organisations**

The Government has committed \$60.3 million over five years from 2025–26 to deliver culturally appropriate aged care assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

The measure will improve culturally safe access pathways to aged care services and supports for older First Nations people across Australia, including regional, remote and very remote communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations will be phased in from 1 July 2025. The proposal will also contribute to the development of a stronger Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector and workforce through potential employment opportunities in regional, rural and remote communities.

### **Approval for Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission Funding Model**

The Government has committed \$116.1 million in 2025–26 to fully deliver existing and new regulatory functions under the *Aged Care Act 2024* (the Act) through the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission. This measure delivers a new funding model for the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission that appropriately costs all of their regulatory activity under the Act. More than one-third of all residential and home care aged care services are in regional, rural and remote Australia.

### **Fair Work Commission Aged Care Value Case – Stage 3 – Nurses**

The Government supports continuing to improve wages and conditions for aged care workers throughout Australia, including regional, remote and very remote areas. These improvements to award wages properly reflect the value of the work performed. Delivering on the Government's commitment to support the Fair Work Commission's outcome, this Budget provides \$2.6 billion to fund further increases in the minimum award wage for aged care nurses, commencing from 1 March 2025. This builds on the \$15.1 billion

in funding invested to support the 15 per cent award wage increase which commenced on 30 June 2023 and the award wage increases for many aged care workers which commenced on 1 January 2025.



## Home Affairs

The Home Affairs portfolio comprises the Department of Home Affairs (including the Australian Border Force), and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

The portfolio's primary role is to make the nation more resilient for the future, safeguarding Australia's domestic interests from national security and border threats, while supporting a prosperous and united Australia through management of Australia's migration and citizenship programs. The portfolio seeks to ensure every member of the Australian community – wherever they live – can go about their lives knowing they are safe and able to participate equally in contributing to society.

The portfolio gives effect to this role through the delivery of its diverse responsibilities, all of which support the Australian community. Functions directly related to regional communities include emergency management, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, enhancing social cohesion and democratic resilience, and the protection of critical infrastructure (including the aviation and maritime transport sectors).

The portfolio works with partners across all levels of government and industry to improve Australia's capacity to anticipate, prepare for, absorb, adapt to and evolve from crisis. During 2024, 210 local government areas were impacted by disasters, with the majority in regional Australia. Through the work of NEMA, the portfolio is committed to reducing the disproportionate effect natural hazards continue to have on regional areas. NEMA continues to play a vital role in supporting communities outside of Australia's capital cities through its network of regional officials and its oversight of a range of initiatives that support rural and regional Australia, including the Disaster Ready Fund, which provides up to \$200.0 million per year for disaster risk reduction projects. The portfolio continues to assist all critical infrastructure owners and operators, including in regional areas, to understand risk and empower owners and operators to improve the resilience of critical infrastructure.

New initiatives in the 2025–26 Budget of particular relevance to supporting a strong, safe and secure regional Australia relate to the delivery of Australia's national resilience and emergency management response and recovery, and strengthening civil maritime security arrangements.

### New initiatives

#### Supporting Border Security – Countering Illegal Foreign Fishing

The Australian Border Force leads whole-of-government efforts to strengthen Australia's civil maritime security arrangements to advance and protect Australia's strategic interests, including countering illegal foreign fishing. Strong civil maritime security upholds our economic wellbeing and ensures Australia can take full advantage of the ocean economy.

The Government has committed \$68.8 million in 2025–26 to support continuation and expansion of whole-of-government operational efforts to counter illegal foreign fishing threat and support Australia’s maritime interests in the region.

The Government has also committed an additional \$2.0 million in 2025–26 for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and \$4.1 million in 2025–26 for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to further mitigate the illegal foreign fishing threat.

# Industry, Science and Resources

The Industry, Science and Resources portfolio helps the Australian Government build a better future for all Australians by enabling a productive, resilient and sustainable economy, enriched by science and technology. This includes growing innovative and competitive businesses, industries and regions, investing in science and technology, and strengthening the resources sector.

Regional Australia is home to many of the resources, ideas, skills and industries needed to achieve a Future Made in Australia. The portfolio is central to delivering on the Government's vision of the Future Made in Australia agenda to boost investment, create jobs and seize the opportunities of a shifting global economy.

The \$3.4 billion investment in the Resourcing Australia's Prosperity initiative, led by Geoscience Australia, will support precompetitive geological exploration to ensure a generational pipeline of resources projects to support Australia's long-term prosperity. Geoscience Australia has completed consultations with stakeholders across government, industry, academia and service providers and is finalising the plan for how it will deliver the data, information and other tools in the first decade of the initiative.

The Critical Minerals Strategy, which sets out the government's vision to grow Australia's critical minerals industry, has been supercharged by the Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive, which will create jobs and economic activity around critical minerals mining and processing projects in regional Australia.

The Future Gas Strategy, released in May 2024, sets out how the gas in our energy systems will support Australia's transition to net zero, while continuing to support extraction and manufacturing industries, particularly across regional Australia.

The portfolio's new and existing support for regional industries, businesses and communities will maximise the economic and industrial benefits of the move to net zero and secure Australia's place in a changing global economic and strategic landscape.

## New initiatives

### Forging a Green Metals future

Green metals are a priority under the Government's Future Made in Australia National Interest Framework. The Government has committed \$1.0 billion to the Green Iron Investment Fund over seven years from 2024–25 to boost green iron manufacturing and supply chains. The fund will support early-mover green iron projects and unlock private investment at scale.

The Commonwealth and South Australian Governments will jointly commit up to \$2.4 billion to stabilise and support the long-term future of the steelworks, and support workers and the community in Whyalla. This Whyalla support package includes \$192.0 million towards administration and operating costs, \$18 million towards the

business creditors assistance scheme and \$9.3 million to support a joint Commonwealth–South Australia taskforce to provide advice and expertise on the transition of the steelworks to a sustainable future. Additionally, the Government has earmarked up to \$500.0 million of the Green Iron Investment Fund to support the longer-term transformation of the Whyalla Steelworks.

The Government has previously committed \$2.0 billion over 19 years from 2024–25 for a Green Aluminium Production Credit to support Australia’s aluminium smelters to transition to renewable energy and become competitive in green metals. Australia is uniquely positioned in having the entire aluminium supply chain onshore. The delivery of the production credit will secure the future of Australia’s aluminium industry for generations to come.

These investments will add value to Australia’s resources, support regional employment, and accelerate decarbonisation, helping Australia’s metals industry to remain competitive, sustainable and a source of well-paid jobs for decades to come. Regional communities where much of Australia’s metal processing and manufacturing occurs include Whyalla, Port Kembla, Gladstone, Portland, Bell Bay, the Hunter and the Pilbara.

### **Decommissioning of the Northern Endeavour**

The Government remains committed to completing the decommissioning of the Northern Endeavour floating production storage and offtake facility. Costs for this activity continue to be recovered from the petroleum industry through the Laminaria and Corallina Decommissioning Cost Recovery Levy. Supporting the decommissioning industry will create well-paid jobs across regional Australia.



# Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts works to improve the lives of all Australians, connecting people and places physically through land, air and shipping infrastructure; digitally through communications infrastructure; and culturally through investments in media and the arts. Recognising the diversity of places and their unique strengths, the department works to empower communities across Australia, including through its support to local governments and the Office of Northern Australia, and management of Australia's external territories. The department also contributes to whole-of-government objectives, including implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the transition to a net zero economy.

Following its release in the 2023–24 Budget, the department has worked across portfolios and with state, territory and local governments to implement the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework – supporting strong and sustainable regions through a coordinated approach that values local voices, fairness and integrity. This approach was embodied in the delivery of the Government's \$600.0 million Growing Regions Program, funding 112 community infrastructure projects that meet the needs of regional and remote communities; and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, funding 29 projects that support a place-based, partnership approach to strategically planning and delivering transformative change for communities. The Government is further investing in the liveability of regions by providing the enabling infrastructure to unlock housing supply, with \$1.5 billion invested in the Housing Support Program since 2023–24.

The department's broader infrastructure programs are integral to supporting strong regional economies, helping connect businesses and producers to markets, moving freight between regions, and maintaining strong supply chains. This includes working with state and territory governments and other partners to deliver the over \$120.0 billion 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline. In the 2025–26 Budget, the Government has provided \$8.5 billion towards 19 new major road and rail projects and \$292.6 million in additional funding for existing projects in regional Australia.

In addition, the High Speed Rail Authority has delivered its business case, now under Government consideration, on the Newcastle to Sydney high-speed rail network. Work continues to progress the delivery of Inland Rail, with sections between Beveridge in Victoria and Parkes in New South Wales to be completed in 2027, and design and approvals work underway between Parkes and Ebenezer in Queensland.

For northern Australia, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) continues to support economic development and population growth through its financing of 32 infrastructure projects forecast to generate \$38.2 billion in public benefit and create 19,500 jobs. A statutory review of the NAIF completed in February 2025 will inform consideration of the NAIF's future and appropriate governance arrangements after 30 June 2026. The Government is providing \$1.5 billion in planned equity to support the development of the

Middle Arm Precinct together with \$440.0 million for Regional Logistic Hubs along key transport links to connect Katherine, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek to Darwin.

The Government is also ensuring regional Australians continue to have access to critical aviation services, following Regional Express Holdings Limited and a number of subsidiaries (Rex) entering voluntary administration. The Government is providing support for Rex to continue to operate its regional network and allow the Administrators to conduct a competitive sale process, ensuring continued service to 26 regional airports that are exclusively serviced by Rex. Funding also continues to support the safety of regional and remote airports, with the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program and Regional Airports Program both extended in the 2024–25 Budget with an additional \$50.0 million and \$40.0 million respectively.

Equally vital to the prosperity of regional Australia is the communications infrastructure that supports communities to access services, and businesses to connect to domestic and global markets. The Government's \$2.2 billion investment in regional communications, announced in its first Budget, continues to improve mobile and broadband connectivity and resilience in rural and regional Australia. As announced on 13 January 2025, up to an additional \$3.0 billion in equity funding to NBN Co has been committed to complete Fibre to the Node upgrades, expected to benefit 334,000 regional premises. In December 2024, the Government welcomed the Regional Telecommunications Independent Review Committee's report, which was informed by extensive consultation with regional communities. The Government is now considering the report, acknowledging all Australians deserve access to fast, reliable, affordable connectivity and telecommunications services regardless of where they live.

Recognising the important role arts and culture play in the liveability of all places, the department continues to implement the Government's 5-year National Cultural Policy – *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*. With the establishment of Creative Australia, including a new First Nations Board, support to artists, organisations and cultural institutions has expanded across Australia. Revive also includes the \$8.5 million boost over four years to the Regional Arts Fund committed in the 2023–24 Budget to support sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia, and \$8.6 million committed in the 2024–25 Budget to support live music venues and festivals across Australia.

As part of the Government's commitment to better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the department is transforming the way it does business, working in genuine partnership with First Nations people to support self-determination. Work to improve access to essential services in discrete First Nations communities, and digital inclusion for all First Nations people, is supporting economic empowerment and social participation. Guided by the First Nations Digital Advisory Group, in a demonstration of shared decision-making, the Government has made significant investments to help close the digital gap, with \$68.0 million announced in the 2024–25 Budget, including \$40.0 million for free community Wi-Fi with 19 remote communities connected to free broadband services by NBN Co since 2024. Support for strengthening First Nations languages also continues, with \$53.8 million allocated in the 2024–25 Budget for language centres and community language learning.

With the transformation to a net zero economy offering unique opportunities for regional Australia, the department continues to ensure the voices of regions are heard, and benefits flow to regional communities. Key policies across the department are informed by a regional perspective, including the development of a low carbon liquid fuels industry as part of a Future Made in Australia, the introduction of the New Vehicle Efficiency Standard, and consultation on a Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap – with regional opportunities and challenges also a key consideration in net zero work led by other portfolios.

## **New initiatives**

### **Infrastructure Investment Pipeline**

The Government is committed to a 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline of over \$120.0 billion that delivers a sustainable program of nationally significant transport infrastructure projects across Australia.

As part of the pipeline, the Government is continuing to invest in infrastructure that builds connections between Australia's regions, communities and major gateways for agriculture, tourism, resources, retail and manufacturing. Through the 2025–26 Budget, the Government is making a substantial investment in improving productivity, resilience, liveability and sustainability in regional Australia, including:

- \$7.2 billion towards safety upgrades on the Bruce Highway in Queensland
- \$1.1 billion for the Western Highway corridor in Victoria, including \$100.0 million to upgrade the intersection with Brewery Tap Road in Warrenheip
- \$200.0 million towards duplicating priority sections of the Stuart Highway between Darwin and Katherine in the Northern Territory
- \$200.0 million towards safety upgrades on the Arthur Highway in Tasmania
- \$40.0 million for the Main South Road Upgrade – Myponga to Yankalilla in South Australia
- \$30.0 million to plan for a potential rail bypass of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales.

Through the 2025–26 Budget, the Government has also provided additional investments in existing projects in regional areas, including \$200.0 million towards the Bruce Highway – Rockhampton Ring Road in Queensland.

### **Supporting and securing regional aviation**

The Government recognises the critical role of the Rex network in supporting connection to regional economies, tourism and access to vital medical and other services. The Government has purchased \$50.0 million of debt owed by Rex to Rex's largest creditor, in

addition to providing an \$80.0 million loan facility to the Administrators of Rex to support Rex to continue to operate its regional network through the voluntary administration period. The Government is committed to securing regional aviation by working with the Administrators of Rex, and shortlisted bidders, to maximise the chance of a successful sale of the business run by the Administrators. The Government has also provided a guarantee in relation to tickets booked during the voluntary administration on Rex, and a waiver of the ‘use it or lose it’ test for Rex’s regional slots at Sydney Airport until 24 October 2026.

### **Complete the NBN fibre network**

The Government is continuing to build on its previous commitment of \$2.4 billion for Fibre to the Node (FTTN) upgrades by providing up to an additional \$3.0 billion in equity funding to NBN Co over seven years from 2024–25. Funding will be used to complete the upgrades for all of the remaining FTTN premises, with NBN Co also contributing \$800.0 million. NBN Co will provide improved access to approximately 622,000 additional premises across Australia, with over 334,000 premises (54 per cent of the footprint) expected to be located in regional Australia (as defined by NBN Co). At the end of the upgrades in 2030, around 94 per cent of the NBN fixed-line footprint will be able to access gigabit broadband speeds.

Like the upgrades that are currently underway, residents and businesses will be able to take advantage of faster broadband speeds through an upgrade of the last mile copper to a fibre connection directly to their premises. The upgrade will be available on demand when a customer in an eligible premise seeks a higher-speed service than would be currently available to them. While pursuing fibre upgrades is the best course of action for the majority of premises, a small proportion of premises are more complex and will require additional design analysis to determine if they may be better served by alternative technology.

### **Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation**

The Government has announced it will introduce a Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) that will require mobile providers (Telstra, Optus, TPG) to provide equitable access to baseline outdoor mobile coverage across Australia. Initially, providers will be required to provide mobile SMS and calling in areas currently without mobile coverage, by leveraging emerging direct-to-device mobile enabled through Low Earth Orbit satellites. The obligation is expected to commence by late 2027, with framework legislation to be brought to Parliament in 2025.

This will substantially expand the scope for people to seek help if they are lost or injured, or are facing natural disasters in areas without traditional mobile coverage. It would also give consumers more connectivity options if other networks are damaged or unavailable, as mobile networks are required to carry all Triple Zero calls over their networks, including from competitors’ customers.

The UOMO is the first step towards modernising the longstanding universal services framework. The Government expects to make further announcements about opportunities

for reform and is considering the recommendations of the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review.

### **Low carbon liquid fuels of the Future Made in Australia**

The Government is delivering \$250.0 million to accelerate the pace of Australia’s growing domestic low carbon liquid fuels (LCLF) industry. This funding is part of the \$1.7 billion Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund and will be provided as grants to support pre-commercial innovation, demonstration and deployment.

Low carbon liquid fuels can be produced sustainably from waste, biomass such as agricultural feedstock, or renewable hydrogen.

Australia’s domestic LCLF industry will focus on supplying sustainable aviation fuel and renewable diesel in liquid fuel reliant sectors, including transport (aviation, heavy vehicle, rail and maritime), mining, agriculture and construction.

The development of low carbon fuels will drive economic growth and jobs in regional areas, including supporting diversification and value-adding opportunities in agriculture, making good use of excess feedstock from crops, sugarcane and waste products such as tallow.

### **Continued funding for the Regional Australia Institute**

The Government has committed \$2.0 million in 2025–26 to extend support for the Regional Australia Institute (RAI). This funding builds on the Government’s election commitment to bolster the RAI’s research and data capacity in key regional priorities, make evidence and policy on regional issues more accessible, and extend knowledge and best practice across regional Australia. The new funding will extend the RAI’s regional research and local capability development activities to improve outcomes for regional communities. Improving the availability and accessibility of regionally focused research and insights will lead to better-targeted investments in Australia’s regions. Continued investment in place-based leadership and the capability development of regional practitioners will assist regions to better understand and adapt to future challenges.

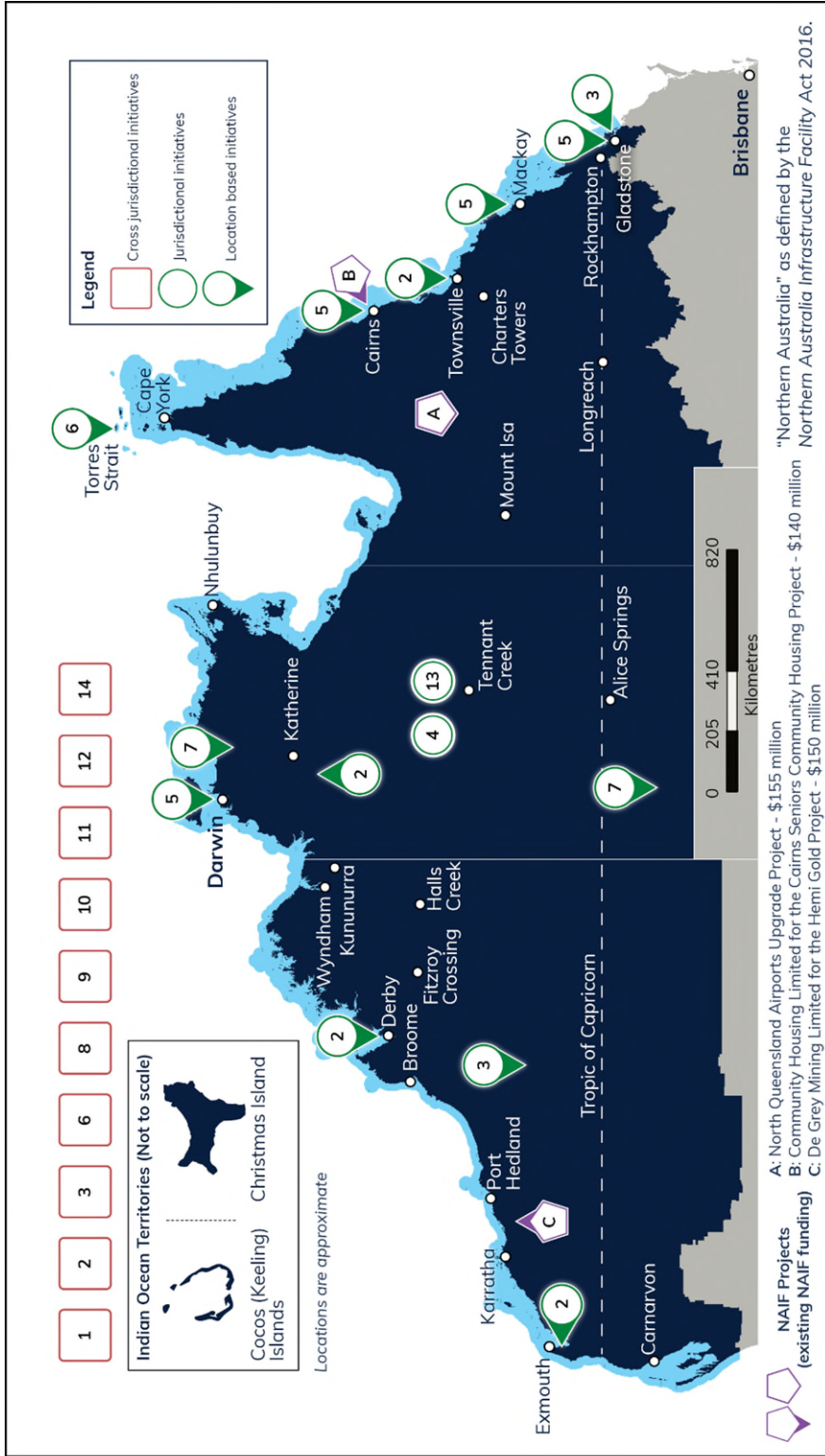
### Highlights for Northern Australia

For a strong national economy, northern Australia must thrive.

In August 2024, the Government released the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029. The Action Plan reaffirms the Government’s commitment to the north and sets the strategic direction for the next stage of investment and growth in the region. The new agenda supports economic and development opportunities, including for First Nations people, and takes account of contemporary issues and the views of northern stakeholders.

Highlights of the Government’s new investments in the 2025–26 Budget that progress the Action Plan and significantly benefit northern Australia are summarised below.

	Initiative	Investment	Portfolio
1	Northern Australia components of the Infrastructure Investment Program	\$8.0 billion	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
2	Defence Facilities and Capital Works	\$1.1 billion	Defence
3	Forging a Green Metals future	\$1.0 billion	Industry, Science and Resources
4	Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment Future Arrangements	\$842.6 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
5	Establishing 50 more Medicare Urgent Care Clinics	\$644.3 million	Health and Aged Care
6	Investment in the Torres Strait	\$77.4 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
7	Protecting Australia’s Iconic National Parks – continuing delivery	\$55.2 million	Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
8	Supporting Remote Cost-of-Living and Food Security	\$50.0 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
9	Lifting Remote Health Outcomes by Building a Nutrition Workforce	\$21.4 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
10	Community Laundries in Remote First Nations Communities	\$11.4 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
11	Biosecurity – for reduction and prevention activities to reduce the economic and environmental burden of established feral animals, pests and weeds	\$11.0 million	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
12	Rheumatic Fever Strategy – ARF and RHD Prevention and Early Intervention	\$9.2 million	Health and Aged Care
13	Better Safer Future for Central Australia Plan	\$3.7 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
14	Digitisation of at-risk Cultural Heritage Collections – continuation	\$3.6 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet







## Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and the Coalition of Peaks across metropolitan, regional and remote locations to shape the direction of Indigenous affairs policies, programs and services delivery to close the gap.

On 12 March 2024, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments announced the joint \$4.0 billion investment to deliver 2,700 houses over 10 years from 2024–25 to halve overcrowding and improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities. On 20 June 2024, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments signed a historic Partnership Agreement with the four Northern Territory Land Councils and Aboriginal Housing NT to oversee and implement the \$4.0 billion investment. The Partnership Agreement embeds shared decision-making ensuring the voices of Aboriginal organisations and communities are heard in informing and monitoring housing delivery. As of March 2025, construction of new houses is underway, working towards the target of 270 houses being built in 2024–25.

During 2024 the Government outlined a two-stage process to fulfil its commitment to replace the Community Development Program. Through the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2024–25*, the New Remote Employment Service (NRES) was announced, which will provide \$1.9 billion over five years from 2024–25. NRES will support people who are currently looking for work or may need help to become job ready to get the skills and resources they need to take up job opportunities. NRES will complement the new \$707.6 million Remote Jobs and Economic Development program which commenced in December 2024 and will fund 3,000 new jobs that communities want with proper wages and decent conditions.

In addition to the investment for jobs and housing in remote Australia, the first round of the Indigenous Rangers Program expansion was launched in 2024, which will double the number of First Nations rangers by the end of the decade and work towards greater representation of women in ranger positions. The expansion will continue to be rolled out in 2025 by First Nations organisations across Australia and will create First Nations ranger jobs, including in areas where employment opportunities may be limited. It will also improve Indigenous-led land and water management services in regional, rural and remote communities.

In the 2025–26 Budget, the Australian Government introduced First Nations initiatives focused on accelerating action in the priority areas of economic empowerment, food security and health and wellbeing as well as a long-term commitment to strengthen service delivery in remote First Nations communities in the Northern Territory.

On 7 February 2025, the Australian and Northern Territory Governments, together with the Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT), signed a landmark Partnership Agreement to strengthen service delivery in remote First Nations communities in the Northern Territory. The agreement commits \$842.6 million over six years to deliver the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment (NTRAI). The NTRAI will provide much-needed funds to continue to deliver essential services, increase funding to interpreter

services and deliver new funding for place-based solutions, community development, mediation and peacekeeping activities.

On 5 March 2025 the Australian Government released a 10-year National Strategy to improve food security in remote First Nations communities and increase access to affordable and nutritious food. The National Strategy was developed in partnership with the New South Wales, Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australian and Western Australian Governments, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations. It is the result of extensive engagement, including consultations in 21 remote communities and 10 regional forums across Australia. This is the first coordinated national approach to address food insecurity for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Through the portfolio, Australia's path to a sustainable future reached a major milestone with the official commencement of the Net Zero Economy Authority (the Authority) on 11 December 2024. The Authority promotes a net zero economic transformation for Australia, its regions, industries, workers and communities. It is doing this by coordinating effort, brokering investments that create jobs in regions, and supporting workers through change – to acquire new skills, to access new employment and to help create jobs in new businesses and industries.

The Authority is central to the Government's vision for a Future Made in Australia, and ensuring the regions that power the nation will do so for decades to come. The Authority works with communities, state, territory and local governments, regional bodies, unions, industry, investors and First Nations groups to take advantage of the opportunities presented by global decarbonisation.

In addition, the portfolio, through the Office for Women, works across government to support improved outcomes for Australian women. In March 2024, the Government launched Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women). The strategy outlines the Government's vision to drive gender equality in Australia over the next ten years, through five priority areas: gender-based violence; unpaid and paid care; economic equality and security; health; and leadership, representation and decision-making.

Working for Women acknowledges that people's experience of inequality can be shaped by factors including location, socio-economic status and First Nations identity. Women living in regional, rural and remote locations can face additional barriers to economic security and to accessing appropriate healthcare, and are more likely than women living in urban areas to experience family and domestic violence. The strategy acknowledges that gender equality cannot be achieved by Government alone, and that every individual, community, organisation and institution has a role to play.

## **New initiatives**

### **Buy Australian Campaign**

The Government has committed \$20.0 million in 2025–26 for initiatives to encourage consumers to buy Australian-made products. This measure will encourage consumers to support Australian-owned businesses, including those in regional and remote Australia.

## **Closing the Gap**

### **Digitisation of at-risk Cultural Heritage Collections – continuation**

The Government has committed \$3.6 million over two years from 2025–26 for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to continue their work with remote and regional Indigenous broadcasters and community organisations to digitise at-risk audio and video collections and meet ‘Deadline 2025’. Deadline 2025 identifies the critical date after which it becomes increasingly problematic, if not impossible, to play and preserve content recorded on audio and video tape. This funding ensures the continuation of the AIATSIS initiative to preserve these significant collections created by First Nations communities over decades and additionally will provide those communities and organisations with support and training to care for these invaluable collections into the future.

### **Community Laundries in Remote First Nations Communities**

The Government has committed \$11.4 million over four years from 2025–26 to establish new laundries, or upgrade existing laundries, and maintain and operate them in up to 12 remote First Nations communities across northern and central Australia. The provision or upgrading of community laundries with reliable clean water and power supply will help reduce the rate of preventable infections for individuals and their families, and in turn reduce the number of people acquiring associated secondary chronic illnesses.

### **Lifting Remote Health Outcomes by Building a Nutrition Workforce**

The Government has committed \$21.4 million over three years from 2025–26 to resume and expand a successful store-based Nutrition Workforce, who support consumers in around 100 remote stores. This measure will improve health and nutrition outcomes for First Nations people living in remote communities by supporting in-store nutrition-related behaviour change. With over 90 per cent of community food being sourced from local stores, the store is one of the most effective places for engaging consumers.

### **Supporting Remote Cost-of-Living and Food Security**

The Government has committed \$50.0 million over four years from 2025–26 to provide access to low-cost products for remote stores and lift remote food security governance in remote retailers, to support remote cost-of-living and food security. This investment will improve food security outcomes for First Nations people living in remote communities

through supporting lower prices of certain essentials in remote stores, and improved governance and operations of remote stores.

### **Investment in the Torres Strait**

The Government has provisioned, subject to co-contribution from the Queensland Government, \$41.2 million over five years from 2025–26 for urgent community infrastructure works and \$36.2 million over five years from 2025–26 for climate resilience in the Torres Strait. If agreed by the Queensland Government, the continuation of the co-funded Major Infrastructure Program Stage 7 and Seawalls Stage 3 initiatives will support infrastructure for essential services relating to wastewater, solid waste, potable water supply, and coastal protection for Torres Strait Islander communities who are exposed to climate impacts of coastal flooding and erosion.

### **Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme Extension**

On 10 February 2025, the Government announced the extension of the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme (the Scheme) for an additional two years to 30 June 2028. The Scheme, which opened March 2022, is open to Stolen Generations survivors who were removed from their families or communities and whose removal took place in the Northern Territory or Australian Capital Territory before self-government, or in the Jervis Bay Territory. The Scheme is a financial and wellbeing package that makes payments in recognition of the harm caused by removal from family or community.

The Scheme extension supports social and emotional wellbeing priorities and healing, including inter-generational healing, for First Nations peoples and communities.

### **Supporting First Nations Women in Business**

The Government has committed \$3.4 million over three years from 2025–26 to establish a place-based business coaching and mentoring program for First Nations businesswomen. The measure will provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women entrepreneurs with greater access to the resources, networks and support they need to launch a viable business, commercialise a viable business idea or grow an existing business.

The measure responds to the inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians, which called for the Government to pilot an entrepreneurial and business mentorship program for aspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The measure will be delivered in partnership with up to 15 First Nations female led businesses or organisations who have existing programs and networks on Country. Preference will be given to select businesses or organisations with cultural and/or community connection and demonstrated experience and outcomes in delivering similar programs. This is a place-based model, which will work with businesses located in regional and remote areas spread out across the nation. Once established, the measure will provide

six months of coaching and mentoring support, delivered through the First Nations partner organisations.

### **Support for First Nations Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health**

The Government has committed \$24.7 million over four years from 2025–26 to enhance investment in First Nations social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) and mental health responses. This measure will strengthen efforts to support healing in families and community and achieve progress against Outcomes 1 and 14 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The measure will boost community access to culturally safe SEWB, and mental health services following traumatic events; support the training of new First Nations psychologists; and build the sector’s evidence base. The measure is consistent with the SEWB sector’s priorities, and the Government will work with First Nations stakeholders to deliver the support.

### **Women’s Safety – First Nations (Action Plan activities)**

The Government has committed \$21.8 million over two years from 2025–26 to continue the successful delivery of critical prevention, early intervention and response services to address family, domestic and sexual violence in First Nations communities. This investment will provide an extension for successful activities originally funded under the Third and Fourth Action Plans of the previous National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and their Children (2010–2022) and continued through commitments made through the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–25 under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32). Services are community led, trauma informed and culturally safe and provide practical intervention for First Nations people at risk of experiencing or using violence.

### **Better Safer Future for Central Australia Plan**

The Government has committed \$3.7 million in 2025–26 to extend the coordination and governance arrangements under the Central Australia Plan for the National Indigenous Australians Agency. This funding will provide governance and ongoing support for the Aboriginal Leadership Group and Youth Roundtable, and to drive cross-government coordination and implementation of an innovative place-based model.

### **Port Augusta Partnership**

The initiative will support the Government’s commitment made in July 2024 to enter into a joint-funded Federation Funding Agreement (FFA) with the South Australian Government. The Commonwealth will provide \$6.0 million over two years from 2024–25, which with South Australia’s contribution will provide a total of \$12.0 million to support the community of Port Augusta. The FFA will support streamlined, community-led investment where it is needed most and to deliver meaningful and timely solutions informed by the Port Augusta Partnership. A broad representative community governance group has been established in line with the Australian Government and South Australian Government

announcement. The community governance group will provide advice on funding priorities within the Port Augusta region to ensure that shared decision-making informs the actions to improve safety and wellbeing in the region.

### **Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment Future Arrangements**

On 7 February 2025, the Government announced \$842.6 million over six years from 2025–26 to deliver the NTRAI. This funding will continue to deliver essential services for remote communities, including to:

- policing, women’s safety, education and alcohol harm reduction services
- increase funding for Aboriginal interpreter services
- deliver new funding for community development, mediation and peacekeeping activities
- continue to fund hearing and oral health services
- strengthen support for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and enable the transition of services from government to community control over time
- empower remote Aboriginal communities by establishing and funding local groups in up to eight locations to design and deliver services for community
- fund up to 12 Aboriginal Community Controlled Children and Family Centres to provide coordinated solutions to complex issues relating to family safety and child development.

The Government will work in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and APO NT to oversee delivery of NTRAI in alignment with a new 6-year Partnership Agreement, ensuring the Australian Government’s commitment drives Priority Reforms and improves socio-economic outcomes under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

### **Growing Regional Data and Digital Talent for Australia’s Growth and Recovery**

The government has committed \$3.4 million over 18 months from 2025–26 to continue supporting a pilot program providing digital and data employment and career opportunities for regional Australians, acting as a bridge from university into entry-level positions within the Australian Public Service (APS) for the full 2025 and 2026 university years.

The pilot established specialised digital and data APS Academy Campuses alongside universities that host the necessary talent. Onsite supervisors support the accelerated

development of new talent in digital and data roles, alongside exciting opportunities to solve real-world challenges while staying connected to their local community.

APS Academy Campuses are linked to the government’s centrally coordinated entry-level and career changer programs, including trainees, cadets and graduates to pursue APS data and digital careers.

### **National Australia Day Grants**

The National Australia Day Grants program will continue to provide \$10.0 million in 2025–26 to support activities and events for Australia Day celebrations. This funding includes a \$4.5 million community events stream to support community-level organisations (primarily local councils and not-for-profit organisations) to deliver community activities and events on Australia Day. Organisations in regional and remote Australia are the target recipients for the Community Events Grants, as these communities often cannot access Australia Day events held in capital cities, to enable them to recognise the day in a way that is meaningful to their local identity.





## Social Services

The Social Services portfolio assists the Australian Government in supporting and delivering essential social services to improve the wellbeing of individuals and their families across the nation. In particular, Services Australia, the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) contribute to the Government's regional investment priorities with their significant presence across Australia.

Services Australia provides support to almost every Australian at some point in their lives. It is the government's primary service delivery agency, connecting people across government and community services through its significant presence across Australia. This includes many service centres in regional and remote areas, a network of agents and access points, 27 remote servicing teams and four mobile service centres to ensure regional and remote communities have access to the same range of services, including natural disaster emergency support.

DSS provides a wide range of housing and homelessness support across regional, rural and remote Australia. This includes delivering Commonwealth Rent Assistance, which benefits over 450,000 households in the regions. The \$9.3 billion National Housing and Homelessness Agreement is helping to provide essential homelessness services across states and territories. DSS is also directly investing more than \$200 million to create new crisis and transitional housing for women and children impacted by family and domestic violence, as well as older women at risk of homelessness. Many of these homes will be delivered across the regions. In line with Closing the Gap, DSS is supporting Australia's only Indigenous national housing peak body, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Housing Association (NATSIHA) to coordinate and deliver housing solutions that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The NDIA - with staff located across Australia, including a regional presence - delivers the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS provides Australians with permanent and significant disability with financial support to build capacity, increase independence, and establish stronger connections with their community and workplace.

The National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commission) commenced operation on 13 January 2025 as an independent entity within the Social Services portfolio. The National Commission is dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people through strategic policy advice and reports to government on matters affecting First Nations children and young people, and their families. The National Commission will engage with regional, rural and remote First Nations children, young people, families and communities to ensure their voices, needs and aspirations are reflected in advice to government.

## **New initiatives**

### **Reform of the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building Program**

In the 2025–26 Budget, the Government has committed \$364.5 million over five years from 2024–25, and \$150.0 million ongoing from 2029–30, to reform the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) program to be part of a more robust, equitable ecosystem of general supports for people with disability outside of the NDIS. These supports will complement additional foundational supports to be co-funded by states and territories.

The reform will deliver evidence-informed capacity building. It will provide information and advice, and supports and services across Australia that enable increased independence, participation and improved access for people with disability and their families.

The reform responds to recent reviews of the ILC program and the Independent Review into the NDIS. This includes designing supports that will address local needs for people with disability living in regional, rural and remote communities.

The new program will have a positive impact on regional, rural and remote communities, providing supports tailored to meet the needs of people with disability, their families, carers, and community organisations in these locations. Through this reform, the Government will also seek to improve geographical coverage of services across regional, rural and remote communities.

# Treasury

The Treasury portfolio takes a whole-of-economy view to support the Australian Government to deliver a more resilient and modern economy and achieve strong and sustainable economic and fiscal outcomes for all Australians. Treasury also works to support effective Government policies, programs and regulation, and improve the supply and affordability of housing. Current priorities for the portfolio include easing cost-of-living pressures on the community, addressing housing cost and availability pressures, including for regional communities, and budget repair.

The portfolio undertakes regional engagement, including through visiting regional Australia, and works with other Government portfolios to deepen its understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional economies. This local engagement is enhanced by the portfolio's nationally dispersed footprint, such as through entities like the Australian Taxation Office and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Treasury advises on small business policy issues and assists the Government in developing an internationally competitive and productive environment for small businesses. The Government's National Small Business Strategy – released in February 2025 – is the first of its kind and outlines how jurisdictions will work together to better support small businesses across our nation.

The Government released the Measuring What Matters Framework (the Framework), Australia's first ever national wellbeing framework, in July 2023. This puts people and progress at the very core of thinking about the economy and society, including for the development of regional policy. With the introduction of the first iteration of the Framework, the Government has developed an important foundation on which we can build – to understand, measure, and improve on the things that matter to Australians. The Government will explore further opportunities to embed the Framework into government decision-making. The Framework could also be used in areas of policy that require different levels of government to work together.

## New initiatives

### **Mandating cash acceptance for essential goods and services**

The Government will mandate that businesses must accept cash when providing essential items, with appropriate exemptions for small businesses. The mandate will ensure regional and remote communities have a reliable and inclusive way to pay for essential goods and services.

Despite the rise of digital payments, cash remains a vital option for many, particularly in regional and rural communities. The Government wants the mandate to assist with payment system resilience – for example, during natural disasters or digital outages.

## Energy Bill Relief

The Government is easing cost-of-living pressures for energy consumers by delivering up to \$1.8 billion in additional energy bill relief. Rebates will continue to be provided to households and small businesses with active electricity accounts, including in regional Australia. This means more than 10 million households and around one million small businesses will receive an additional \$150 in rebates on their electricity bills through the six-month extension to 31 December 2025.

## Extending the Home Guarantee Scheme

The Government is providing \$4.9 million over four years from 2025–26 to continue the Regional Home Guarantee and the Family Home Guarantee, which support regional and single-parent first home buyers to purchase a home with a smaller deposit. This extension builds on the success of the Home Guarantee Scheme, which since May 2022 has assisted around 32,000 regional first home buyers under the Regional Home Guarantee and over 3,700 single parents or legal guardians under the Family Home Guarantee to purchase a home of their own.

## Expanding Help to Buy

The Government is expanding eligibility for the Help to Buy scheme to support Australians to buy homes with lower deposits and smaller mortgages. This Budget is committing around \$800.0 million in equity financing to increase the property price and income caps to make the scheme more accessible, including for Australians wishing to purchase a home in a regional area. Under the scheme, the Government will provide an equity contribution of up to 40 per cent to support eligible homebuyers to buy a home with a lower deposit and smaller mortgage, helping around 40,000 Australian households locked out of the market into home ownership.

## Accelerating the uptake of modern methods of construction

The Government is supporting the development of modern methods of construction (MMC), such as prefabricated and modular homes, to help build more homes faster. Homes built using MMC can be completed faster than homes built using conventional methods. They offer advantages to regional and remote areas where labour shortages and climate conditions can make building homes using conventional methods more challenging, time consuming and expensive.

The Government is investing \$49.3 million to support states and territories to scale up existing MMC projects and \$4.7 million to the Australian Building Codes Board to develop national voluntary certification and rating schemes for MMC to provide regulatory certainty. The Government has also committed \$120.0 million from the National Productivity Fund to incentivise states and territories to remove red tape preventing the uptake of MMC.

### **Supporting the hospitality sector and alcohol producers**

The Government is providing support for hospitality venues, brewers, distillers, and wine producers through changes to the alcohol tax settings. The Government will pause indexation on draught beer excise for two years from August 2025 and expand the existing excise remission scheme for alcohol manufacturers and Wine Equalisation Tax (WET) Producer Rebate, by increasing the caps for both schemes to \$400,000 from 1 July 2026.



## Veterans' Affairs

The Australian Government has an enduring commitment to supporting and recognising those who have served in the defence of our nation and their families.

In 2025–26, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will continue to deliver quality services to veterans and families, implement the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, and simplify processes and improve its enabling services to better serve veterans and families.

The implementation of the Government's response to the Royal Commission will comprise the most comprehensive reform ever undertaken of the culture, systems and processes supporting Defence personnel, veterans and families. This will involve the establishment of a new agency focused on veteran wellbeing, and a national peak body for ex-service organisations. DVA will work with the Department of Defence, the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission, other Commonwealth stakeholders, states and territories, ex-service organisations and the veteran community to implement these important reforms and coordinate its services and supports to complement those of its partners in government, ex-service and community organisations. This will maximise the support provided to Australia's veterans and families today and into the future.

For veterans and their families in regional areas, the Government understands the importance of connecting people and providing the right services. DVA continues to expand the Veterans' and Families' Hub Network, with 17 hubs operating by 2026. The majority of these will be in regional areas, or will provide services to regional areas. More broadly, the geographic reach of the department enables a wide range of services and support to be delivered through its Veterans' Access Network. The department continues to have an active strategy to improve employment outcomes for veterans and partners in regional areas, such as Townsville.

The Government is committed to reforming the veteran support system to ensure veterans and their families thrive in their lives after service, regardless of where they live. Initiatives in the 2025–26 Budget will continue to improve mental health and wellbeing for veterans by delivering a series of national workshops and training sessions on suicide awareness and mental health first aid; providing chaplaincy support or outreach chaplaincy services to transitioning members, veterans and their families in Townsville, Perth, and Brisbane and surrounding regional locations; extending the Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program for another year; supporting Invictus Australia to maintain and improve critical health and wellbeing sports services for veterans across Australia; and supporting Kookaburra Kids to deliver recreational and educational camps, activities and events for children experiencing mental health issues due to their parent's Australian Defence Force (ADF) service.

The Government is also committed to making it simpler and easier for veterans and families to access services and entitlements, regardless of where they live. The *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* was passed in February 2025, making it simpler and easier for veterans to lodge claims under a single Act

from 1 July 2026. Similarly, DVA is continuing to implement a range of business improvements in 2025–26, which will improve the timeliness of claims processing, enabling veterans and families access their entitlements more quickly.

## **New initiatives**

### **Continuing to Support Veterans and their Families**

This measure consists of a number of subcomponents as outlined below.

#### **Broadening the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Program**

An additional \$1.0 million over one year will be provided from 1 July 2025, to extend the broadening of the Prime Minister’s Veterans’ Employment Program to deliver initiatives that support Australian organisations to improve employment outcomes for ADF veterans by:

- promoting the skills veterans bring to the civilian workforce to increase employment opportunities for veterans and partners
- encouraging and supporting employers to recruit and retain veterans and to build veteran-inclusive environments
- providing employment information and resources for veterans and partners including the Veteran Employment Toolkit and a searchable database of employers recognised via the Veteran Employment Commitment (VEC).

The Veterans’ Employment Program is a national program providing support to veterans regardless of geographic location. Around 30 per cent of organisations signed up to the VEC operate solely in regional areas.

#### **Supporting Veterans – volunteer training in suicide recognition and intervention**

An additional \$1.0 million over one year will be provided from 1 July 2025, to extend the Mental Health Literacy and Suicide Prevention Training Program to deliver a national series of workshops and training sessions on topics such as suicide awareness and mental health first aid. The training aims to increase the capacity of the ex-service community to support veterans in distress. It is delivered through face-to-face and online channels in metropolitan and regional areas of Australia.

The initiative aims to:

- increase the understanding of mental health literacy and suicide intervention in the veteran community
- provide the veteran community with the skills to recognise early warning signs and support access to appropriate help



- build capacity for meeting the needs of individuals within the veteran community who are at risk by delivering the training to up to 4,000 participants
- provide the veteran community with the capacity to maintain an environment where individuals, families and communities can build resilience and improve their general health and wellbeing during times of adversity
- assist the veteran community to help themselves by providing the skills required to create an environment that supports self-help.

### **Extension to the Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program**

The Government has committed to extend the Veterans' Chaplaincy Pilot Program (VCP) for one year to 30 June 2026. The VCP offers chaplaincy support to transitioning members of the ADF, veterans and their families in the three pilot locations of Townsville, Perth and Brisbane. The VCP provides another option to support those who need it most. VCP Chaplains provide services to veterans and their families in the cities where they are based and also deliver outreach services to support those that need them in the surrounding regional locations.

One of the key objectives of the VCP is to develop, upskill and support community-based faith leaders to deliver this support to veterans and families, and expand their access to appropriate support services across Australia, particularly in regional locations where VCP Chaplains cannot reach. To further this work, VCP Chaplains are examining the delivery of localised training (potentially based around mental health first aid) and ongoing partnership/support to community-based faith leaders.

### **Extension to the Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program**

The Government has committed to extending the Military and Veteran Psychiatry Training Program for one year until 30 June 2026. The training placements provide opportunities for psychiatry trainees and are targeted at facilities that often work with military and veteran personnel in locations with a high ADF and/or DVA service provision presence, and may include placements outside capital cities, such as in Townsville and Wollongong. In these cases, the placements improve the quality of mental healthcare provided to regional veterans and may also provide some broader benefit to regional workforce distribution.

### **Supporting Invictus Australia**

An additional \$3.3 million is being provided in 2025–26 to Invictus to maintain and improve critical health and wellbeing sports services for veterans across Australia. Invictus Australia has a strong history of supporting the veteran community, promoting and creating sport and recreation opportunities for improved health and wellbeing, and supporting wounded, injured or ill veterans through their recovery journey.

### **Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation**

An additional \$5.6 million is being provided to the Australian Kookaburra Kids Foundation's Defence Kids Program (Kookaburra Kids) in 2025–26 to continue to deliver targeted support through recreational and educational camps and activities to children of current and ex-serving ADF members, who experience mental health issues due to their parent's ADF service. Participants receive an age-appropriate psychosocial education program designed to build mental health literacy and help children to develop skills and strategies in seeking help when they need it. Activities enable children to build supportive social networks with children who are experiencing similar issues to their own.