

NSW Police Force Aboriginal Strategic Direction 2018-2023 monitoring report

23 October 2023

Monitoring the Aboriginal Strategic Direction 2018-2023

What is the Aboriginal Strategic Direction?

The Aboriginal Strategic Direction (ASD) is a public document created by the NSW Police Force to provide a blueprint for its long-term, positive engagement with Aboriginal communities throughout NSW.

The ASD lists 4 priorities:

- Community safety
- Enhancing communication and understanding
- Working with other agencies to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system, and
- Improving the safety and wellbeing of young Aboriginal people.

The ASD gave the Law Enforcement Conduct Commission the role of monitoring the NSW Police Force's progress against the Strategy.

How we did our review

We compared the intended aims, activities and outcomes of the ASD with what occurred in practice over the period.

Our key sources of information were NSW Police Force documents including:

- ASD action plans, environmental scans and quarterly reports
- closure reports for crime prevention grants awarded under the ASD
- records about officer training

We also spoke to over 20 individuals including police officers, Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs), the NSW Police Force Aboriginal Coordination and Strategy Team, the Chief and Deputy Chief Magistrates of the Local Court, the President of the Children's Court, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, the Aboriginal Legal Service, and Transforming Aboriginal Outcomes in the Department of Communities and Justice.

Summary

Positive developments

Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) are highly valued by the NSW Police Force and are key to promoting the purpose of the Aboriginal Strategic Direction locally. ACLOs do important work in challenging cultural contexts, including navigating competing expectations from communities and police in relation to their responsibilities.

Police officers, ACLOs and members of the Aboriginal Coordination and Strategy team played an essential role in supporting communities during natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic, including providing care packages and coordinating vaccination programs.

Room for improvement

It is the role of the Steering Committee to monitor and drive implementation of the ASD. The Steering Committee is chaired by a Deputy Commissioner who is the Corporate Sponsor for Aboriginal Engagement.

We encourage the NSW Police Force to consider the following areas for improvement when developing future ASDs:

- the measures for each of the 4 priority areas could be clarified to make it easier to evaluate whether activities achieved their intended objectives
 - many measures were not reported against because the NSW Police Force indicated it did not 'own' the data which it indicated would demonstrate success
 - the NSW Police Force did not have a systematic approach for finding out the overall impact of its activities and reporting requirements on the ASD priorities.
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Looking at the big picture

Our report highlighted 2 contextual factors relevant to policing of Aboriginal communities in NSW.

The continuing over-representation of Aboriginal people in policing interactions

This includes interactions where the law allows a police officer to choose whether to charge a person or divert the person away from the criminal justice system.

We asked the NSW Police Force to look at its policing practices, training, and procedures, to ensure it is doing everything possible to reduce Aboriginal over-representation in the criminal justice system.

The NSW implementation of Closing the Gap

Closing the Gap is a whole-of-government initiative including outcomes to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal adults and young people in the criminal justice system (outcomes 10 and 11).

The NSW Government's [Implementation Plan](#) for reaching these targets lists actions regarding arrest, bail and co-designing a community policing model.

The NSW Police Force sits on a number of Closing the Gap working groups. Our report suggests that the NSW Police Force could make clearer commitments about how it will partner with other organisations to work on the initiatives that relate directly to policing.

Recommendations

We recommended the NSW Police Force should:

1. Support Commands and Police Districts to develop localised approaches to working with communities that are aligned with the principles of Closing The Gap.
2. Work with local Aboriginal community representatives to review the information included in environmental scans.
3. Provide the Working with Aboriginal Communities training to all sworn all unsworn employees state-wide.
4. Work with local communities and ACLOs to develop Region- or Command-specific training materials that reflect the history of the local Aboriginal communities, as well as current challenges and strengths.
5. Review the ACLO role, including remuneration, career development, responsibilities, and cultural support available to the role.
6. Increase the staffing and funding provided to the Aboriginal Coordination and Strategy Team.
7. Review all guidance in the Bail Law Reform Standard Operating Procedures in relation to bail determinations for Aboriginal people.
8. Work with BOCSAR to publish state-wide and local statistics about policing of Aboriginal people.
9. Review its operational training and procedures relating to pro-active policing and other day-to-day policing actions that involve the use of discretion.
10. Consider adding a component to the mandatory Aboriginal cultural training dedicated to the impacts, opportunities and risks of proactive and operational policing in Aboriginal communities and options for diversion.
11. Publish a Closing the Gap delivery plan which states how it will implement the priority reform areas and what it will take to help NSW achieve targets 10 and 11 to reduce over-representation.

We recommend the NSW Government should:

12. Amend its Closing the Gap Implementation Plan to list the NSW Police Force as a responsible agency

The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission is the independent police oversight agency which aims to promote integrity within law enforcement in NSW. Taking an interest in the policing of Aboriginal communities in NSW is, and will continue to be, an important part of this work.

The Law Enforcement Conduct Commission acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Owners and Custodians of the lands on which we work, and recognises their continuing connection to the lands and waters of NSW. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures, and the Elders past and present.



Read the full report [here](#).