2026

First Nations
Workforce Insights Report



PUBLIC SKILLS AUSTRALIA
PUBLIC SAFETY SKILLS AUSTRALIA LTD

JSC | Jobs and Skills Council
Public Safety and Government
An Australian Government Initiative

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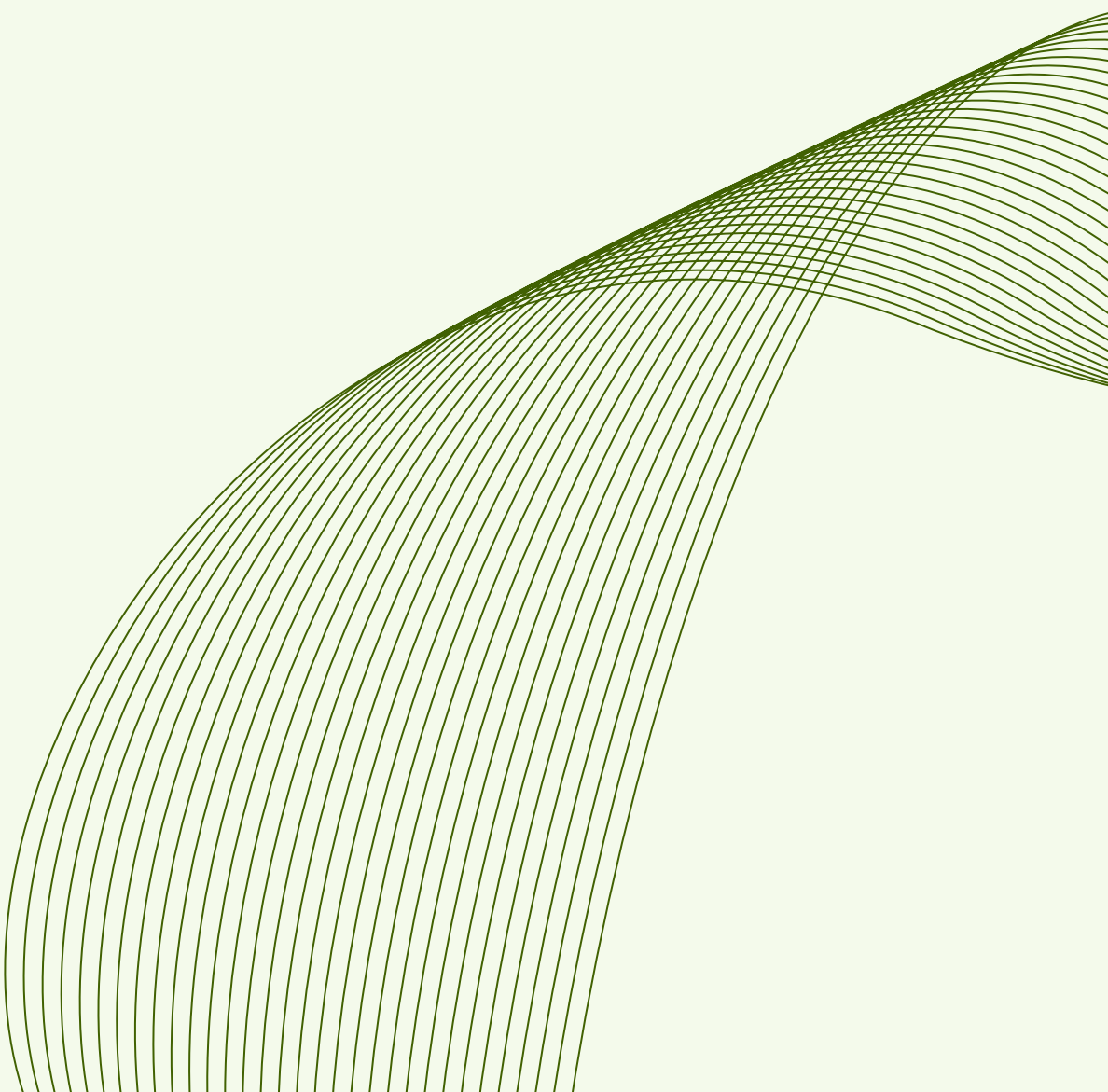
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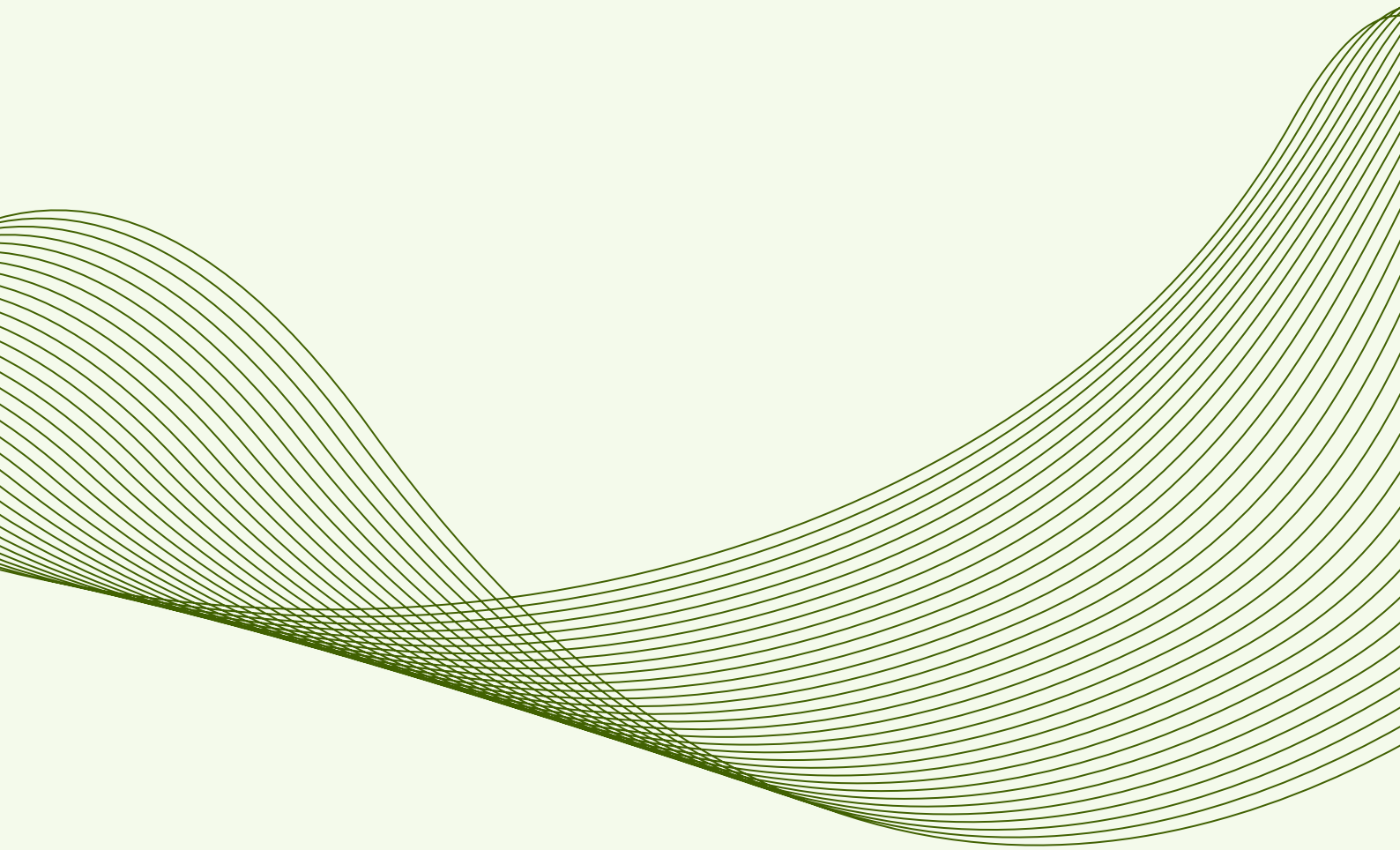


Acknowledgement of Country

Public Skills Australia respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.

Public Skills Australia also extends thanks to Karabena Consulting, a bespoke First Nations led research and consultancy firm, who supported the data collection, industry consultation and analysis captured in this report. The Karabena Consulting team provided invaluable support and guidance in framing industry insights and challenges facing First Nations people in the Public Safety and Government industry.



About Public Skills Australia

Public Skills Australia is the Jobs and Skills Council (JSC) for the Public Safety and Government industry, comprising Correctional Services, Defence, Federal, State/Territory and Local Government, Fire and Emergency Services and Police industry-sectors.

Through its work, Public Skills Australia actively supports employer and employee bodies in these industry-sectors and associated volunteer associations. Public Skills Australia works in partnership with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) and other JSCs to give effect to broader Ministerial and government priorities.

Public Skills Australia:

- undertakes data analysis, research and consultation to deepen understandings of contemporary workforce challenges and how to mitigate these challenges
- develops quality training products in the Vocational Education and Training sector to strengthen the skills and capabilities of Public Safety and Government workforces
- monitors and promotes the implementation of training products to support career pathways for the Public Safety and Government industry
- consults with, promotes and amplifies the needs of the Public Safety and Government industry

Public Skills Australia remains committed to encouraging the participation of First Nations people,[1] those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those living with or experiencing disabilities, women and other gender diverse people and mature people in the Public Safety and Government industry workforces.

Public Skills Australia thanks persons from First Nations backgrounds for their contributions, alongside other industry and governance group representatives, the DEWR and Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) for sharing their views and data generously, and for supporting the development of this report.

1 Please note, First Nations people will be used as preferred terminology inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. When citing a data source (such as government strategies or state of the sector reports) the terminology of the data source will be used to maintain accurate data representation.

Executive Summary

Public Skills Australia's *First Nations Workforce Insights Report* (the report) was developed to support the continuing work under the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (Closing the Gap) and associated Ministerial priorities.

The report provides a point in time overview of First Nations people's participation within the Public Safety and Government industry workforces. It highlights the strategies and programs currently being implemented to increase First Nations representation and identifies opportunities to further support these efforts.

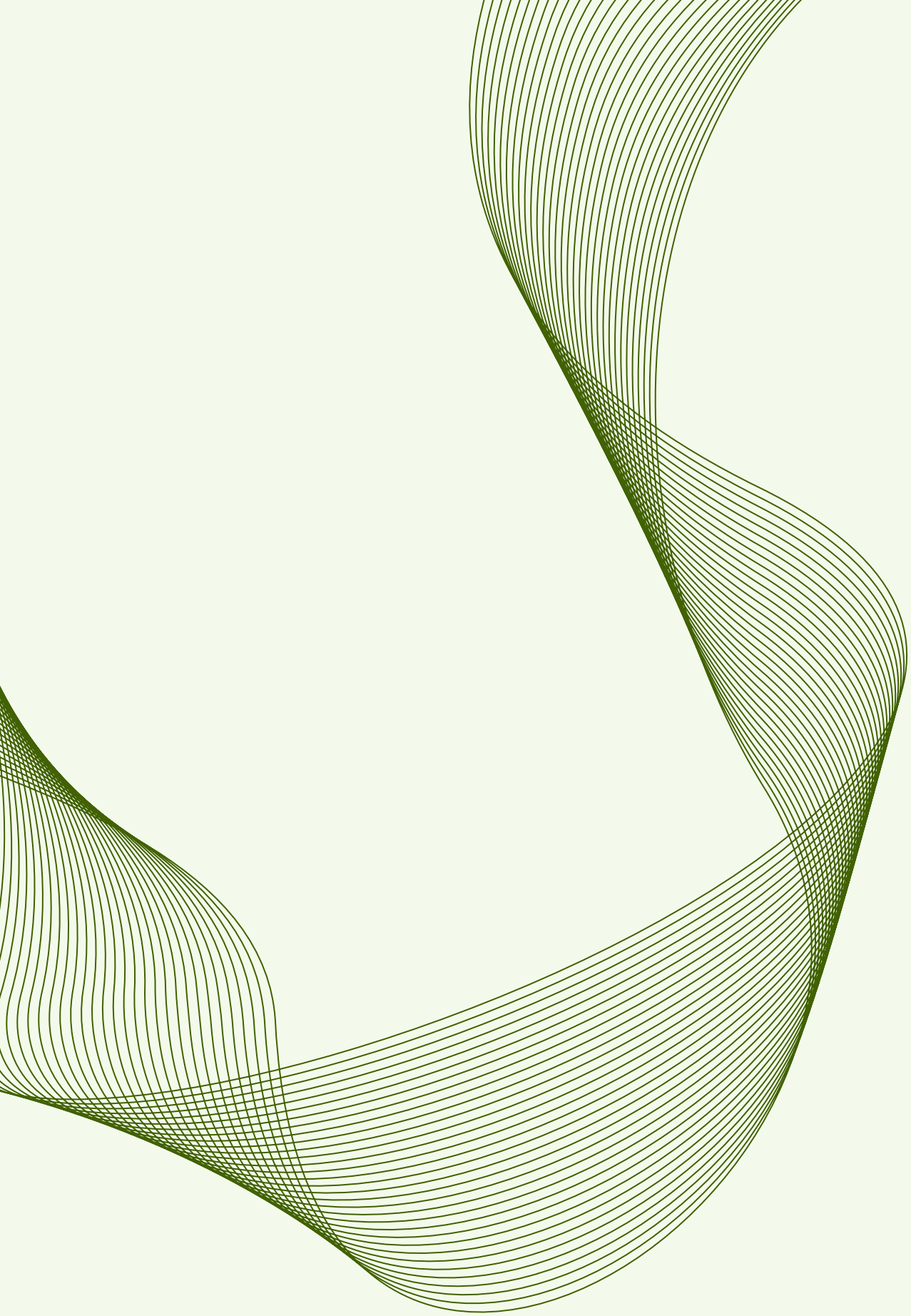
Through data analysis and stakeholder consultations the report reflects that:

- of the current 913,500 person workforce of the Public Safety and Government industry, 3 per cent identify as people from First Nations
- a higher proportion of First Nations people are employed in operational and frontline occupations, with lower representation in managerial or senior roles
- there are challenges in recruiting and retaining First Nations people in the Public Safety and Government industry
- there are a range of strategies and programs currently being implemented across the Public Safety and Government industry, demonstrating continued efforts to support Closing the Gap

The report concludes with the following considerations for the Public Safety and Government industry to continue to drive bespoke inclusion efforts. They are:

Creating culturally safe workplaces and promoting career development and senior leadership opportunities.

Greater availability, consistency and depth of workforce data on First Nations participation.



Introduction

First Nations people bring deep knowledge, cultural expertise, leadership and community connections to Australian workplaces.

In the Public Safety and Government industry, these contributions are critically important as they shape safety, justice, public trust and service delivery. The Public Safety and Government workforce industry represents an important employment pathway[2] with approximately 3 per cent of total workforce identifying as people from First Nations.[3]

Improving First Nations participation in this workforce through education, training and employment remains a priority for the vocational education and training (VET) system and is reflected in the *National Skills Agreement*.[4]

First Nations Workforce Insights Report

This report combines workforce data regarding First Nations peoples workforce representation and insights drawn from stakeholder consultations to better understand current workforce experiences, challenges and opportunities. It both highlights current strategies and programs in the Public Safety and Government industry and identifies critical insights to improve First Nations workforce representation.

Ministerial Priority

This report responds to the Ministerial priority of *"Work with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), First Nations peoples, Industry (employers and unions) and other Jobs and Skills Councils to progress priority reforms under the Closing the Gap National Agreement".*

2 Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA), First Nations People Workforce Analysis, JSA, 2023, pp. 1-2, accessed 15 April 2026.
3 Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), Census of Population and Housing, 2021, ABS, Canberra, 2022, accessed via JSA Atlas Pro, accessed 14 April 2026.
4 Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR) 2023, National Skills Agreement, accessed 30 June 2026.

Sections

This report is sectioned as follows:

Introduction	Provides background and outlines methodologies used to develop the report.
Workforce overview	Details the current state of First Nations employment across the Public Safety and Government industry.
Industry-sector[5] analysis	Draws on individual industry-sectors to highlight good practice, and quantitative data to examine industry-sector challenges and opportunities.
Existing strategies and programs	Provides an overview of current strategies and programs implemented across individual industry-sectors to improve First Nations workforce representation.

Context

Closing the Gap[6] commits to systemic and structural transformation to improve accountability and respond to the needs of First Nations people through four Priority Reforms:

Formal partnerships and shared decision making

Building the community-controlled sector

Transforming government organisations

Shared access to data and information at a regional level

5 *'Industry-sectors'* refer to the five industry-sectors that comprise the Public Safety and Government industry, including, Correctional Services, Defence, Fire and Emergency Services, Loca/State/Territory and Federal Government and Police.

6 Council of Australian Governments (COAG), National Agreement on Closing the Gap, accessed 30 June 2026

Along with the Priority Reforms, Closing the Gap has 19 national socio-economic targets relating to life outcomes for First Nations people. The targets provide an indication of how governments[7] are tracking against the objectives and outcomes of Closing the Gap with Target 6 being the most relevant to the Public Safety and Government industry.

Target 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.

Closing the Gap is an important policy framework, which has guided the direction of this report.

Methodology

This report was developed using a combination of qualitative and quantitative data and insights obtained from publicly available sources and stakeholder consultations.[8] Consultations were used to gain insights[9] into the experiences of First Nations people employed in the Public Safety and Government industry and identify opportunities to inform future workforce planning. Public Skills Australia acknowledges the generous insights provided by the First Nations people who were consulted as well as others who dedicated their time to support the development of this report.

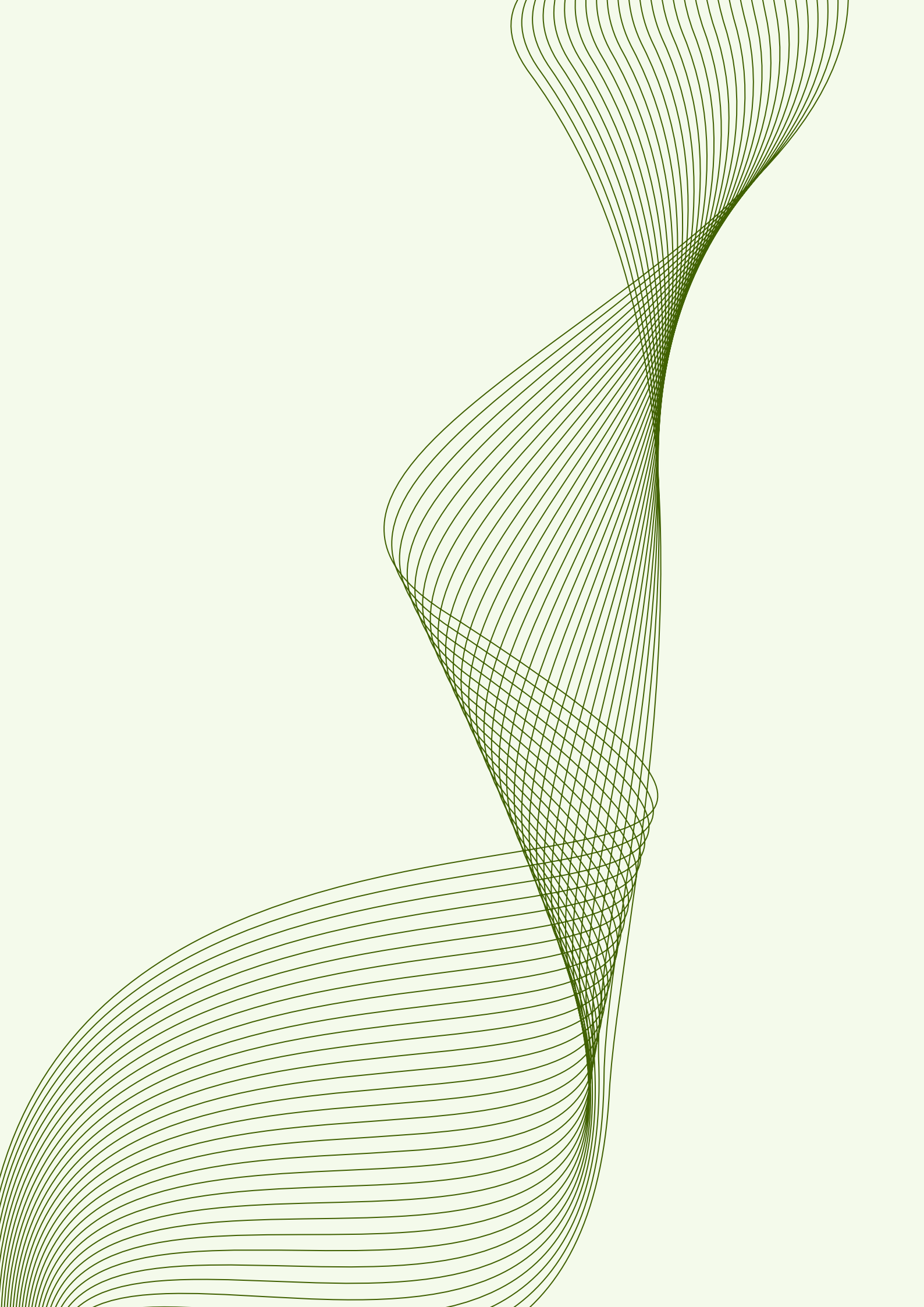
Case Studies

Case studies were incorporated to highlight known successes, challenges and learnings from current/relevant strategies and programs in the Public Safety and Government industry. For example, the *Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES) Case Study* was selected based on desktop research and consultations (annual reports and consultations with Public Skills Australia's First Nations Network and Fire Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW)).

7 Parties signed to Closing the Gap are: Australian Government, Australian Local Government Association, all state and territory governments and Coalition of Peaks.

8 The data on First Nations people used for this workforce analysis, including data published by the ABS, is based on self-identification and does not include community recognition or acceptance.

9 These insights are identified in the Industry Insight boxes throughout the report.

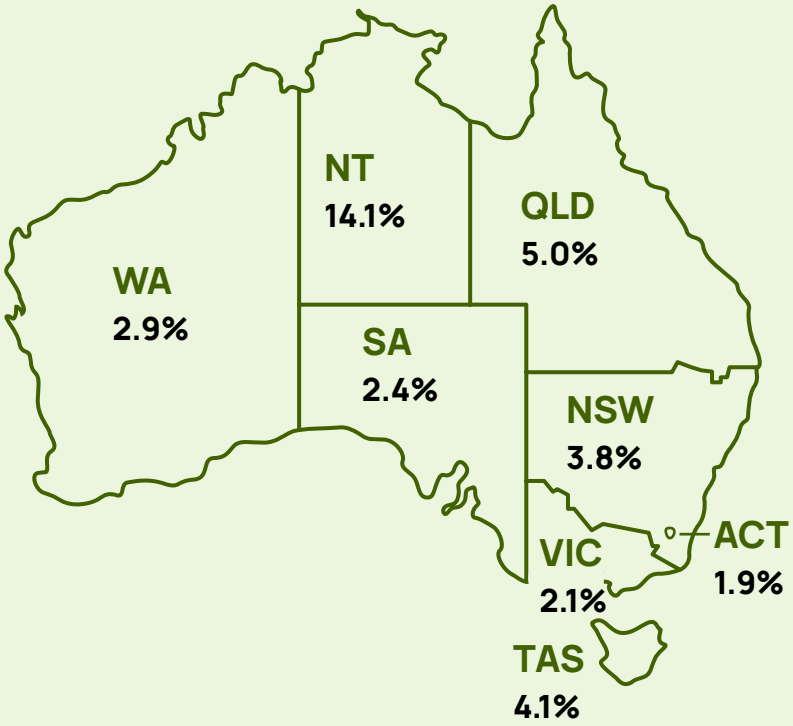


Public Safety and Government Industry First Nations Data[10]

The Public Safety and Government industry employs around 3 per cent of First Nations people in its workforce (approximately 913,500 employees),[11] compared with around 2 per cent in the national workforce.[12] This industry plays a critical role in creating employment pathways and advancing First Nations inclusion across the Australian labour market. This chapter provides an overview of the workforce across the Public Safety and Government industry.

In the subsequent sections of the report, this report uses the statistical classification of *'Public Administration and Safety'*, from the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ANZSIC) as this is the closest classification that reflects the Public Safety and Government industry.

Map: First Nations representation in the Public Administration and Safety industry (%)



First Nations Employment Federal Government
(% of total APS employees)

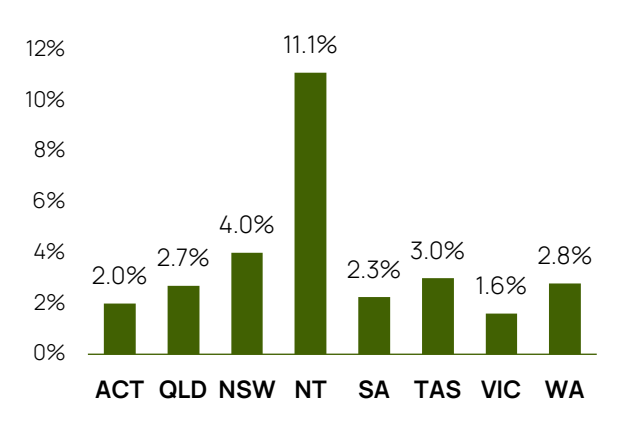
3.4%

First Nations Employment Australian Defence Force
(excluding Defence APS)

3.9%

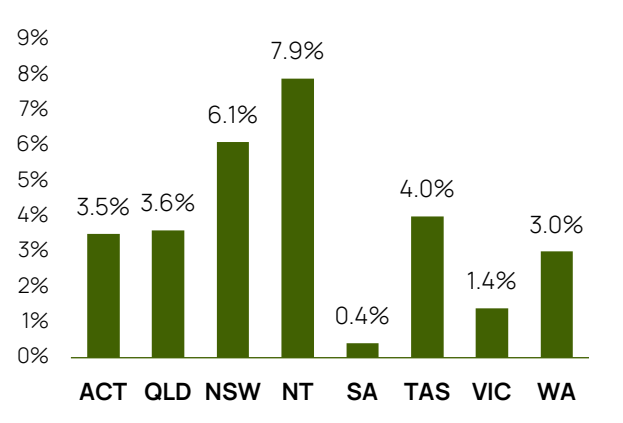
10 See Appendix A.
11 ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, ABS, Canberra, 2022, accessed via JSA Atlas Pro, accessed 20 April 2026.
12 ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, ABS, Canberra, 2022, accessed via JSA Atlas Pro, accessed 20 April 2026.

State and Territory Government



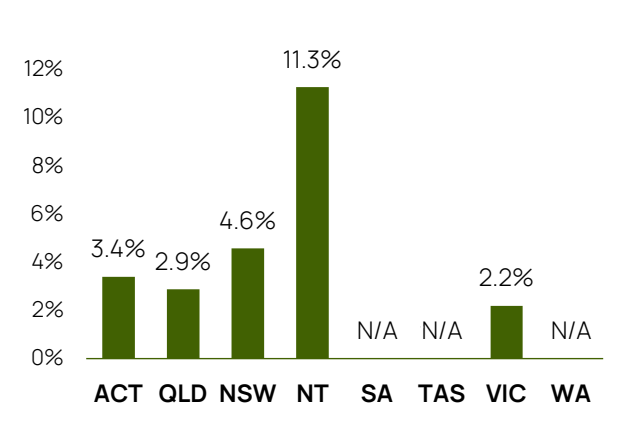
Source: See Appendix A for data sources.

Fire and Emergency Services



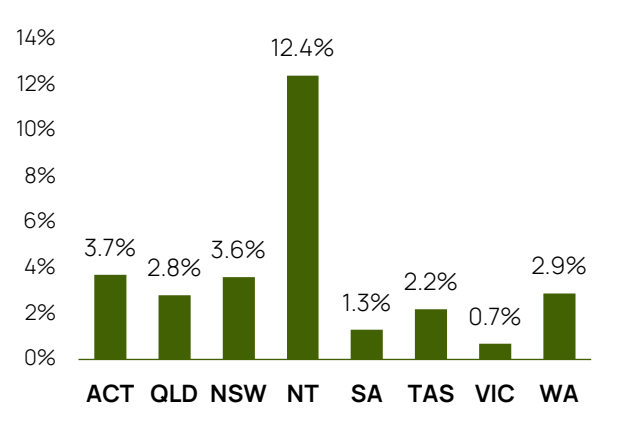
Source: See Appendix A for data sources.

Correctional Services



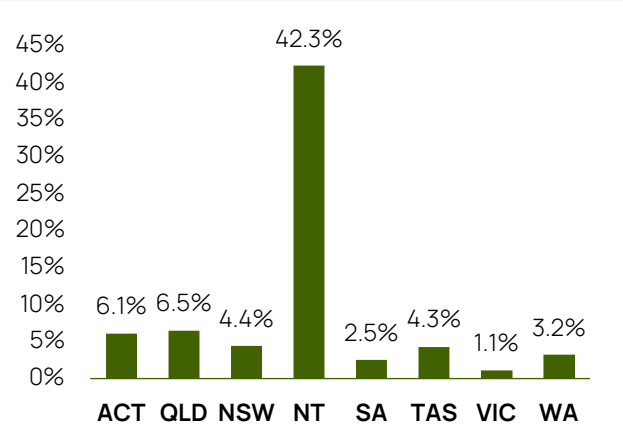
Source: See Appendix A for data sources.

Police



Source: See Appendix A for data sources.

Local Government



Source: See Appendix A for data sources.

Public Safety and Government First Nations Industry-Sector Data Insights

First Nations employment varies across different industry-sectors of the Public Safety and Government industry.



The Northern Territory has the highest representation of First Nations employees across the Public Safety and Government industry - aligning with the Northern Territory's higher population of First Nations people.



Employed First Nations people (according to the Public Administration and Safety statistical classification) are on average younger than employed non-First Nations people.

INSIGHTS:

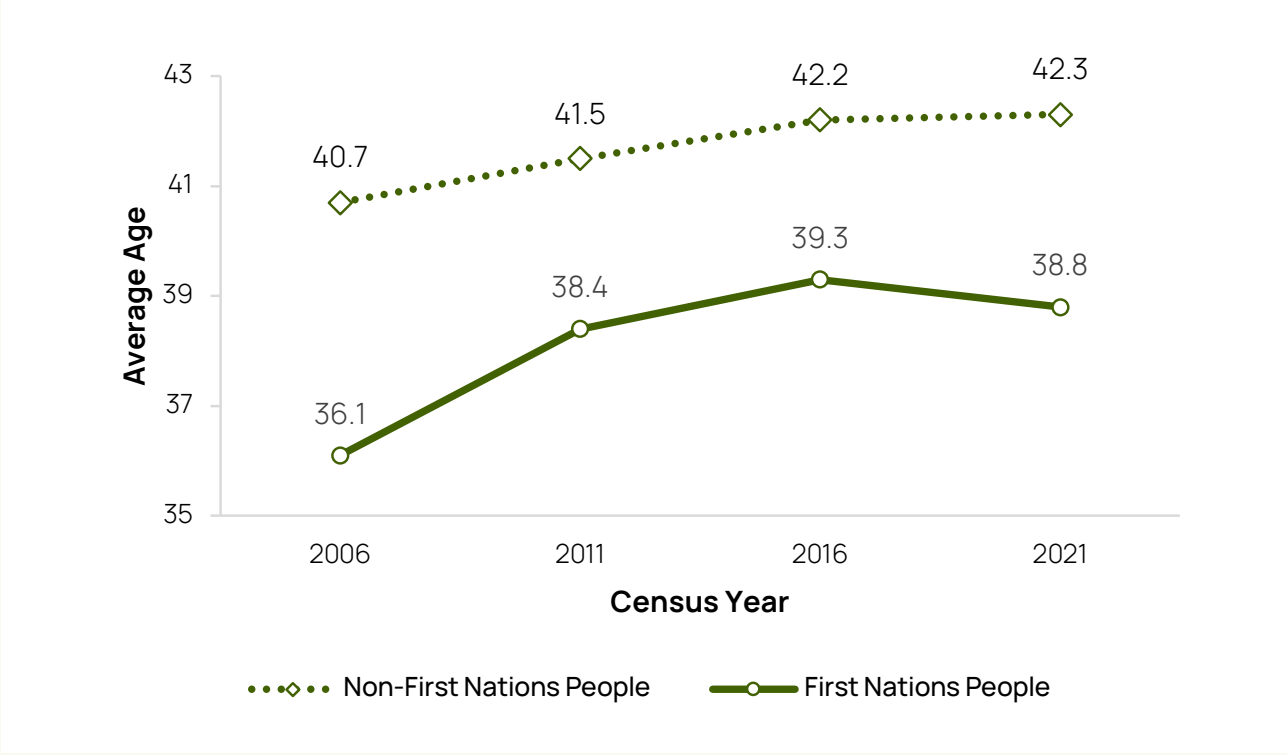
While attributable to statistical variation, this trend aligns to two insights raised through consultations:

Younger average First Nations workforce may reflect the success of recruitment initiatives targeting younger First Nations people to join the Public Safety and Government industry-sectors.

This trend may also signal challenges in retaining First Nations employees as they progress in their careers.

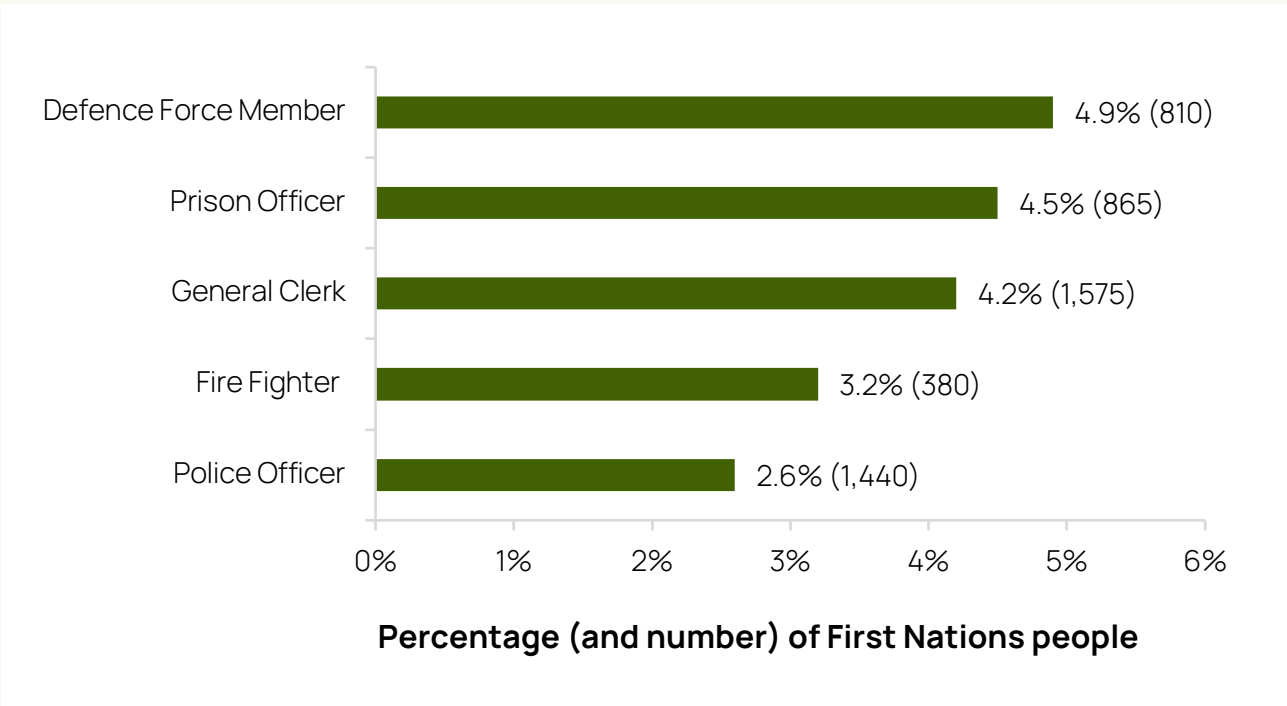
Public Safety and Government First Nations Workforce Characteristics

Figure 1: Average Age of First Nations and Non-First Nations People in the Public Administration and Safety Industry-Sector, 2006-2021



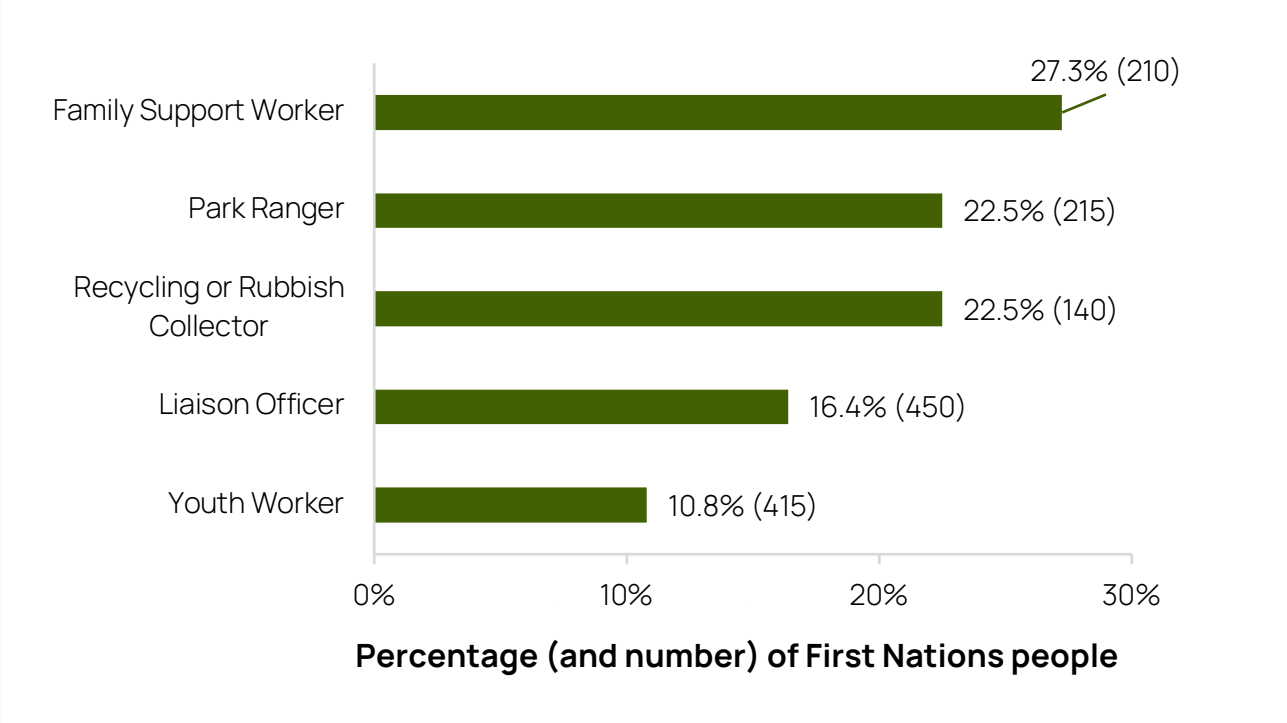
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing, 2006-2021, TableBuilder, accessed June 2026.

Figure 2: First Nations Representation in Selected Occupations in Public Administration and Safety Industry



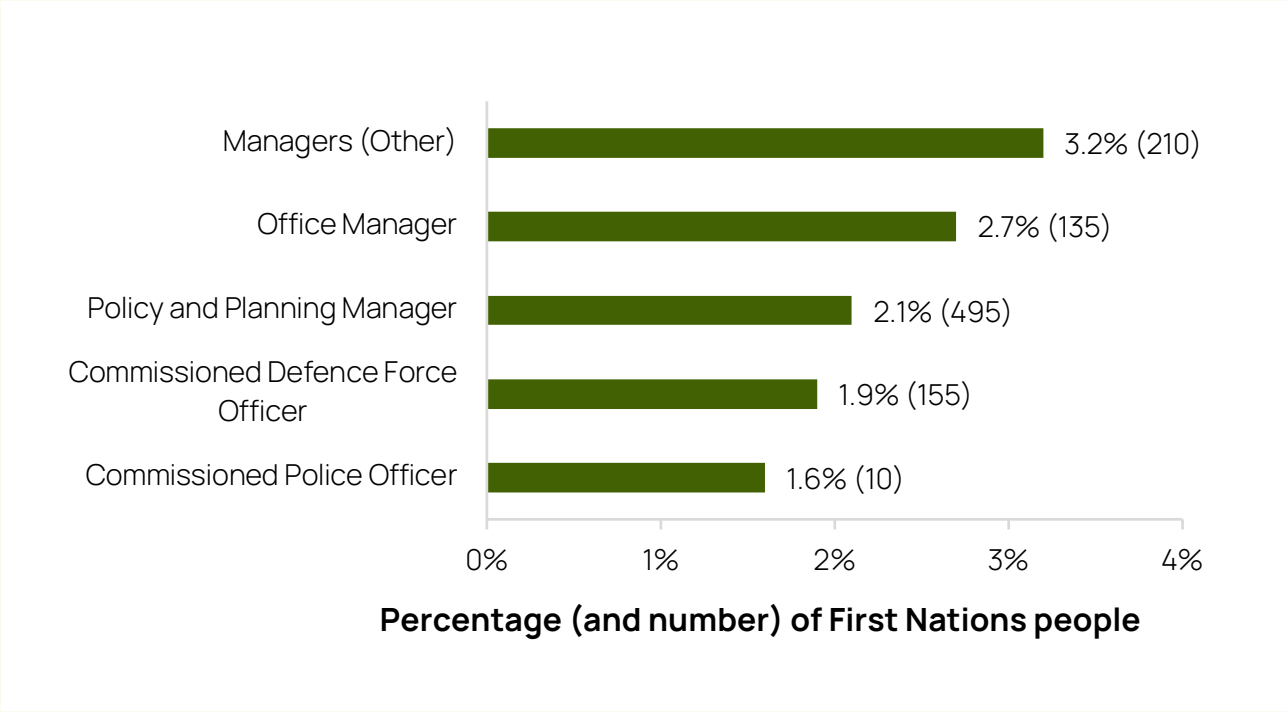
Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder, INDP Indigenous Status and 6-Digit OCCP by Public Administration and Safety Industry, accessed June 2026.

Figure 3: First Nations Representation in Selected Operational and Frontline Occupations in the Public Administration and Safety Industry



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder, INDP Indigenous Status and 6-Digit OCCP by Public Administration and Safety Industry, accessed June 2026.

Figure 4: First Nations Representation in Selected Managerial Occupations in the Public Administration and Safety industry



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder, INDP Indigenous Status and 6-Digit OCCP by Public Administration and Safety Industry, accessed June 2026.

Public Safety and Government First Nations Workforce Characteristics

The data presented above (Figures 1-4) explores the workforce characteristics including average age, leading occupations, proportions of First Nations people in frontline occupations as well as managerial and leadership occupations. The insights shared, deepen understanding of the lived experience of people working in the Public Safety and Government industry.

FIGURE 1:

The average age of First Nations people in the workforce dropped from 39.3 in 2016 to 38.8 in 2021.

FIGURE 2:

There is higher representation of First Nations people in operational and frontline occupations.

FIGURE 3:

Additional occupational data supports Figure 3 that there is higher representation of First Nations people in operational and frontline occupations.

FIGURE 4:

Additional occupational data suggests that First Nations representation is generally lower in managerial and senior roles.

While several operational occupations record First Nations representation above 4 per cent, representation in managerial occupations is between 1.6 and 3.2 per cent. This trend may indicate barriers to progression into leadership roles, despite successful recruitment into operational occupations.

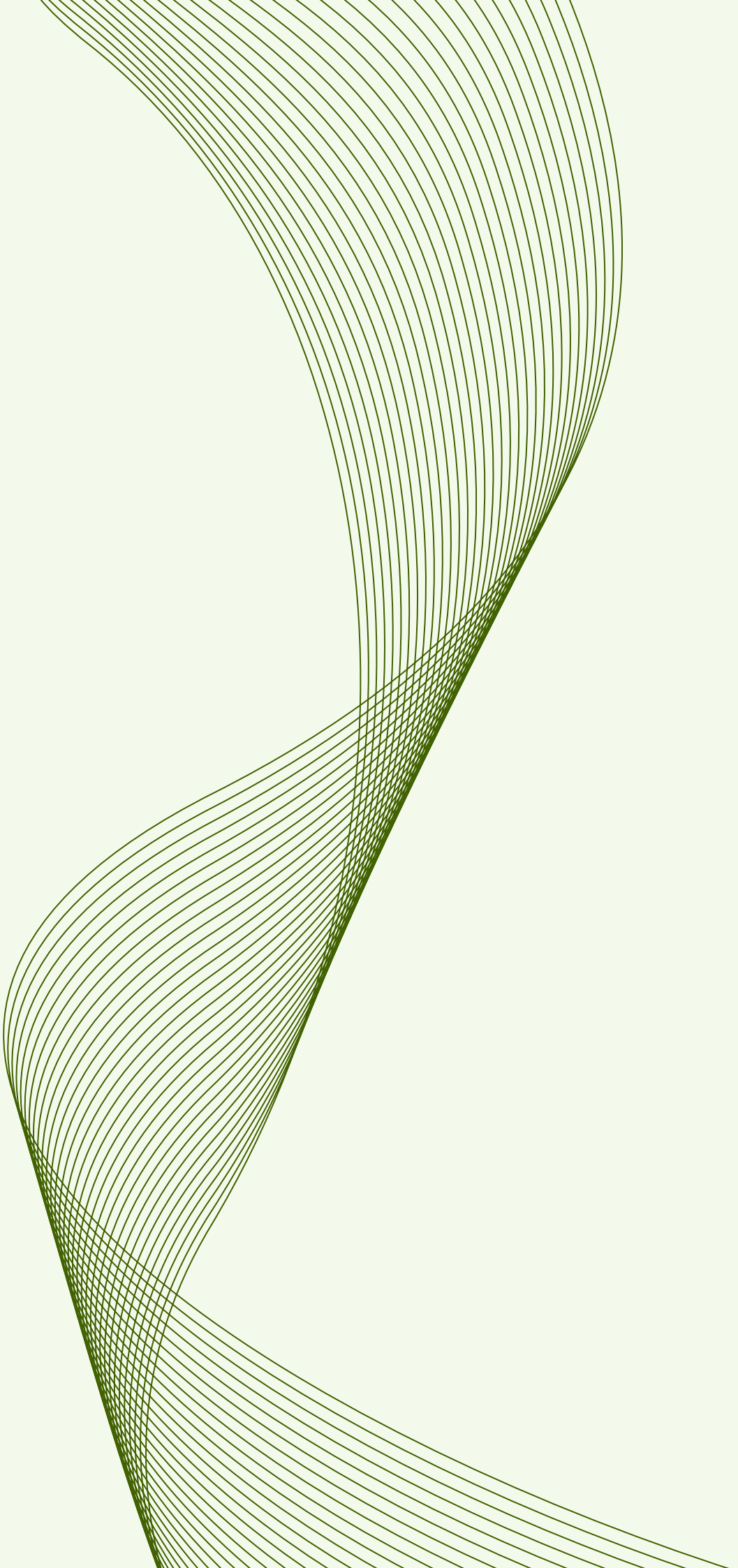
INSIGHTS:

This trend aligns to two insights raised through consultations:

The need for greater progression and leadership pathways for First Nations people.

First Nations employees elect to remain in operational roles as they are often closer to the communities they serve and from which they come. Leadership roles that take First Nations employees further from their communities were sometimes not accepted or not pursued due to this.

Progression challenges into managerial and senior roles exist with consultations promoting planning for the next generation of First Nations people in the workforce to be supported from the moment they join the workplace through to support into leadership pathways and programs.



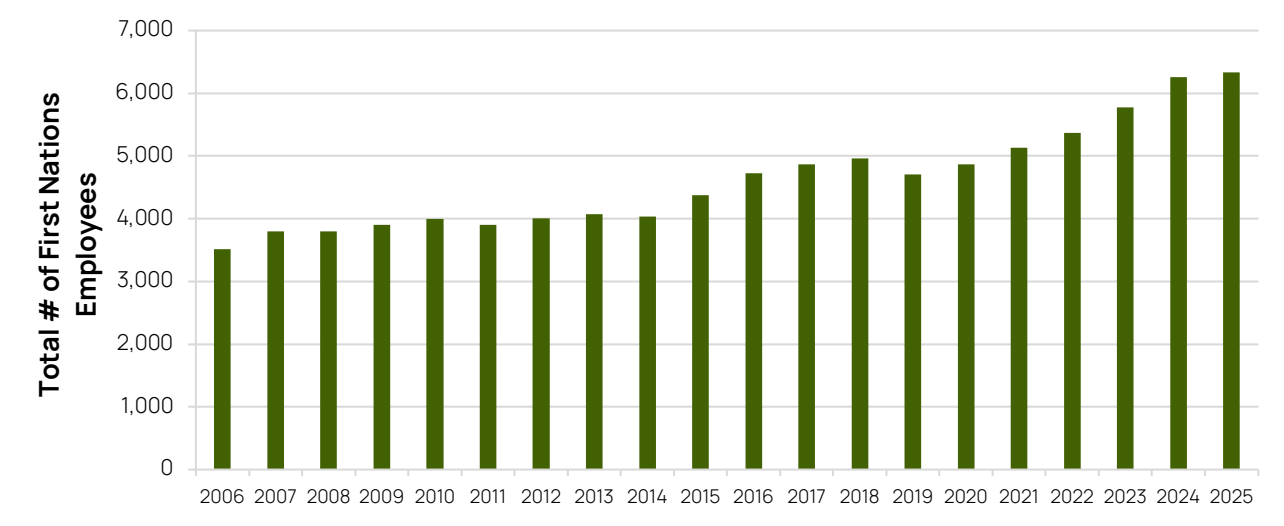
Public Safety and Government Industry-Sector Analysis

This section focuses on the individual industry-sectors: Correctional Services, Defence, Federal and State/Territory Government, Fire and Emergency Services, Local Government and Police. It joins data and insights for each of these industry-sectors, as well as any relevant government commitments or targets that may apply. The report highlights areas where the industry-sectors could strengthen efforts in recruitment and workforce representation.

Federal and State/Territory Government

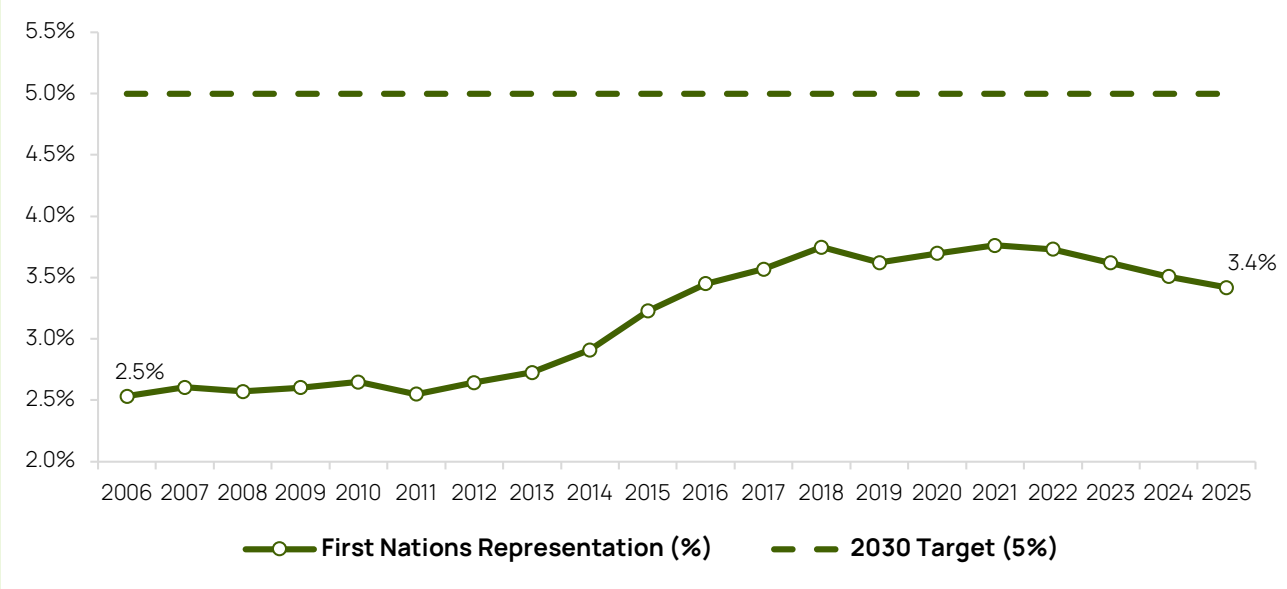
The Federal and State/Territory Governments play an important role in supporting First Nations employment and workforce development. The Federal Government has set an employment target for First Nations people to comprise 5 per cent of the Australian Public Service (APS) workforce by 2030. Progress towards this target is tracked annually by the Australian Public Service Commission, as illustrated in the figures below:

Figure 5: Growth in First Nations Employment in the APS (Ongoing) – 2006-2025 (Headcount)



Source: Australian Public Service Commission, Employment Release Tables December 2025, Table 77 all employees: diversity group, 2006 to 2025, accessed June 2026.

Figure 6: First Nations Employment in the APS (Ongoing) – 2006-2025 (%)



Source: Australian Public Service Commission, Employment Release Tables December 2025, Table 77 all employees: diversity group, 2006 to 2025, accessed June 2026.

As this data indicates,[13] the total number of First Nations people has increased year on year, to a total of 6,334 ongoing First Nations employees in December 2025, comprising 3.4 per cent of the workforce. The APS also employs 535 First Nations people in a non-ongoing capacity, which comprises 5.1 per cent of the non-ongoing workforce. Although acknowledging the progress, the APS remains below its target of 5 per cent and has been trending down in recent years from its peak of 3.8 per cent in 2021.

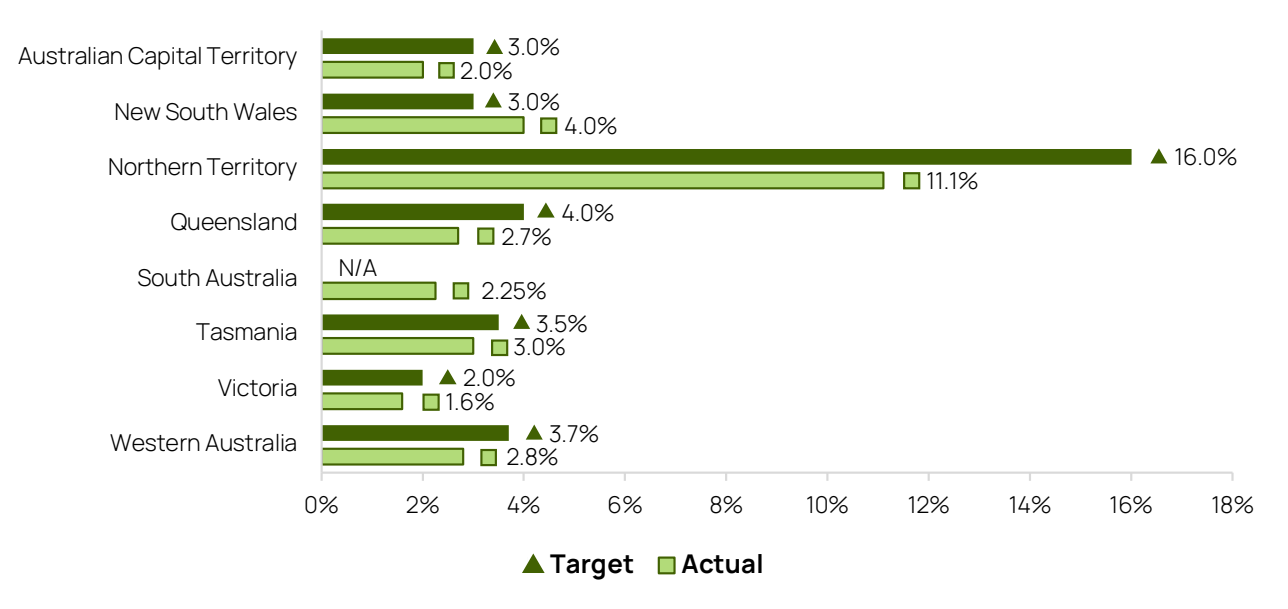
Some departments within the APS also nominate First Nations employment targets, and outline strategies to achieve them. For example, the Fair Work Ombudsman has set a target of 2.7 per cent by 2025. Some departments also provide publicly available detailed breakdowns of First Nations people of their workforce. For example, the Department of Social Services' *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Action Plan* (2021)[14] reports on the number of First Nations employees employed across the APS, Executive Level (EL) and Senior Executive Service (SES) salary bands, compared to the Australian Public Service.

13 Australian Public Service Commission, Employment Release Tables December 2025, Table 77 all employees: diversity group, 2006 to 2025, accessed 6 July 2026.

14 Department of Social Services, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy and Action Plan 2021–2025, Australian Government, 2021, accessed 21 October 2026.

Similar observations can be made across state and territory governments. Each state and territory sets its own First Nations employment target, and reports broadly on progress, with individual departments often reporting separately on the First Nations people working for them. The figure below displays the employment targets for each state and territory and the reported representation of First Nations people within each public service:[15]

Figure 7: First Nations Employment Representation and Jurisdictional Targets in State and Territory Public Services



Source: see Appendix A for data sources.

15 South Australia has not set an employment target but reports on First Nations people in the South Australian Public Service. 2.25 per cent of the workforce identifies as First Nations compared to 2.3 per cent of people identifying as First Nations in the state's labour market. Government of South Australia, State of the Sector Report 2025, 2025, pg. 8.

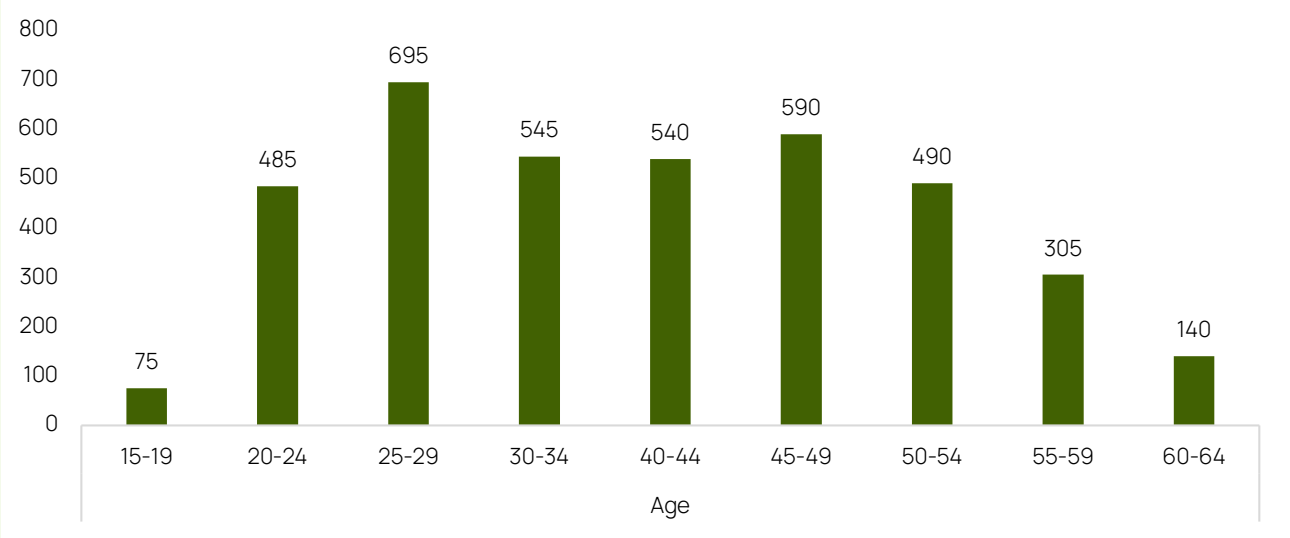
While reported representation remains below stated targets in most states and territories, New South Wales and Tasmania exceeded their published targets, while the Northern Territory recorded the highest level of First Nations representation, reflecting both its higher workforce target and larger First Nations population. These targets demonstrate an ongoing commitment across states and territories to increase First Nations participation in their public sector workforce.

While employment targets provide an indication of policy orientation adopted by Australian governments, understanding the characteristics of the existing workforce provides additional context. The age profile of First Nations employees in the APS gives insight into the distribution of employees across different career stages.

Figure 8 below presents the age distribution of First Nations employees in the federal government sector using 2021 Census data.[16] Employment is concentrated in the core working-age cohorts, particularly between 25 and 54 years of age, with the largest cohort aged 25-29. Overall, the distribution shows that First Nations employees are represented across multiple career stages rather than concentrated in a single age cohort.

Figure 8: Age distribution of First Nations employees in the Australian Public Service, 2021

First Nations employment in the Federal Government by Age (Headcount)

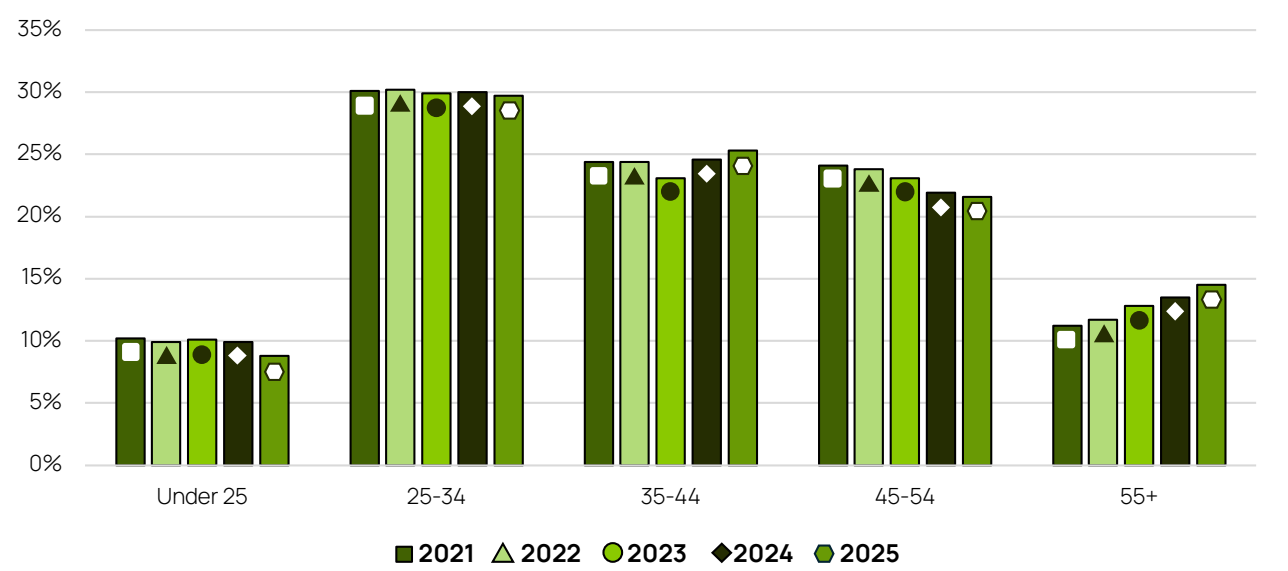


Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2021 Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder; customised cross-tabulations of First Nations persons employed in Federal Government by age group.

16 The ABS Census classifies Australian Government employment under ANZSIC Class 7510 - *Central Government Administration*. In this report, this classification is referred to as *Federal Government* for ease of reading. Although the data from the ABS Census is from 2021, this represents a stable source of information on First Nations workforce demographics.

While the Census provides a point-in-time snapshot, APS workforce data makes it possible to examine how the age profile has changed over time. Figure 9 shows that the proportional age distribution of First Nations employees in the APS has remained relatively stable between 2021 and 2025. Employees aged 25-34 years continue to comprise the largest share, while the proportion of employees 55 years and over has grown steadily, likely signalling the ageing workforce.

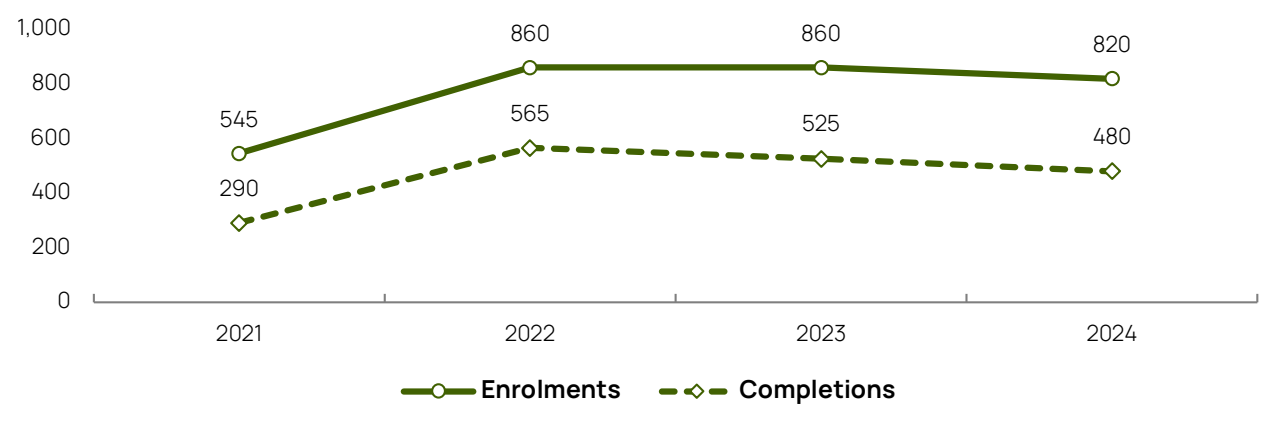
Figure 9: Percentage distribution of First Nations employees in the Australian Public Service by Age, 2021-2025



Source: Australian Public Service Commission, APS Employment Database (APSEDii), Indigenous Status by Agency Size, age group data extracted for 31 December 2021-31 December 2025, accessed June 2026.

The concentration of employment in the early and mid-career cohorts highlights the importance of training pathways that support recruitment and workforce development. Some of these recruitment efforts may be reflected in enrolments with the PSP Public Sector Training Package, for which the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) data tracks enrolments and completions for First Nations students, as shown in the Figure below.

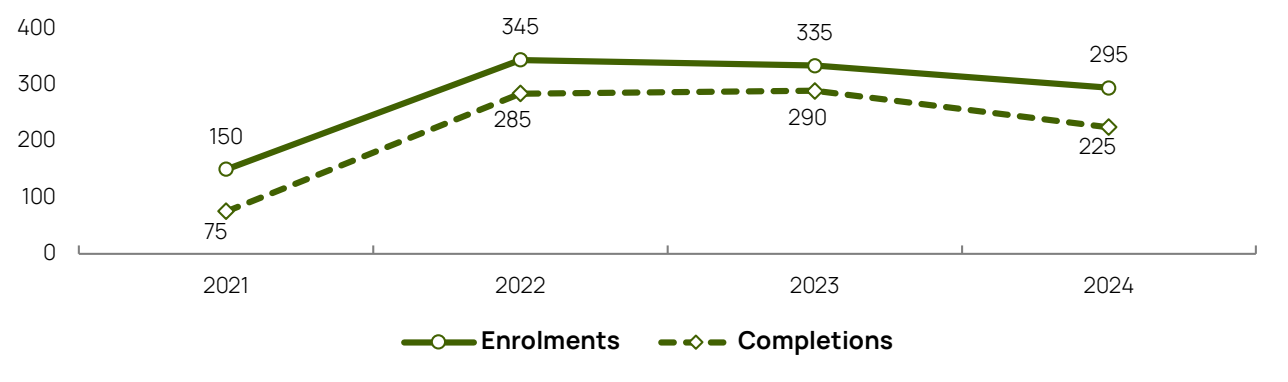
Figure 10: First Nations enrolment and completions in the PSP Public Sector Training Package, 2021-2024



Source: NCVER, National VET Provider Collection, Training Package data (PSP Public Sector Training Package), accessed June 2026.

Within this training package, the most prevalent qualification for First Nations people is the *Diploma of Government*:

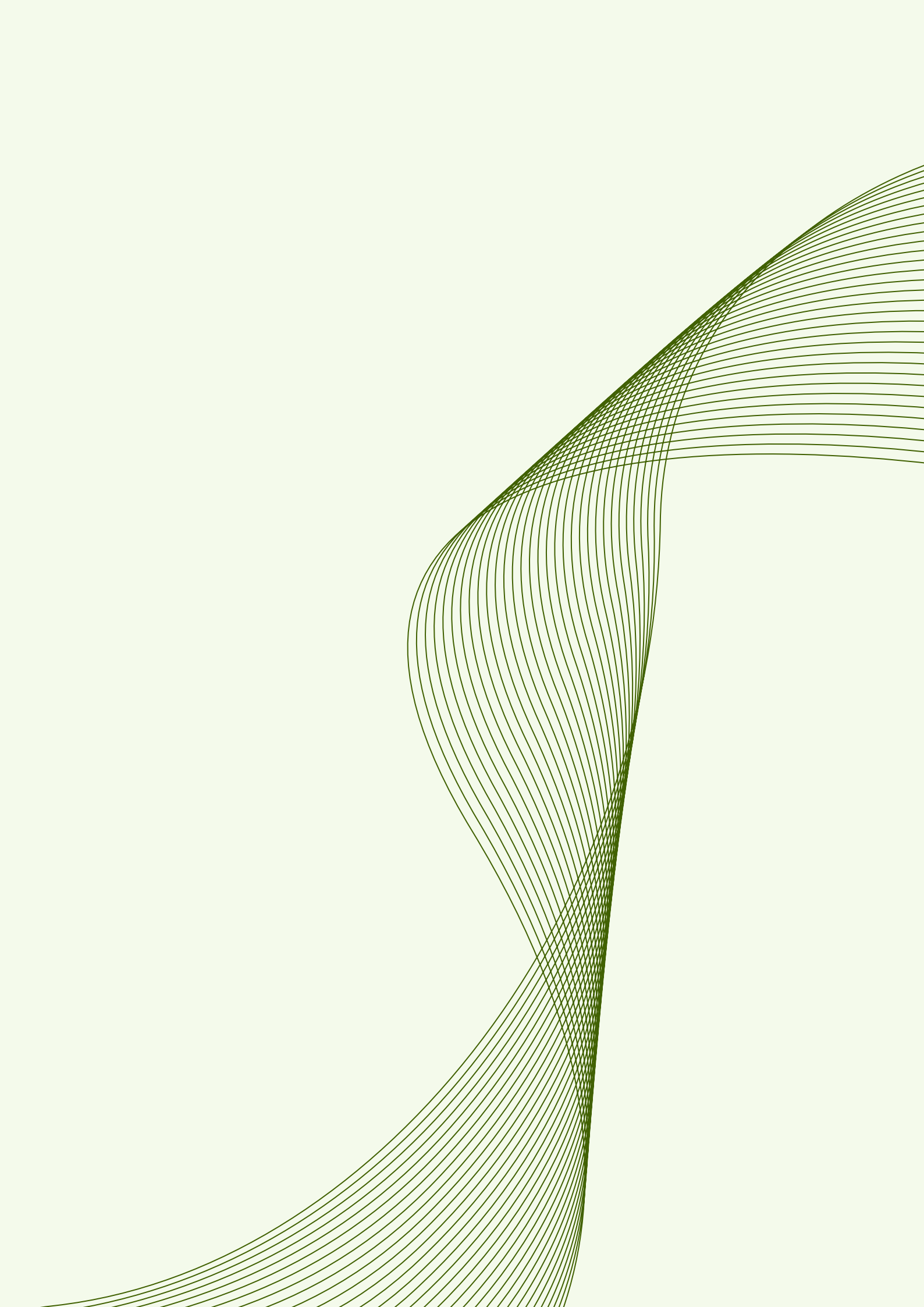
Figure 11: First Nations enrolments and completions in the Diploma of Government, 2021-2024



Source: NCVER, National VET Provider Collection, Training Package data (Diploma of Government), accessed June 2026.

This qualification primarily maps to occupations 599999 Clerical and Administrative Workers and 591232 Taxation and Compliance Officers, demonstrating the types of roles that would benefit from completing this qualification. Sitting at Australian Qualification Framework Level 5, the *Diploma of Government* offers specialisations in Injury Management, Workplace Inspection and Policy with general electives focusing on leadership and workplace coaching and mentoring, providing the opportunity for learners to develop leadership and managerial skills. However, this data on qualifications does not distinguish whether individuals undertake the training prior to entering employment or after commencing employment as part of their career development.[17]

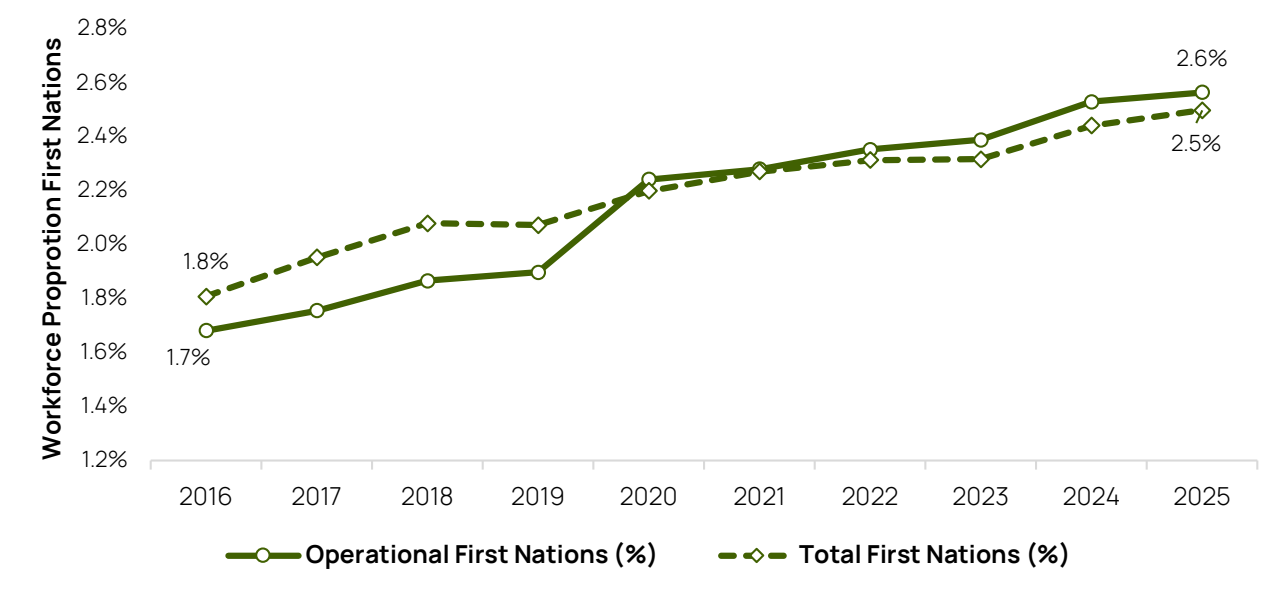
17 More broadly, consultations have indicated that enrolment and completion data do not consistently link qualification attainment with employment pathways, such as workforce entry, retention, progression or leadership.



Police

Police play a central role in public safety across Australia and employ a large operational workforce alongside specialists, administrative and support staff. In 2024-25, First Nations people represented 2.6 per cent of employees in operational policing roles nationally, and 2.5 per cent of employees across all policing roles.[18] Representation has increased steadily over the past decade, rising from 1.7 per cent to 2.6 per cent in operational roles and from 1.8 per cent to 2.5 per cent across all roles between 2015-16 and 2024-25 (Figure 12).[19] Simultaneously, the operational policing workforce increased by approximately 13 per cent over this period, while the number of First Nations employees in operational roles grew by around 72 per cent, contributing to the increase in representation.[20]

Figure 12: First Nations representation in the Australian police workforce, operational roles and all roles, 2016-2025



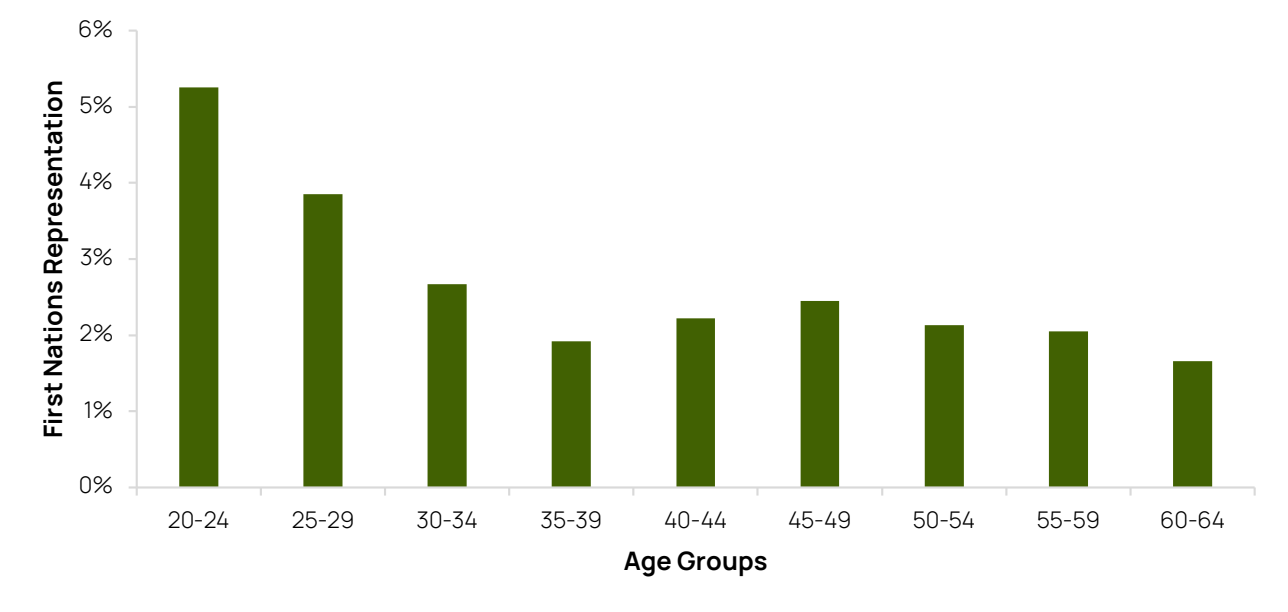
Source: Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2026, Table 6A.2, Police Services (data set), accessed June 2026.

The 2021 Census provides a point-in-time snapshot of First Nations people aged 25–34 employed in Police. The analysis of this data identified 661 First Nations employees in this age group, comprising 357 people aged 25–29 years and 304 aged 30–34 years.

First Nations representation varies by age group, with the highest representation observed among employees aged 20-24 years (5.3 per cent). Representation then declines across the subsequent age cohorts before remaining relatively stable at around 2-2.5 per cent through the mid-career years.

18 Productivity Commission, Police services – Table 6A.2 [data set], Productivity Commission, 2026, accessed 7 April 2026.
19 Productivity Commission, Police services – Table 6A.2 [data set], Productivity Commission, 2026, accessed 7 April 2026.
20 Based on Productivity Commission Report on Government Services data. Between 2015-16 and 2024-25, the national operational policing workforce increased from 65,325 to 72,394 employees (12.5 per cent), while the number of First Nations employees in operational roles increased from 1,082 to 1,858 (71.7 per cent).

Figure 13: First Nations representation in Police Services by age group, 2021 Census



Source: ABS, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder, Police Services industry (ANZSIC), Indigenous status by five-year age group, accessed June 2026.

Even though the data provides an overview of workforce representation, it does not detail factors influencing recruitment, career progression or retention. To affect change, it is important to understand why First Nations people choose careers in policing, what affects their decision to remain and how their experiences might differ across jurisdictions. Further analysis would assist in identifying the occupational profile of First Nations employees in the police, i.e. whether they are sworn/unsworn or whether they held operational, liaison, administrative, supervisory or specialist roles. Even though recruitment initiatives and programs remain important, consultations for this report have pointed out that retaining First Nations employees also depends on workplace cultures that recognise other responsibilities.

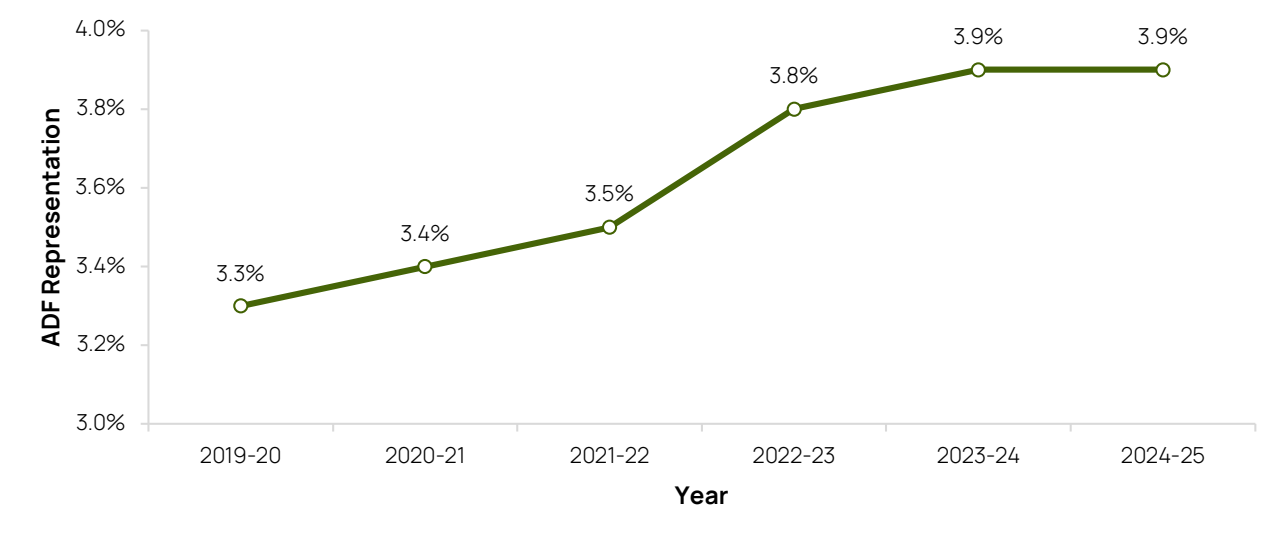
INSIGHT:

Consultations indicated that some First Nations staff also carry additional cultural responsibilities above their formal role, including providing cultural advice, community connections and mentoring. Acknowledging the additional workload and importance of this work was flagged, and if recognised would likely support retention.

Defence

The proportion of First Nations employment in the Australian Defence Force (ADF) increased steadily from 3.3 per cent in 2020 to 3.9 per cent in 2025 (See Figure 14).[21] Even though the size of the permanent ADF declined from approximately 60,330 active personnel in 2021 to 59,147 in June 2025,[22] the number of First Nations staff rose from 1,991 in 2021 to 2,307 in 2025. This represents a net increase of approximately 316 First Nations staff, demonstrating growth in both numbers and their proportional representation over that period despite an overall reduction in the force.

Figure 14: First Nations representation in the ADF, 2019-20 - 2024-25



Source: Department of Defence, Annual Reports 2019–20 to 2024–25, accessed June 2026.

In terms of education and training, analysis focused on First Nations people employed in Defence aged 25-34 years, consistent with the age cohort used for Closing the Gap measures relating to tertiary attainment. The qualification profile of this cohort is predominantly from VET. More than half (58.5 per cent, n=316) hold a Certificate III or IV qualification, while 22.6 per cent (n=122) hold an Advanced Diploma or Diploma and 14.8 per cent (n=80) hold a Bachelor's degree. Only a small proportion (3.5 per cent, n=19) hold graduate diploma, graduate certificate or postgraduate qualifications.[23] This suggests that vocational and technical qualifications remain the primary pathway into Defence for First Nations people.

Within Defence APS, First Nations representation declined from 1.9 per cent in 2024 to 1.8 per cent in 2025.[24] Despite this slight decrease, Defence continues to invest in targeted recruitment initiatives. In 2024-25, 12 participants were employed through the Indigenous Apprenticeship Program, an Australian Government initiative designed to recruit First Nations people into APS roles.[25]

21 Defence Annual Report 2024-25, Table 5.10, p.124.
22 Defence Annual Report 2020-21, Table 6.4, p.112.
23 ABS, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder; customised cross-tabulations of First Nations persons employed in Defence by highest non-school qualification and age group.
24 Department of Defence, Annual Report 2024-25, Department of Defence, Australian Government, 2025, p. 146.
25 Department of Defence, Annual Report 2024-25, Department of Defence, Australian Government, 2025, p. 147.

Looking ahead, Defence recruitment, leadership and retention efforts are expected to be strengthened through the implementation of the *Defence First Nations Commitment, 2025-2030,* which is outlined later in the report.[26] In addition to the workforce recruitment activities, the ADF also operates several programs aimed at encouraging young First Nations people to explore Defence careers and pathways into service. These include the following:

Table 1: Number of First Nations participants across the span of Young Adult Programs within the Department of Defence in 2024-25

Source: Department of Defence, Defence Annual Report 2024 – 25, Department of Defence, 2025, p 146.

Program	First Nations Participants
ADF Pre-Recruit Program	22
Army and Navy Indigenous Development Programs	88
Air Force Indigenous Youth Program	242
Defence Work Experience Program	488
Indigenous Apprenticeship Program	12

26 Department of Defence, 'Defence First Nations Commitment 2025–2030', Department of Defence, 2026.

Fire and Emergency Services

Fire and Emergency Services organisations report workforce information through the Productivity Commission's *Report on Government Services* (ROGS) and jurisdictional annual reports. Fire and Emergency Services differ from other public safety industry-sectors through their strong regional presence and reliance on both career and volunteer employees. In 2024-25, the ROGS records approximately 24,760 full-time paid employees, supported by approximately 190,000 volunteers nationally.[27]

However, when it comes to First Nations representation in this workforce, these sources do not signal a consistent national picture. ROGS does not report First Nations workforce data, while jurisdictions vary in how they collect and publish this information. Consequently, this section draws on ABS Census data to provide a consistent snapshot of First Nations employment across the sector. For example, Air Services Australia and Fire and Rescue New South Wales (FRNSW) publish First Nations employment data for firefighter occupations,[28] whereas other jurisdictions report First Nations employment only at the broader department level. These differences further limit direct comparisons across Australian Fire and Emergency Services organisations.[29]

Table 2: Proportion of First Nations employment in Fire and Emergency Services occupations

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) 6-digit level OCCP Occupation and STATE (POW) by INGP Indigenous Status [Census TableBuilder], accessed 9 April 2026.

State / Territory	Proportion of First Nations Employment
Australian Capital Territory	3.5%
New South Wales	6.1%
Northern Territory	7.9%
Queensland	3.6%
South Australia	0.4%
Tasmania	4.0%
Victoria	1.4%
Western Australia	3.0%

27 Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2026: Part D, Section 9 – Emergency Services for Fire and Other Events*, Productivity Commission, Canberra, Table 9A.4. accessed 1 July 2026.

28 Airservices Australia, Annual Report 2024-25, Airservices Australia, Australian Government, 2025; Fire and Rescue NSW, Annual Report 2024-25, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Government, 2025, accessed 1 July 2026.

29 ANZSCO occupations 441211 Emergency Service Worker and 441212 Fire Fighter.

ABS Census data reveals considerable variation in First Nations representation across Australian Fire and Emergency Services occupations, as shown in Table 2, ranging from 0.4 per cent in South Australia[30] to 7.9 per cent in the Northern Territory. New South Wales (6.1 per cent), for example, records substantially higher First Nations representation in the Fire and Emergency Services occupations than the broader Public Administration and Safety workforce in the state (3.8 per cent). This may reflect the impact of targeted initiatives to attract, recruit and retain First Nations employees.

Several Fire and Emergency Services organisations have also adopted Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs)[31] to reinforce relationships with First Nations communities, enhance cultural learning and support opportunities for First Nations people, including in employment.[32] FRNSW's *Reflect* RAP, for example, incorporates programs such as the Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES), which has supported more than 90 First Nations people to become firefighters over the past decade. The IFARES program is examined in greater detail later as a case study in this report to illustrate one example of a targeted program to support First Nations attraction, recruitment and retention within the sector.

30 South Australia recorded the lowest proportion of First Nations employment in the 2021 ABS Census (0.4 per cent). No publicly available evidence was identified that explains this result.

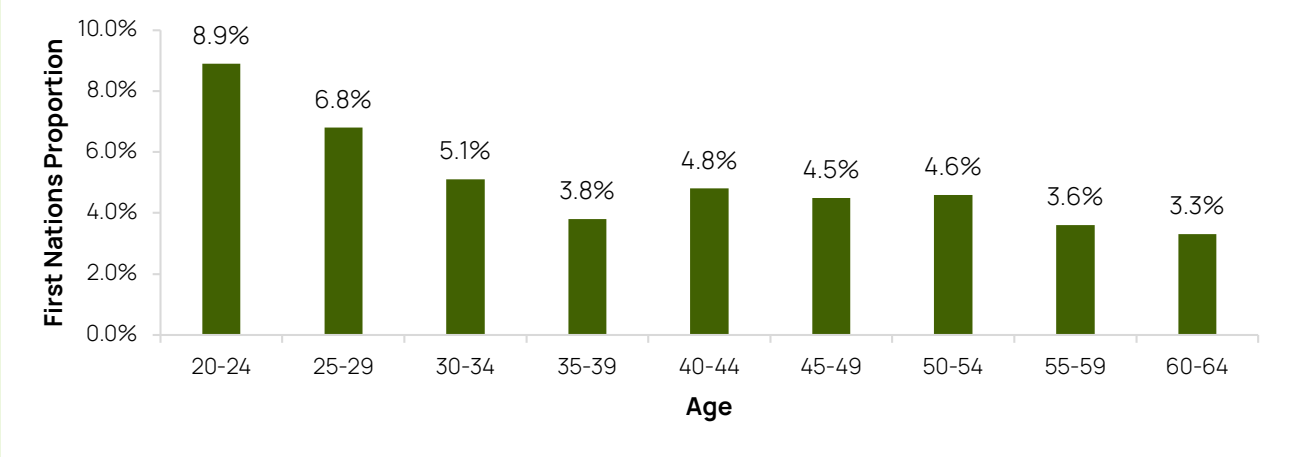
31 As at 2025, RAPs had been adopted by 2,190 organisations across Australia, including by many within each of the Public Safety and Government industry-sectors. See Reconciliation Australia, *Who has a RAP?*, 2025, accessed June 2026.

32 Reconciliation Australia, *About RAPs*, 2025, accessed June 2026.

Correctional Services

Similar to Fire and Emergency Services, Correctional Services reporting varies across jurisdictions. The separate jurisdictional organisations capture and report differently on their workforce data, including the demographic data such as the number of First Nations people employed in the organisation. Drawing from 2021 Census data, there were 867 First Nations Prison Officers (4.5 per cent of the workforce). Although First Nations people represented 4.5 per cent of Prison Officer nationally in 2021, representation was not evenly distributed across all age groups (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Proportion of First Nations Prison Officers by age group, 2021



Source: ABS, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, TableBuilder, 4-digit level Occupation (Prison Officers) by Indigenous Status and Age in Five-Year Groups, accessed July 2026.

First Nations representation was highest among younger Prison Officers, accounting for 8.9 per cent of employees aged 20-24 and 6.8 per cent of those aged 25-29 years. Representation then declined across the older age cohorts, ranging between 3.3 per cent and 5.1 per cent. This suggests that First Nation recruitment into correctional services has strengthened in recent years.

While the data above provides a broad national point-in-time view of First Nations representation in correctional services, consultations offer additional insight into the types of roles pursued by First Nations employees and the factors that influence their workforce representation. Stakeholders indicated that community correctional roles and liaison roles were often pursued by First Nations employees as they provided stronger connections with community, particularly in regions where First Nations incarceration and interaction with the criminal justice system remain high. Consultations highlighted the importance of culturally safe workplaces, mentoring and career development in supporting the attraction and retention of First Nations employees across the Correctional Services workforce.

The findings above are consistent with *Public Skills Australia's 2025 Correctional Services Workforce Insights Report*,[33] which identified several workforce challenges affecting First Nations participation across the Correctional Services industry-sector, including cultural capability, recruitment and employee wellbeing:

1. **Industry-sector representatives indicated that all Correctional Services staff are required to attend mandatory cultural awareness or competency training. Some states and territories also provide optional further related learning and development courses.**

2. **Employer and employee bodies identified the ongoing challenge regarding recruitment of First Nations people from local areas surrounding regional facilities.**

3. **Employer and employee bodies acknowledged that the provision of formal cultural safety and wellbeing supports was a challenge in regional facilities, small facilities and facilities with low First Nations representation – as a result of fiscal restraints.**

33 Public Skills Australia, 2025 Correctional Services Workforce Insights Report, accessed 1 July 2026.

Local Government

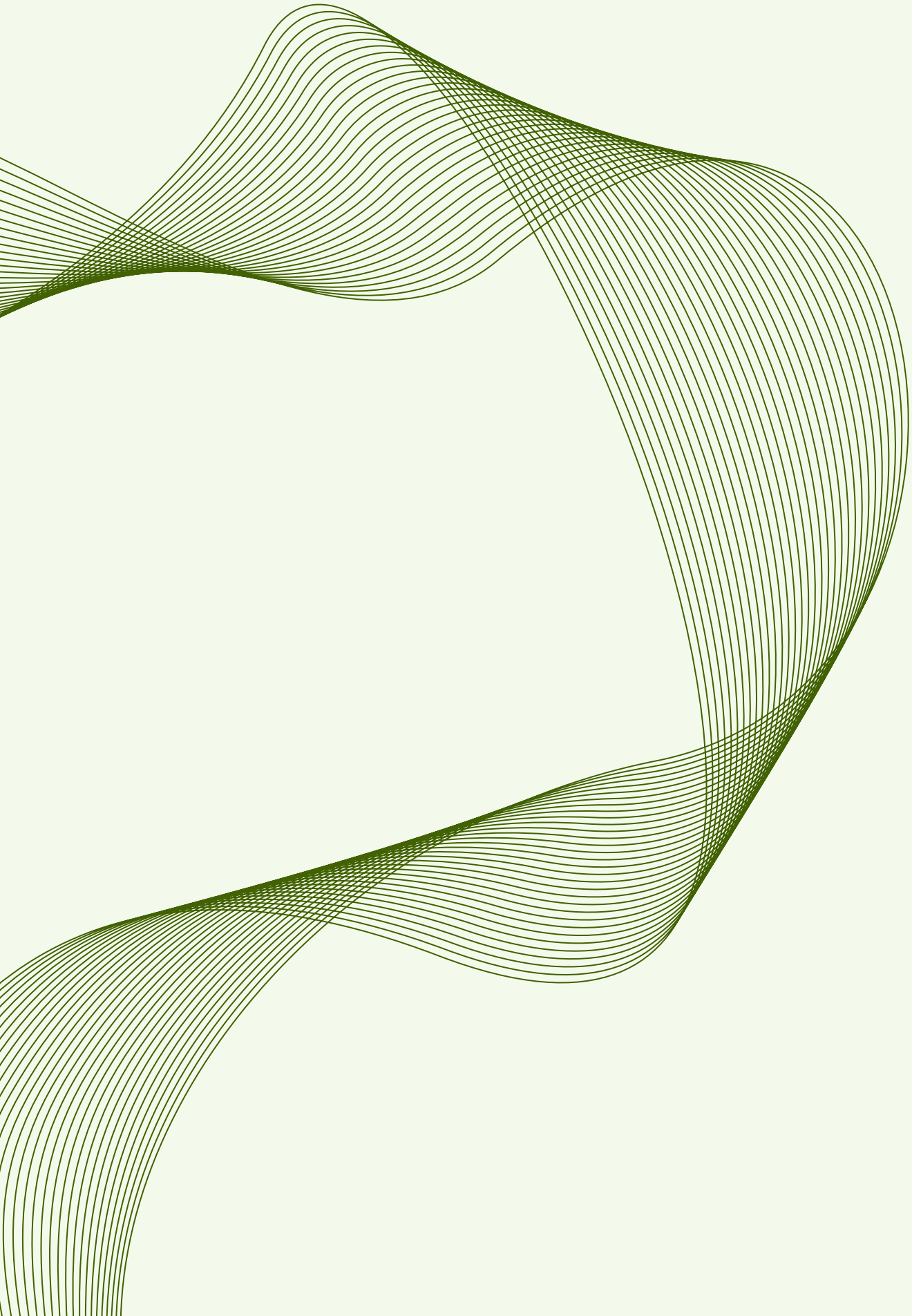
Local Government workforces are diverse and may be preferred by First Nations people due to strong community and place-based connections. There are 538 local councils across Australia, employing 7,308 First Nations people according to 2021 ABS Census data. Jobs and Skills Australia estimate the First Nations workforce at approximately 4 per cent for the entire Local Government industry-sector.[34]

Recent work undertaken by Public Skills Australia for the Local Government Skills Audit surveyed 209 councils across Australia and found a range of First Nations employment trends existed across responding councils. Notably, of the seven responding councils in the Northern Territory, 47.4 per cent of their entire workforce identified as First Nations. It is likely that some local councils are the primary employer of First Nations people in their communities.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is a signatory to Closing the Gap and its role is to support local councils in deepening their understanding of the agreement and encourage the adoption of priority reforms and targets where possible.[35] An example of how Local Government is driving improvements in First Nations participation is the *Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy (2021-2026)*.[36] This Strategy aims to embed First Nation perspectives in local council decision-making and improve outcomes in areas such as employment, economic participation and service delivery. The Strategy is being implemented as a sector wide framework for councils, integrated into existing plans. Progress is guided by a staged approach and local action plans developed with First Nations communities.

34 ABS, Census of Population and Housing, 2021, ABS, Canberra, 2022, accessed via JSA Atlas Pro, accessed 14 April 2026.
35 Australian Local Government Association, Closing the Gap, accessed 3 July 2026.
36 Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Victorian Aboriginal and Local Government Strategy 2021-2026, Victorian Government, 2021, accessed 21 October 2026.





Industry-Sector Case Studies

This section highlights two case studies identified by stakeholders as useful examples of strategies and programs developed to increasing First Nations participation within the Public Safety and Government industry-sectors. The case studies are followed by a summary of other existing strategies and programs[37] currently being implemented across the industry-sectors to support First Nations recruitment, retention and career development.

37 For the purpose of this report, strategies refer to formal plans that establish objectives, priorities and actions (e.g. Reconciliation Action Plans), while programs refer to specific activities or initiatives undertaken by an organisation (e.g. Recruitment and retention programs). While every effort has been made to identify relevant strategies and programs, this should not be interpreted as a complete or exhaustive catalogue. Some First Nations workforce-related strategies or programs may not be publicly available, under-development or delivered through internal organisational processes and therefore have not been captured in this analysis.

Case Studies

1 Case Study 1: Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES)

The Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy (IFARES) program has been increasing employment opportunities for First Nations people living in the Australian Capital Territory and New South Wales since 2014. Designed by First Nations staff within FRNSW, the IFARES program prepares participants for the career firefighter recruitment pathway in a culturally safe and supportive adult learning environment. Program participants gain hands on experience, learning the skills and capabilities required of a FRNSW recruit through simulated training and immersive first responder activities.

Through a combination of theoretical and technical learning activities, IFARES program participants gain exposure to, and knowledge of, the processes, systems, expectations and capabilities required to be a successful FRNSW firefighter. The program has been designed to build participants' confidence and courage, supporting them on their journey to firefighter recruitment.

KEY POINTS

- Until recently, the IFARES program included training in a nationally recognised Certificate III to ensure applicants met the minimum educational standards for a career in Fire and Emergency Services.
- Stakeholders noted that recruitment pathways like IFARES benefit from senior staff and leadership support and engagement. For the IFARES program, stakeholders offered examples of the senior staff spending time with participants, as a way to acknowledge commitment to the program.

Description

- Four application and training phases move participants through interviews, face-to-face workshops, FRNSW-specific training, cultural learning and career readiness.
- Participants gain exposure to a range of FRNSW capabilities, including hose, hydrant and branch skills, search and rescue equipment and techniques, breathing apparatus theory, bushfire operations, controlled burning techniques, and remotely piloted aircraft system operation.
- A variety of task-based and team-based activities support participants to deepen their critical thinking and problem-solving skills, enhance positive values and sense of self, establish teamwork, and build deeper connections.

Outcomes



Since the program's inception, a total of

90 Participants

successfully graduated from the program

with 60-70% of participants ultimately recruited into permanent firefighter positions with FRNSW.



In recent intakes, IFARES has attracted approximately

150 Applicants

who were/will be vetted and shortlisted to a pool of 20-25 per intake.



The program was praised for its genuine and supportive design

including providing First Nations mentors (often ex-IFARES graduates themselves) to guide participants through the 12-month program, preparing them for not only their recruitment journey, but also for future careers.

Benefits

- For First Nations people, the IFARES program provides experiential opportunities, teaches transferrable skills and knowledge, promotes connections between people and communities, and encourages participants to consider a career as a firefighter with FRNSW (increasing their confidence to apply).
- For FRNSW, the IFARES program develops individuals that are better prepared for the rigours of career firefighting, builds a supportive network of First Nations staff and enhances fire safety within the wider community.
- For industry, the IFARES program represents examples of how to enhance recruitment practices, provide increased employment opportunities and build a workforce that is diverse, empowered and enabled.

Case Studies

2 Case Study 2: Solid Futures Aboriginal Traineeship Program

The *Solid Futures Aboriginal Traineeship Program* connects First Nations people with Western Australian public sector agencies by providing formal training, employment opportunities and ongoing mentoring. Established in 2015, the program supports trainees to complete a *Certificate III in Government* while preparing them for long-term careers in the public sector.

KEY POINT

- Offering cultural support to the trainee is vital. The program has built in male and female mentors to guide trainees in a culturally safe way. The program matches trainees with place-based work and builds culturally safe relationships with agencies that trainees are placed with.

Description

- Western Australia public sector agencies are eligible to host Solid Future trainees, who can be placed in metropolitan or regional locations.
- Support is provided to trainees through First Nations mentors (who have completed the program themselves) and the traineeship combines paid employment in public sector agencies with a *Certificate III in Government*.
- Eligibility for the program has expanded to people of all ages and offers flexible delivery arrangements with part-time arrangements to support cultural responsibilities.

Outcomes



Since 2015

the program has supported trainees to **successfully complete** nationally recognised qualifications.



A recent cohort saw

21 trainees graduate

from the program

and commence their careers in the public sector.



Approximately

70%

of participants complete the qualification.



Around

60-70%

of graduates remain employed

in their agencies following completion of the program.

Benefits

- The program offers structured employment pathways for First Nations people into the public sector.
- Supports place-based employment opportunities that enable participants to remain connected to community.
- First Nations mentoring contributes to culturally safe learning environments and ongoing workforce support.

Current Industry-Sector Strategies and Programs

The Public Safety and Government industry-sectors have committed to and undertaken strategies and programs[38] to enhance workforce representation for First Nations people. This section illustrates this commitment by summarising some of the publicly available strategies and programs currently available to promote recruitment, retention and career development for First Nations people.

Correctional Services

Northern Territory

Aboriginal Advisory Committee

Northern Territory Government – Department of Corrections

The Aboriginal Advisory Committee aims to ensure First Nations perspectives, cultural values and knowledge systems are incorporated into the development, implementation and evaluation of Department of Correction's policies, strategies and services that affect First Nations people.

The committee focuses on incorporating First Nations cultural perspectives into departmental policy and service delivery; strengthening engagement with First Nations communities and organisations; promoting cultural safety, respect and First Nations empowerment across the department; improving cultural competence among employees; and aligning departmental activities with key frameworks including Closing the Gap, the Aboriginal Justice Agreement and the Anti-Racism Framework.

The intended outcomes of the committee include a stronger First Nations input into departmental decision-making, increased cultural capability and cultural safety across the workforce, improved engagement and partnerships with First Nations communities, an increase in culturally appropriate policies, rehabilitation programs and service delivery, and greater alignment with government commitments relating to Closing the Gap and First Nations justice reform.

Queensland

Queensland Corrective Services - Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2024 – 2026

Government of Queensland – Queensland Correctional Services (QCS)

The QCS RAP aims to increase cultural capability across the organisation and improve workforce representation and outcomes for First Nations peoples, alongside reducing overrepresentation of First Nations peoples in the criminal justice system.

The RAP's workforce-related components focus on increasing First Nations employment across QCS; improving recruitment, retention and career development outcomes; building leadership pathways; creating culturally safe workplaces and support networks; strengthening cultural capability; and enhancing wellbeing, mentoring and professional development.

Key workforce initiatives include the implementation of an 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategy'; review of recruitment policies/processes to remove barriers to First Nations employment; development of a cultural mentoring network for employees; delivery of cultural capability and cultural safety training; and continued participation in First Nations leadership and career development programs.

38 This is not an exhaustive and/or complete list of current strategies and programs; this report acknowledges that there are more strategies and programs not captured here.

South Australia

Department for Correctional Services – Stretch Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Jan 2024 – Jan 2027

Government of South Australia – Department for Correctional Services (DCS)

DCS's RAP is its second and expands on its prior reconciliation commitments. The plan aims to advance reconciliation and improve outcomes for First Nations peoples in the justice system, as well as build a culturally safe, inclusive workforce and strengthen partnerships with First Nations communities and organisations.

The RAP is structured around four pillars: 1) Relationships: strengthening partnerships with communities, Elders and organisations; 2) Respect: increasing cultural understanding, truth-telling and adherence to cultural protocols; 3) Opportunities: improving employment, leadership and economic participation outcomes; and 4) Governance: embedding accountability, reporting and ownership of reconciliation.

Delivered through system-wide initiatives, including expansion of culturally responsive programs; strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations; mandatory cultural capability training; and workforce initiatives, e.g. First Nations employment pathways, leadership development.

The key intended outcomes include increased First Nations workforce representation (target 8 per cent); improved cultural safety and anti-racism practices across workforce; stronger partnerships/economic participation through First Nations organisations; and clear governance, accountability and measurement of reconciliation progress.

Victoria

Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2024-2027

State Government of Victoria – Department of Justice and Community Safety

The strategy aims to enhance, expand and retain First Nations people within the Department of Justice and Community Safety, including within custodial and correctional environments, to improve outcomes for First Nations people interacting with the justice system. The strategy has three pillars that apply to correctional services: 1) Attract and retain First Nations talent (including custodial officers/justice employees); 2) Culturally safe and supportive workplace (including correctional facilities); and 3) Create employment pathways and build stronger careers (including progression into specialist/leadership roles). The strategy is delivered as a department-wide framework, with Corrections Victoria and other justice service areas. Specialised, business-unit-specific strategies are required to align with overarching strategy. Implementation is supported by the Aboriginal Workforce Unit and consultation with First Nations employees. The strategy's key targets and outcomes include:

- Workforce target: 2.5 per cent First Nations workforce representation across the department (including Corrections), exceeding the Victorian Public Service target of 2 per cent.
- Baseline (May 2024): 2.2 per cent First Nations workforce, with representation across Corrections and Justice.

Defence

First Nations Commitment 2025-2030

Department of Defence

The First Nations Commitment 2025-2030 aims to foster an environment where First Nations peoples are respected, empowered and integral to Defence efforts and support them to join and remain connected to Defence.

The commitment is structured around four pillars: employment and education (recruitment, careers); inclusion and reconciliation (culture, connection to Country); health, wellbeing and truth-telling (cultural safety and health); and economic empowerment (industry participation and procurement).

Implementation is whole-of-Defence, with each Group and Service responsible for delivering initiatives through their own implementation plans. A Project Management Office within Defence People Group oversees governance, program management and annual performance reporting against outcomes.

Workforce participation targets of the First Nations Commitment include: 5 per cent First Nations representation in both the ADF and Australian Public Service by 2030 and 3 per cent First Nations representation in APS senior leadership by 2030.

Indigenous Pre-Recruit Program (IPRP)

Department of Defence

IPRP is a six-week residential program delivered prior to Initial Military Training (IMT). The program aims to increase First Nations participation in the ADF by preparing candidates for entry into military training. It focuses on building confidence, fitness, resilience and cultural support before enlistment.

The program is a pre-entry readiness and transition pathway aiming to prepare candidates for IMT; build physical, mental and personal capability; and provide culturally supported entry into Navy, Army or Air Force careers.

IPRP is delivered as an intensive, military-based program, including physical fitness training, classroom learning and adventure activities; exposure to military life and training environments; and cultural mentoring and support from serving ADF members.

The key intended outcomes of IPRP include increased First Nations recruitment into the ADF; improved readiness and success in IMT and enlistment requirements; development of a confident, job ready pipeline of candidates; and enhanced diversity and cultural capability across Defence.

Navy Indigenous Development Program (NIDP)

Department of Defence

NIDP is a long-term development program (approx. 5-6 months), delivered as a full-time course. NIDP aims to increase First Nations participation in the Navy by supporting candidates who do not yet meet entry requirements, with a focus on education, fitness and employability.

The program is a pre-entry capability-building pathway, which aims to meet education and fitness requirements for Navy entry; build leadership and cultural awareness; and prepare participants for future enlistment or broader employment pathways.

NIDP is delivered as a structured residential training program, including formal education and TAFE-delivered qualifications; physical fitness, military skills training and leadership development and cultural learning activities; and mentoring from serving ADF personnel and exposure to Navy environments.

The key intended outcomes of NIDP include increased First Nations recruitment for the Navy; improved readiness to meet entry standards and recruit training requirements; achievement of recognised educational qualifications; development of a skilled pipeline of candidates for Navy enlistment or other employment.

Army Indigenous Development Program (AIDP)

Department of Defence

AIDP is a 17-week full-time development program, delivered prior to formal recruit training. AIDP aims to increase First Nations participation in the Army by supporting candidates who do not yet meet entry requirements, with a focus on education, fitness and confidence for entry into military training. The program is a pre-entry capability-building pathway, which aims to: meet education (literacy/numeracy) and fitness standards for Army entry; build leadership, resilience and personal development; and prepare participants for Initial Military Training and Army careers. AIDP is delivered as a structured residential program, including formal education and TAFE Certificate II-level qualification; physical fitness, military skills training and leadership and mindset development; strong cultural mentoring and connection to Indigenous identity and community; and delivery at Army locations (e.g. Kapooka or Darwin) with mentoring from serving personnel. The intended outcomes of AIDP include increased First Nations recruitment into Army roles; improved success in recruit training/enlistment; achievement of recognised qualifications/employability skills; and development of culturally supported candidate pipeline, with paths into Army or broader employment.

Fire and Emergency Services

New South Wales

Fire and Rescue NSW - Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Feb 2025 – Aug 2026

Fire and Rescue NSW (FRNSW)

FRNSW's (Reflect) RAP is focused on building understanding and capability and aims to advance reconciliation between FRNSW and First Nations peoples, improving relationships, cultural understanding and equitable outcomes. It establishes a foundation for embedding reconciliation across FRNSW's workforce, culture and service delivery. The RAP is structured around four pillars: 1) Relationships: strengthening partnerships with First Nations communities; 2) Respect: increasing cultural awareness and recognition of First Nations cultures; 3) Opportunities: improving employment, development and economic participation; 4) Governance: establishing structures to support accountability and implementation. Delivered through practical actions and organisational initiatives, including partnerships and engagement with First Nations communities; cultural awareness training and integration of cultural protocols; employment and career pathway initiatives; and governance mechanisms such as a RAP Working Group and reporting processes. The RAP builds on existing initiatives and commits employees to contribute. Focuses on establishing foundational outcomes, including stronger relationships with First Nations communities; improved cultural capability/inclusive workplace practices; increased First Nations employment, development and engagement; clear governance/accountability on reconciliation progress.

NSW Rural Fire Service – Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2026 – 2028

NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS)

RFS's (Innovate) RAP aims to increase First Nations representation across the RFS, improve cultural capability, and create employment and volunteering opportunities while supporting recruitment, promotion and retention of First Nations employees. The RAP is focused on increasing First Nations representation among staff and volunteers; improving recruitment, retention and professional development outcomes; strengthening leadership and cultural capability across the organisation; creating culturally safe environments for staff and volunteers; and embedding cultural knowledge into operational practices.

The RAP's key workforce initiatives include development of an 'First Nations Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development Strategy'; review HR and recruitment policies to remove barriers to employment and volunteering; development of a cultural learning strategy and formal cultural capability training for employees; and consultation with First Nations members to identify barriers and opportunities for workforce representation.

South Australia

South Australian Emergency Services Sector Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2025 - 2027

South Australian Fire and Emergency Services

The strategy covers July 2025 – July 2027 as an 'Innovate' RAP, building on earlier Reflect RAP (2022). It aims to embed reconciliation across the Emergency Services by improving cultural capability, strengthening relationships with First Nations communities and increasing workforce representation. The RAP is structured around three core pillars: 1) Relationships (community engagement and partnerships); 2) Respect (cultural capability and awareness); and 3) Opportunities (employment, procurement and participation).

Implementation is sector wide across emergency services agencies, coordinated through a Reconciliation Working Group with representation from SAFECOM, Country Fire Service, Metropolitan Fire Service and State Emergency Services. The RAP's key outcomes include an increase in First Nations representation in both employees and volunteer workforces through recruitment/retention strategies; and improved cultural safety, stronger partnerships with First Nations communities and enhanced service delivery tailored to community needs.

Western Australia

Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services - Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) Oct 2025 – Oct 2027

Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) 2025 - 2027

The DFES RAP builds upon its earlier Reflect RAP and aims to embed reconciliation into DFES operations and service delivery, ensuring culturally safe, inclusive services and workplaces. It focuses on strengthening partnerships with First Nations peoples, improving cultural capability and awareness and increasing First Nations workforce representation.

The RAP is structured around four pillars: 1) Relationships: building partnerships with First Nations communities; 2) Respect: enhancing cultural understanding/learning; 3) Opportunities: improving employment/development outcomes; and 4) Governance: ensuring accountability and oversight.

Delivered through organisational and operational initiatives, including mandatory cultural awareness training and cultural learning strategies; strengthened Reconciliation Working Group and leadership; community engagement and co-design with First Nations stakeholders; and workforce initiatives.

The key intended outcomes of the DFES RAP include increased First Nations workforce representation (currently 2.7 per cent employees); improved cultural capability and culturally safe workplaces; stronger partnerships with First Nations communities; and better emergency service delivery informed by First Nations knowledge.

Local Government

Australian Local Government Association Closing the Gap (ALGA) Report 2024-25

Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)

Closing the Gap establishes a clear role for ALGA in supporting local councils to understand the commitments under this agreement. ALGA is required to report on their progress against their agreement implementation plan. In 2024-25, the following were delivered by Local Government peak bodies under the priority reform related to employment and retention of First Nations employees:

- Northern Territory: reported the strongest representation nationally, reflecting the demographics of the Northern Territory, with nearly 60 per cent of elected members identifying as First Nations.
- Victoria: highlighted structured employment pathways, including traineeships and cadetships in Banyule and culturally inclusive workforce programs across several councils.
- South Australia: local councils supported culturally safe workforce practices through the use of the Ngutungka Toolkit, improving internal capability to recruit and retain First Nations employees.
- New South Wales: Careers at Council program delivers targeted outreach to First Nations jobseekers and highlights First Nations leadership pathways within Local Government.
- Western Australia: established the Aboriginal Elected Member Roundtable to support leadership, knowledge sharing and workforce inclusion.

Northern Territory

Local Government Association of the Northern Territory – Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan 2025-2027

Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT)

LGANT's RAP aims to strengthen relationships between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous Australians, support Closing the Gap outcomes and increase First Nations participation in local government.

The workforce-related components of the RAP focus on improving understanding of First Nations employment within LGANT, reviewing employment policies to remove barriers to First Nations participation, increasing organisational cultural awareness and cultural capability and supporting First Nations representation and leadership in local government.

Key workforce and organisational initiatives include developing a business case for First Nations employment within LGANT, reviewing employment policies to identify and remove barriers to First Nations employment, reviewing cultural learning needs and developing a business case to strengthen cultural understanding and awareness and increasing staff understanding of local Traditional Custodians and cultural protocols.

Key intended outcomes include improved understanding of First Nations workforce representation and employment opportunities within LGANT, identification and removal of employment barriers affecting First Nations peoples and increased cultural awareness and capability among LGANT staff and leadership.

New South Wales

Collaborate NSW and NSW Local Government Aboriginal Network (LGAN)

Local Government NSW (LGNSW)

Collaborate NSW is a joint initiative between LGNSW, the NSW Office of Local Government, the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, Aboriginal Affairs NSW and NSW Planning and Environment. Collaborate NSW consists of a resource kit and website to support the inclusion of First Nations communities in council decision-making, service development and delivery. The resource kit and website include information on the following legislative and policy frameworks, council responsibilities, strategic planning and community engagement strategies, heritage and planning and protocols and resources.

The *NSW Local Government Aboriginal Network (LGAN)* brings together First Nations council employees to share best practice initiatives and program. LGAN supports inclusion of First Nations communities in Local Government decision-making service delivery and works with a range of organisations to promote reconciliation and cultural understanding within councils.

Queensland

Queensland Indigenous Council Leaders Accord and Accord Committee

Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)

The *Queensland Indigenous Council Leaders Accord* (the Accord) was established in October 2025 between Queensland's 17 discrete First Nations Local Governments and the Queensland Government. The first meeting was held in May 2026 during the LGAQ Indigenous Leaders Forum. The Accord aims to improve the liveability and opportunities for discrete First Nations communities through the delivery of economic, social and cultural infrastructure and services with a focus on progressing outcomes established in the Closing the Gap. The Accord Committee was established as the primary governance structure for the implementation and operation of the Accord. Membership includes the following representatives:

- The department responsible for Local Government.
- Mayors of the First Nations local governments who are parties to the Accord.
- Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ).
- The department responsible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships.
- Agencies responsible for progression of identified priorities.

South Australia

Local Government Aboriginal Cultural Capability toolkit (Ngutungka toolkit)

LGA South Australia

The Ngutungka Toolkit (meaning 'Place of Knowledge') is designed to build awareness, confidence and the cultural capabilities of council leaders, councillors and employees. The toolkit provides case studies and best practice examples across the following topics:

- Culturally appropriate information for South Australia.
- Tools and resources to support Local Council elected leaders.
- Promotion of First Nations governance and self-determination.
- Identification of the Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCO) Network to assist with establishing appropriate representation on projects.

Victoria

Opportunities for Employment of First Nations People

Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV)

MAV outlines a range of actions and strategies that local councils can undertake to improve First Nations employment. These include:

Attraction and recruitment:

- Actively seek First Nations candidates for vacant positions.
- Develop and promote council's approach to First Nations employment.
- Include wording on job advertisements encouraging First Nations people to apply.

Induction and retention:

- Undertake cultural awareness training for line managers and team where First Nations will be working.
- Provide clarity about council requirement and expectations.

Procurement:

- Find First Nations businesses operating locally and alert them to procurement opportunities.
- Use First Nations businesses where possible.
- Become a member of Supply Nation (First Nations business directory).

Western Australia

Kolbang Yanginy – Local Government Reconciliation Resource and Local Government Reconciliation Network

Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA)

WALGA in collaboration with Reconciliation WA and State Government agencies launched **Kolbang Yangini**, which is a website designed to support Local Governments across Western Australia build strong relationship with First Nations people. The resource coves the following themes: reconciliation: plans and strategies, truth-telling, placemaking: community engagement, collaboration, cultural protocols, partnerships: government partnerships, Closing the Gap, people: representation and employment pathways, cultural competency and native title and heritage. The *Western Australia Local Government Reconciliation Network* supports peer-to-peer advice and learning and opportunities for partnership and collaboration.

Police

Australian Federal Police

First Nations Pathway Program

Australian Federal Police (AFP)

This 12-month structured pathway program aims to increase First Nations employment and representation within the AFP, providing a structured entry pathway into careers in law enforcement and support roles. It focuses on building skills, confidence and experience in a culturally safe and supportive environment. The program is workforce-focused and aims to improve attraction and entry of First Nations candidates; skill development and career exposure across AFP roles; and retention and long-term employment pathways.

Delivered through an employment and development model, including employment with rotational placements across multiple areas; training and qualifications; ongoing mentoring and Indigenous employee networks; professional development and workplace learning opportunities; and exposure to AFP operations and programs. Key intended outcomes include increased First Nations participation across AFP roles; improved recruitment, retention and career progression outcomes; a more representative and culturally capable workforce; and transition into ongoing (permanent) employment on successful completion.

New South Wales

NSW Police Force - Aboriginal Employment and Engagement Strategy 2024 – 2026

New South Wales Police Force

The strategy aims to increase First Nations employment, retention and engagement within the NSW Police Force. It seeks to create a culturally safe and inclusive workplace where First Nations employees can build careers in the Police Force. The strategy is structured around four pillars: 1) Aboriginal Cultural Safety – embedding respectful and inclusive workplaces; 2) Cultural Health and Wellbeing – supporting wellbeing of First Nations employees; 3) Aboriginal Leadership – developing leadership pathways and representation; and 4) Attracting and Growing Talent – improving recruitment, retention and career pathways.

It is delivered through initiatives, including cultural awareness and immersion programs; strengthening the Aboriginal Employee Network; leadership development and career progression pathways; recruitment campaigns and pre-employment pathways; and partnerships with First Nations communities/organisations to support recruitment.

Key intended outcomes include increased First Nations workforce representation across roles and levels; improved retention, engagement and employee experience; stronger First Nations leadership pipeline; and enhanced cultural capability and culturally safe workplaces.

New South Wales

Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery (IPROWD)

New South Wales Police Force

This full-time 18-week (or flexible 24-week) program aims to increase First Nations representation in law enforcement by preparing participants for careers with the NSW Police Force and/or AFP. It provides a culturally safe and supportive pathway into policing and related careers. The program is a pre-recruitment and career readiness pathway centred on preparing participants for NSW Police and AFP recruitment processes; building fitness and work-readiness; and supporting First Nations people to pursue careers in law enforcement and community safety.

IPROWD is delivered through a partnership between TAFE NSW, NSW Police Force and AFP, including completion of a *Certificate III*, Vocational and Study Pathways, police fitness preparation, support with police applications/recruitment processes and mentoring and culturally appropriate learning support.

Key intended outcomes include increased First Nations recruitment into policing and law enforcement careers, improved readiness for police entry requirements/assessments, and development of a stronger pipeline of First Nations candidates for the NSW Police Force and AFP.

Queensland

Queensland Police Force - Reframing the Relationship Plan 2024 – 2027

Queensland Police Force

The plan aims to strengthen relationships with First Nations peoples while increasing their representation, participation and leadership within QPS. It seeks to build a culturally safe workforce and improve recruitment, retention, career progression and leadership opportunities for First Nations employees.

The plan focuses on increasing First Nations employment and leadership representation; reducing barriers to recruitment; supporting career development and progression; building cultural capability across the workforce; and embedding First Nations perspectives into recruitment and decision-making processes.

Key workforce initiatives include a QPS First Nations employment target of 4 per cent and increased representation across all employment streams and leadership levels; increased participation of First Nations employees on recruitment panels; career planning/development support for First Nations employees; enhanced peer support, mentoring and professional networks; cultural capability and cultural safety training for all QPS employees; and establishment of a wellbeing framework and First Nations-led Employee Assistance Program.

Queensland

First Nations Recruit Preparation Pathway

Queensland Police Service (QPS)

This six-month program is a full-time preparatory course, aiming to increase First Nations representation in policing by supporting First Nations applicants to enter the QPS recruit training pipeline. It focuses on building readiness and capability to meet recruitment and training requirements.

The pathway is a pre-recruitment and transition program, which aims to: prepare candidates for entry into police recruit training; support applicants who may not yet meet all recruitment requirements; and provide cultural and practical support throughout the recruitment process.

Delivered as academy-based program, including theory, practical and physical police training; preparation for key recruitment stages; exposure to policing concepts, legislation and operational skills; cultural support via First Nations recruitment/pathway teams; and selection via QPS recruiting process.

Key intended outcomes include increased First Nations recruitment into policing; improved success rates in recruitment assessments and academy entry; progression into the formal recruit training program; and a more diverse and representative police workforce.

South Australia

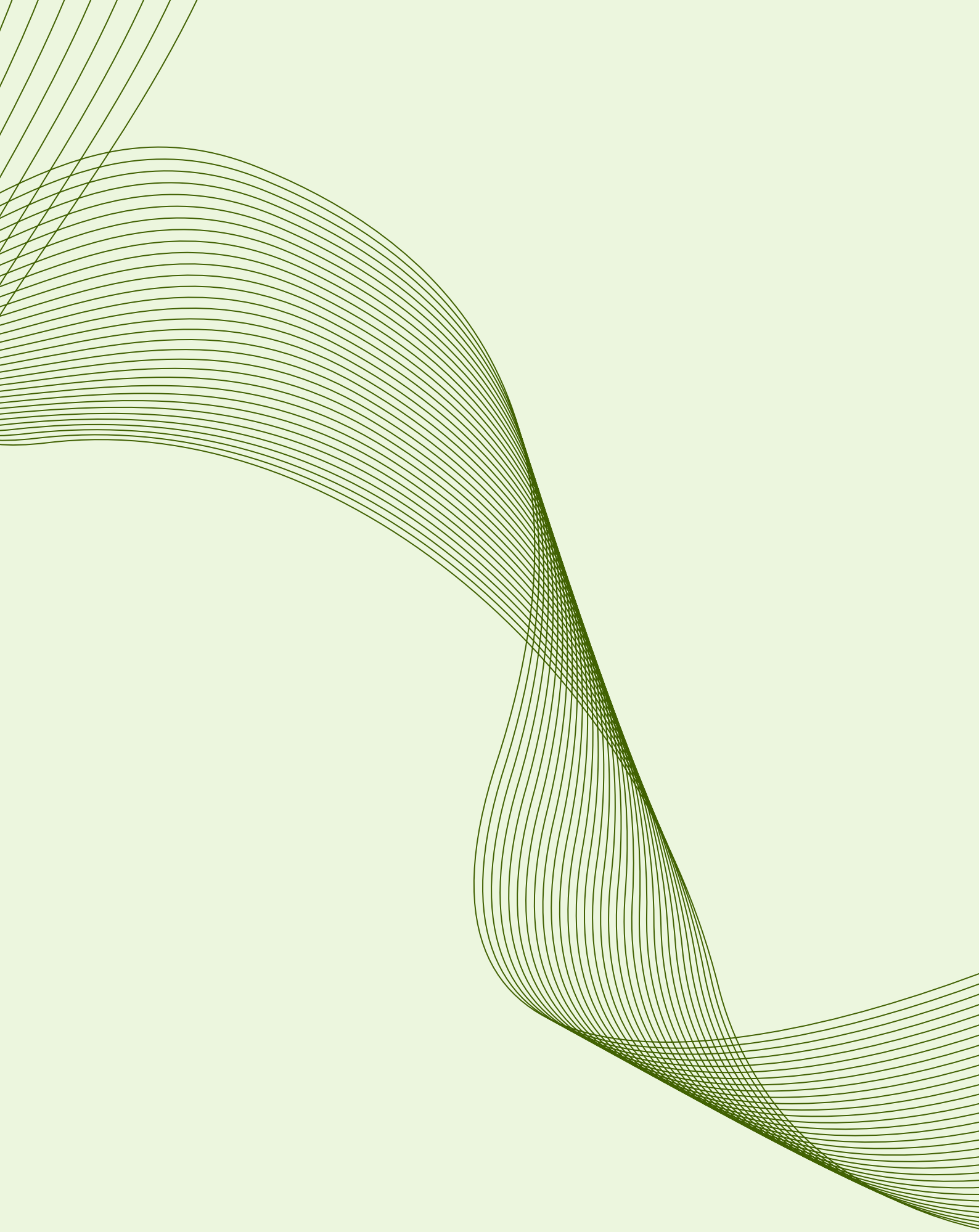
South Australia Police – Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) 2024 – 2026

South Australia Police (SAPOL)

The SAPOL RAP aims to grow First Nations participation and representation within the workforce, with specific commitments to increasing First Nations recruitment, retention, leadership development and career progression opportunities.

The workforce plan focuses on increasing First Nations employment across sworn and non-sworn roles; improving recruitment/retention outcomes; creating culturally safe and supportive workplaces; strengthening professional development and leadership pathways; increasing First Nations representation in management and senior leadership positions; and enhancing employee wellbeing and cultural capability across the organisation.

Key workforce initiatives include the development of a dedicated First Nations Recruitment, Retention and Professional Development Strategy; review of recruitment policies and practices to identify/remove barriers to First Nations participation; clear career pathways and leadership opportunities for First Nations employees; and access to culturally safe wellbeing and counselling services.



State and Territory Government

New South Wales

Aboriginal Career and Leadership Development Programs (ACLDP)

Government of New South Wales

ACLDP aims to develop leadership capability among First Nations employees in the NSW public sector, supporting high-potential individuals to progress into current and future leadership roles. It is a career and leadership development program, which aims to build public sector leadership capability aligned to NSW Leadership Framework, strengthen cultural leadership and identity, support participants to navigate cross-agency challenges, and develop peer networks and cross-sector collaboration.

ACLDP is delivered through the NSW Leadership Academy using a structured, multi-component model, including leadership workshops, self-assessment and development planning, coaching and mentoring support, peer learning groups and networking, and opportunities for cross-sector collaboration. The key intended outcomes of the program include increased First Nations representation in leadership roles across the NSW public sector, development of high-performing, culturally capable leaders, strengthened cross-agency networks and collaboration, and improved capacity to lead system-wide initiatives.

New South Wales Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2019 – 2025

Government of New South Wales

The strategy aims to increase First Nations employment across the NSW public sector and create a workforce that reflects the community. It focuses on improving attraction, retention and career progression while ensuring First Nations employees feel supported, respected and empowered. The strategy is structured around key focus areas: attracting and recruiting First Nations talent; creating inclusive and culturally safe workplaces; and supporting career development and mobility.

Delivered through sector wide initiatives and guidance for agencies, including recruitment pathways and targeted employment initiatives; programs to develop and retain First Nations employees; cultural capability training and stronger engagement with First Nations employees and communities. The strategy focuses on improving workforce outcomes, including increased First Nations representation across roles and seniority levels; improved retention, development and career progression; and more inclusive, culturally safe workplaces across the public sector.

Northern Territory

Kigaruk & Lookrukin Aboriginal Leadership Development Program

Government of Northern Territory

The 18–24-month program aims to develop First Nations leadership capability within the Northern Territory public sector, supporting managers to progress into senior leadership roles and strengthening the pipeline of First Nations leaders. This program targets participants who are mid-career and aims to build leadership and decision-making capability, strengthen effectiveness and cultural leadership, and prepare participants for senior public roles.

Delivered as an accredited, cohort-based leadership program, including formal qualification pathway; structured workshops and training blocks; and development across core capability areas such as leadership and communicationand business management and policy development.

Key intended outcomes include increased First Nations representation in senior leadership roles, development of qualified, job-ready leaders, strengthened retention and career progression of First Nations employees, and creation of a sustainable leadership pipeline within the Northern Territory public sector.

Victoria

Barring Djinang First Peoples' Workforce Development Framework 2024 – 2028

Government of Victoria

The Barring Djinang First Peoples' Workforce Development framework aims to improve First Peoples employment outcomes across the Victorian public sector, including increasing workforce and leadership representation. The framework is structured around six focus areas: 1) Increasing entry level career pathways; 2) Supporting career growth and mobility; 3) Building a leadership pipeline; 4) Connecting and sharing across the sector; 5) Strengthening cultural capability; and 6) Improving data, understanding and insights.

Delivered through sector-wide initiatives, including recruitment and entry-level employment pathways; career development and leadership programs; and cultural capability and workplace inclusion initiatives. The framework focuses on improving workforce outcomes, including increased First Peoples representation across all levels; stronger retention and career progression; greater First Peoples representation in leadership roles; and more culturally safe and inclusive public sector workplaces.

Western Australia

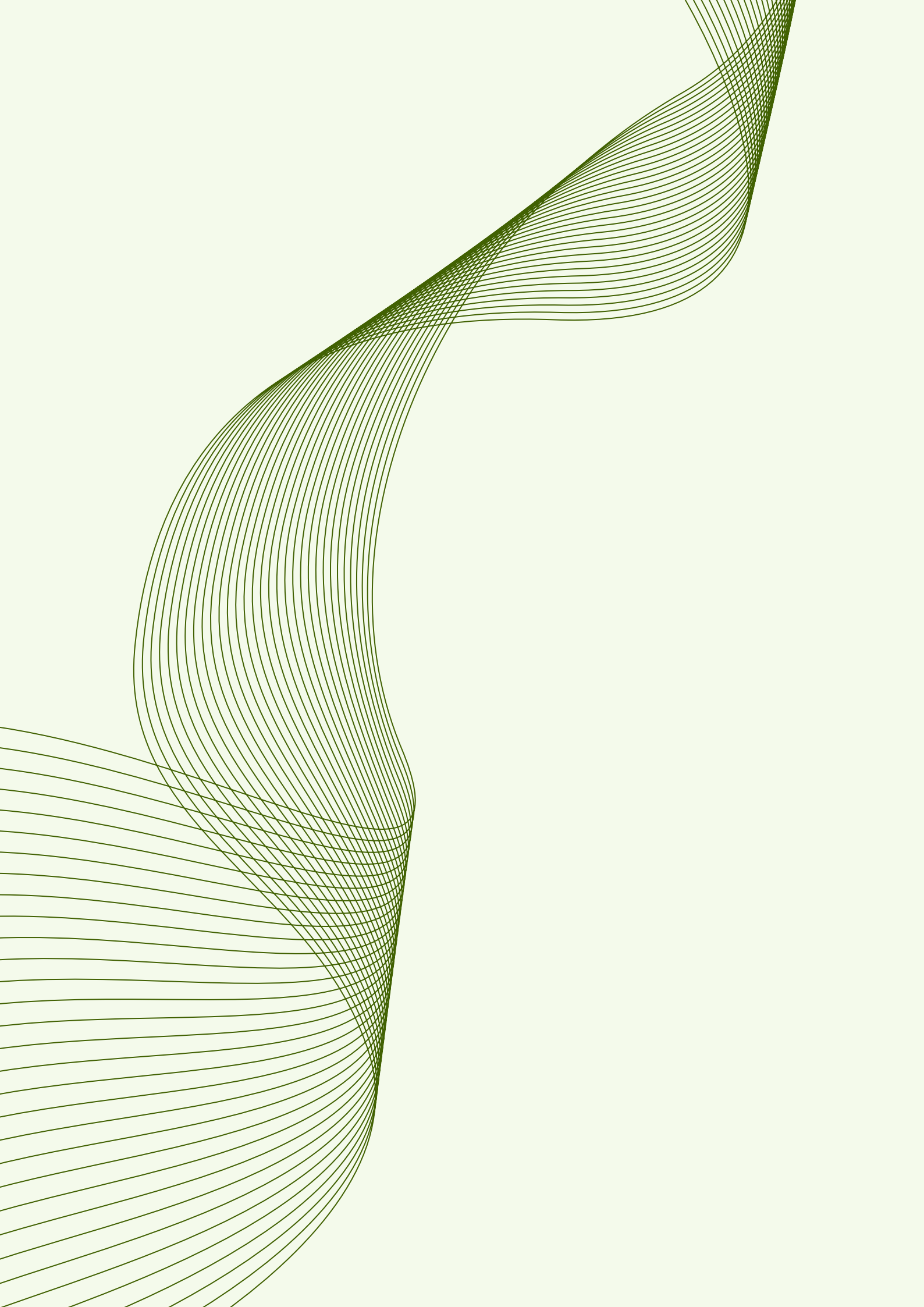
Western Australian Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2025 – 2026

Government of Western Australia

This short-term strategy aligns with other diversity initiatives, and aims to increase the recruitment, retention and development of First Nations employees within the Western Australian public sector. It focuses on building a workforce that reflects community diversity while improving cultural capability and workplace experience for First Nations employees. The strategy focuses on two areas: 1) increasing First Nations workforce representation via entry pathways/inclusive recruitment and 2) improving cultural safety, career development and workplace support.

It is delivered through an action plan of targeted initiatives, including entry level programs and inclusive recruitment practices; improved induction, onboarding and career development pathways; workplace initiatives to enhance cultural safety and employee wellbeing. The strategy focuses on improved workforce outcomes, including increased First Nations representation across the workforce; improved retention and career progression; enhanced cultural capability and a more inclusive workplace; and better overall employment experience for First Nations employees.





Conclusion

This report has examined First Nations employment across the Public Safety and Government industry using available data, consultations and examples of existing workforce strategies and programs. The findings demonstrate that the Public Safety and Government industry continues to strengthen its commitment to the priority targets of the Closing the Gap agreement and to raising First Nations participation in the industry-sector workforces.

Across industry-sectors, there is clear evidence that organisations are investing in pathways to attract First Nations employees. Many are implementing employment targets, developing Reconciliation Action Plans and other strategies, establishing pre-employment and traineeship programs and incorporating mentoring initiatives to assist the attraction, development and retention of First Nations people within career pathways. The case studies of IFARES and Solid Futures Aboriginal Traineeship Program showcase how targeted programs can support workforce entry and deliver mutually beneficial employment outcomes.

From the data analysis and industry insights obtained through the consultations, this report offers two considerations for the Public Safety and Government industry, which may bolster ongoing strategies and programs to increase First Nations workforce representation and strengthen the retention of First Nations people within their existing workforce.

Considerations

1

While there is a need to strengthen First Nation representation across industry-sector workforces, increasing employee numbers is only one part of a broader challenge. Consultations consistently emphasised the importance of creating culturally safe workplaces and promoting career development and senior leadership opportunities to ensure First Nations people can move beyond operational occupations and entry-level roles into managerial occupations.

2

The evidence suggests that retaining and developing First Nations employees throughout their careers is an increasingly important consideration. To effectively monitor and measure progress, there needs to be greater availability, consistency and depth of workforce data on First Nations participation across industry-sectors. Addressing data gaps represents an opportunity to strengthen the evidence base, better assess improvements over time and support long-term workforce planning.

Appendix A: Public Safety and Government Industry First Nations Data

Map: First Nations representation in the Public Administration and Safety industry (%)

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder, INDP Indigenous Status and 6-Digit OCCP by Public Administration and Safety Industry*, accessed June 2026.

Australian Defence Force

- Department of Defence, *Defence Annual Report 2024-2025*, Australian Government, 2025, Table 5.28, p. 147, accessed June 2026.

Australian Public Service

- Australian Public Service Commission, *State of the Service Report 2024-25,* Australian Government, 2025, Figure AB 1, p. 171, accessed June 2026.

Correctional Services

- ACT Government Justice and Community Safety Directorate, *Annual Report 2024–25*, ACT Government, 2025, p. 217, accessed 13 April 2026.
- Queensland Corrective Services, *Annual Report 2023-24*, Queensland Government, 2024, p. 64, accessed 13 April 2026.
- New South Wales Department of Corrections and Justice, *Correctional Services NSW Annual Report 2024-25, Vol. 1 Part 2*, NSW Government, 2025, p. 58, accessed 13 April 2026.
- Northern Territory Department of Corrections, *Department of Corrections Annual Report 2024-25*, Northern Territory Government, 2025, p.74, accessed 13 April 2026.
- South Australia, no statistical data available.
- Tasmania, no statistical data available.
- Victoria State Government Department of Justice and Community Safety, *Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2024-2027*, Victoria State Government, 2025, p.11, accessed 13 April 2026.

Fire and Emergency Services

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Census of Population and Housing 2021, TableBuilder, 6-digit level OCCP Occupation and STATE (POW) by INGP Indigenous Status*, accessed 9 April 2026.

Local Government

- Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021 Census of Population and Housing, as reported in *Australian Local Government Association*, *2022 Local Government Workforce Skills and Capability Survey – National Report*, 2022, Table D3, p. 126, accessed June 2026.

Police

- Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2026, Table 6A.2, Police Services [data set]*, 2026, accessed 7 April 2026.

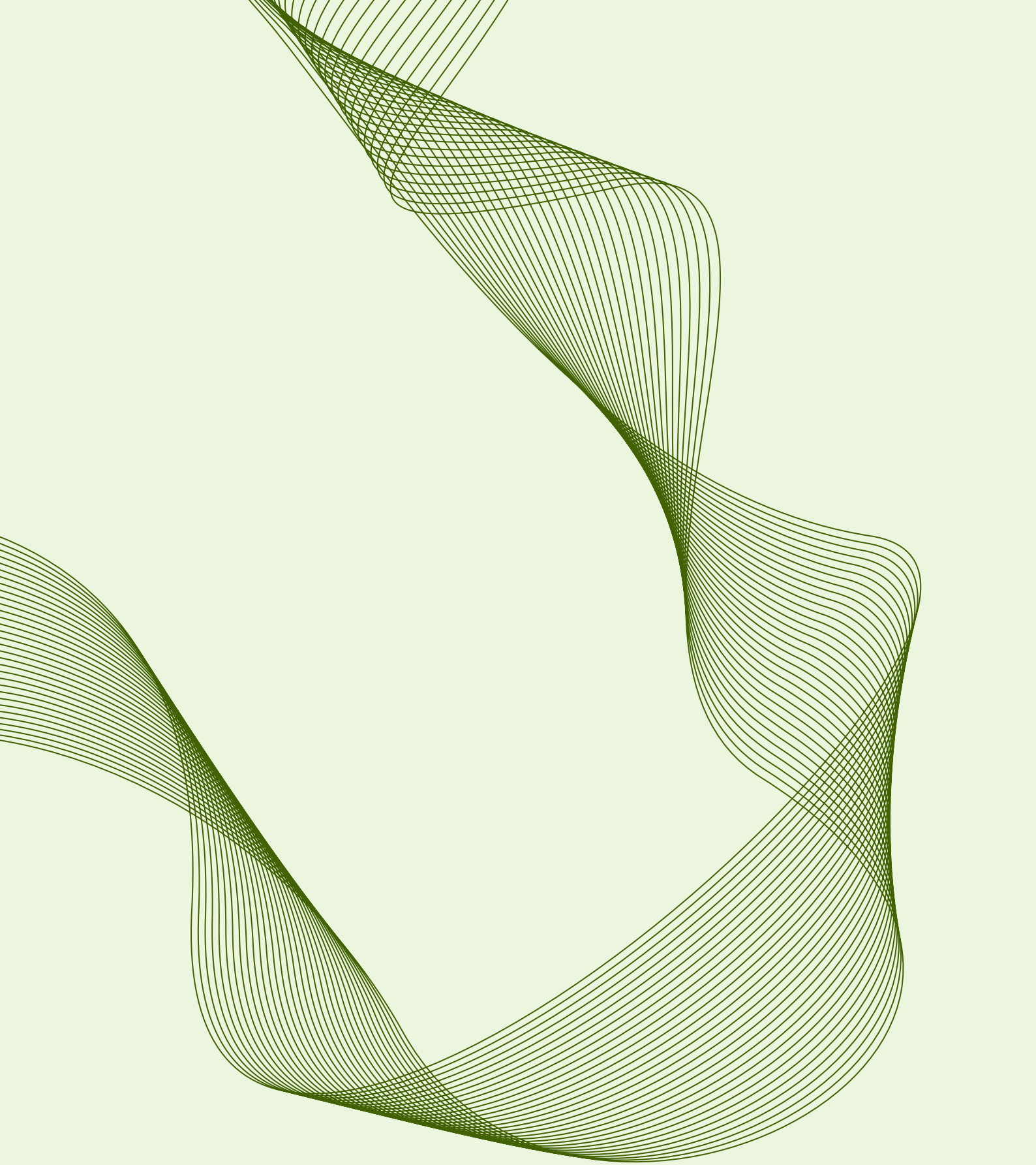
State and Territory Government

- ACT Government, *State of the Service Report 2024-25*, ACT Government, 2025, Table A.1, p. 51, accessed April 2026.
- Public Sector Commission, *State of the Sector Report 2025*, Queensland Government, 2025, p. 35, accessed April 2026.
- Premier's Department, *Workforce Profile Report 2025*, NSW Government, 2025, p. 19, accessed April 2026.
- Office of the Commissioner for Public Employment, *State of the Service Report 2024-25*, Northern Territory Government, 2025, Figure 18, p. 21, accessed April 2026.
- Office of the Commissioner for Public Sector Employment, *State of the Sector Report 2025*, Government of South Australia, 2025, p. 8, accessed April 2026.
- Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Tasmanian State Service Annual Report 2024-25*, Tasmanian Government, 2025, p. 11, accessed April 2026.
- Victorian Public Sector Commission, *Workforce data (state of the public sector): Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander*, Victoria State Government, 2024, accessed April 2026.
- Public Sector Commission, *State of the WA Government Sector Workforce 2024-25*, Government of Western Australia, 2025, p. 32, accessed April 2026.

Appendix B: Consultation List

Industry-Sector	Jurisdiction	Organisation	Theme/Interest
Fire and Emergency Services	New South Wales	Fire Rescue NSW	IFARES - recruitment introduction program
Police	Victoria	Victoria Police	Perspectives on Victoria Police engagement with First Nations People
	Queensland	Queensland Police Service, First Nations Recruit Preparation Pathway (FNRPP)	Activities of FNRPP
Defence	Australia	Defence Education Learning and Training Authority (DELTA)	Defence First Nations Plan
Federal, State and Territory	New South Wales	Office of the Public Service Commission	Aboriginal Employment Strategy
	Western Australia	Western Australia Public Sector Commission (WAPSC)	Solid Futures Aboriginal Traineeship Program
Local Government	Australia	Australian Local Government Association (ALGA)	National landscape regarding First Nations people in Local Government
	New South Wales	Local Government NSW	Closing the Gap Toolkit & other LGNSW strategies
	Queensland	Local Government Association of Queensland	Cape Councils First Nations Pathways
	Western Australia	Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA)	Certificate III in Government and WALGA First Nations strategies

Industry-Sector	Jurisdiction	Organisation	Theme/Interest
Corrections	Victoria	Justice and Community Safety	Aboriginal Workforce Unit - Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2024-27
Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA)	Australia	JSA	Activities of the Inclusive Participation Workforce Unit
Registered Training Organisations (RTOs)	Western Australia	Skills Strategies	First Nations training within the VET system
		Aspire Performance Training	
	New South Wales	TAFE NSW	Indigenous Police Recruitment Our Way Delivery (IPROWD) program



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