

# 2025 Yule River Community Priorities



**Systemic Reform**  
**Education**  
**Health**  
**Housing**  
**Wellbeing**  
**Community Safety**

**This document is to be read in conjunction with the  
*2024 Yule River Call to Action and Solutions Roadmap*,  
which remains the full list of needs, wants, and aspirations of the Pilbara Aboriginal community.**

## Introduction

This **2025 Yule River Community Priorities** document reflects community-led discussions held on Day 1 of the *10<sup>th</sup> Annual on-Country Bush Meeting at Yule River*, held 23 – 24 July 2025 on Kariyarra Country, and presented to Parliamentarians and government representatives on Day 2 of the meeting. It is a list of current priorities community considers require immediate attention. **The 2025 Yule River Community Priorities have been refined due to the absence of formal reporting from government that the Community requested on the 2024 Yule River Call to Action and Solutions Roadmap (Yule River CTA), and limited engagement undertaken since the 2024 on-Country meeting.**

These priorities are drawn from the 2024 Yule River CTA, **which remains the comprehensive calls to action community have identified. Therefore, it must be understood that Community also holds an expectation that stakeholders across government will also act on, and report back to community on this document as well.**

Yule River Call to Action Working Group (YRWG) members have at various times been advised by government agencies that we cannot be too specific with our requests; and at other times that our requests are not clear enough, and/or are too conceptual. The Yule River CTA seeks to address enduring issues. This will require **meaningful change** in the way government works, including direct engagement with community to co-design solutions – an approach directly aligning with the National Agreement on *Closing the Gap Priority Reform Three – Transforming Government Organisations*.

These *2025 Yule River Community Priorities* therefore intend to provide tangible direction for government, and **a starting point for engagement** – reflecting the key issues and components of a solution that community members agree are critical to achieving results – presented with an understanding that through the sharing of information from government, and more direct engagement and consultation with community, a final approach and way to implement strategy that will also address outcomes in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy can be actioned.

The priorities have been developed and approved by the *Yule River Call to Action Working Group* (YRWG), informed by extensive consultation with the Pilbara First Nations community<sup>1</sup> at the 2023 and 2024 On-Country Bush Meetings at Yule River, and associated community workshops in May 2023 and April 2024. The YRWG members were nominated at the May 2023 consultation meeting ahead of the 2023 Bush Meeting. The YRWG consists of Mr Ashley Councillor, Mr Danny Brown, Mr Donny Wilson, Mr Henry Lockyer, Ms Linda Dridi, Mrs Eaton, Ms Raylene Button and Mr Terry Jaffrey.

*The 2024 Call to Action and Solutions Roadmap* contains links to key strategies designed to improve outcomes for Aboriginal peoples; the **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**, the WA Implementation Plan of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy. It is *our* version of a place-based delivery strategy for the National Agreement.

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<sup>1</sup>The Yule River meeting is attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from across the Pilbara. When the term Aboriginal is used in this document, it is referring to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders residing in the Pilbara.

## Priority Items for: **Your System – Done Our Way (Systemic Reform)**

### **1. We ask that the Yule River Call to Action Working Group, and the 2024 Yule River Calls to Action and Solutions Roadmap be recognised by Government.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3 and 4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **all 17 Outcomes** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) We ask that the Western Australian Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, through his power under the *Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority Act 1972*, invite the Yule River Call to Action Working Group to join with other State Government Aboriginal Advisory Groups when they are convened by the Aboriginal Advisory Council of Western Australia (AACWA).
- b) We ask that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs arrange for the Yule River Call to Action Working Group representatives who attend the Pilbara District Leadership Group (DLG):
  - i. be invited to present to the AACWA on the *Yule River Call to Action and Solutions Roadmap*; and provide regular updates to the Council in order to receive support from the AACWA through their close link with the State Government's Aboriginal Affairs Coordinating Committee (AACC), and
  - ii. to seek support for the YRWG to receive formal recognition as an Aboriginal Advisory function alongside other State Government agency advisory groups and Peaks (e.g. the Council of Aboriginal Services Western Australia and Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia).

These actions are considered critical to enabling Pilbara voices to be heard in key forums informing policy and making decisions impacting State-wide service delivery, as well as to provide an opportunity for holistic approaches appropriate to the Pilbara to be supported through all Aboriginal Advisory Groups.

It was noted by community members at the on-Country meeting that this is already happening within the Pilbara at a local level, through work being done by organisations such as Hedland Aboriginal Strong Leaders (HASL) and Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation (JAC) in Port Hedland, and Yandi for Change in Roebourne.

**2. We ask that each of the government member agencies of the Pilbara District Leadership Group (DLG) commit to annual grant funding to support community leadership and engagement on the *Yule River Calls to Action and Solutions Roadmap*.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, and 3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **all 17 Outcomes** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) We ask that the member agencies of the Pilbara DLG each commit to contributing year-on-year grant funding of \$15,000 (minimum) per agency for the next three fiscal years. This funding would be used to bolster and develop over the three years a standalone governance structure to enable community oversight and ongoing engagement on the *Yule River Call to Action and Solutions Framework* to support on-the-ground outcomes.

This funding support would be auspiced through an agency of the YRWG's choosing and would include such costs as secretariat support; meeting expenses, fees and other allowances (recognising the role of community leaders in guiding outcomes), and costs to support engagement with and between community and with government stakeholders.

**3. We ask that the WA State Government, through the Department of the Premier and Cabinet, develop a way to report on systemic racism currently impacting the daily lives of community members.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **all 17 Outcomes** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

On Day 1 of the 2025 on-Country meeting community identified several ways in which they regularly encounter racism.

- a) **Systemic racism** – Ongoing dehumanisation of our people is occurring regularly because of the racism experienced by community members at an individual and systemic level. We want to establish stronger complaint mechanisms (including region-specific ones), for our people to identify where it is happening, and to directly inform strategies to address it and stamp it out. This is particularly important for any Government agencies that are regularly providing services.
- b) **Over-policing** – Community members identified this as an issue regularly affecting them. We ask that WA Police commit to regular and ongoing monthly forums where community members can discuss ineffective policing and other issues to help officers in the Pilbara do better. We want to work with WAPOL to achieve safer and more effective community policing in our communities. This issue is additionally addressed under *Looking After our People (Community Safety)* section (page 12).
- c) **Taxi services** – We request help to connect and work with the Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure to address several issues regularly encountered by Aboriginal community members, including regular overcharging of Aboriginal passengers, and

demands of up-front payments for transport that far exceeds what the metered fare would be. This could include better promotion of existing avenues to report on issues encountered by our people.

## Priority Items for: **Not Just Schooling – Teaching Our Way (Education)**

### **1. Reintroduce and fund the Aboriginal Student Support & Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program in every Pilbara school.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1** and **3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) Community members identified the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program as having been highly successful and call for its immediate reintroduction. ASSPA committees promoted Aboriginal involvement at school and led directly to better education outcomes. This is a program that should be reintroduced immediately.

### **2. The Department of Education commit to increasing the teaching of Aboriginal languages in schools.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1** and **3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcome 16** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) We request the Department of Education provide a status update regarding the current delivery of teaching our Aboriginal languages in Pilbara schools.
- b) The Department of Education to commit to working with the Pilbara Aboriginal community to develop and implement a strategy for our traditional languages to be taught in Pilbara schools, ensuring this involves language being taught on a place-based nature, e.g. appropriate to location. This transition should take place over a maximum of three years, transitioning away from other LOTE programs. Examples of this community and agency joint leadership approach can be taken from other place-based locations where this has successfully occurred. To work, this strategy needs to ensure it is built on a solid foundation of teaching 'two-ways' so that English and Traditional languages are taught side by side.
- c) Key to achieving this is elevating the function and role of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers (AIEOs), in order to ensure they are in a position to meaningfully contribute and offer Cultural guidance to language programs being offered in schools.
- d) Resource Wangka Maya to participate, advise, and support delivery of language teaching – this Pilbara ACCO is recognised as holding knowledge and expertise on local languages.

As part of the language program, the Department should look to establish a program that focuses on cultural relationships and reconnecting students with cultural ways of working to strengthen identity.

### 3. Department of Education to partner with us to achieve improvements in literacy and numeracy for our children.

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 3 and 4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 5, 6, and 7** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

To achieve this, we ask the Department of Education to work with the Pilbara Aboriginal community and ACCOs over the next three years to:

- a) Provide community, through the YRWG, place-based data on each Pilbara location showing cohort literacy and numeracy proficiency using the readily available indicators of:
  - Primary School students through NAPLAN
  - High School students through OLNA
- b) Once this data has been compiled;
  - Establish and share with community a ranking showing to the order of the poorest performing to highest performing schools, to identify/inform benchmarks for improvements.
  - Identify the five lowest performing schools.
- c) The Department, in consultation with the YRWG, to partner with other place-based ACCOs and school communities to co-design/develop a place-based strategy/plan for the five lowest performing schools to improve outcomes. Elements considered critical to this strategy include at a minimum:
  - An Aboriginal Student Support & Parent Awareness (ASSPA) program in each school and working with school parents/family members on place-based programs and solutions.
  - Working with existing educational programs to offer more targeted literacy and numeracy support and development across each school, including for those Primary School children preparing for NAPLAN.
  - Engaging literacy and numeracy specialists to design culturally appropriate programs of support.
  - Involve consultation with existing, and/or resourcing for additional AIEOs when developing the programs. Other Aboriginal staff should also be consulted when developing school-specific strategies.
- d) All programs should be implemented with the view that Aboriginal students can achieve as much as anyone else and should set a higher standard of expectation than what is currently observed. Our young people will not thrive if it is expected they will achieve less from the outset.

**4. Pilbara Development Commission to work on the establishment of more Pilbara Residential Colleges, starting by leading a region-wide consultation that includes mapping where former Hostels are located, and how new Residential Colleges can be commissioned.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 2**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 5, 6, 7 and 16** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) Building on the success of Martu Jijiku Maya Residential College (Newman), Pilbara Development Commission to lead consultation and coordination of the relevant agencies, local industry and place-based ACCOs to establish a Residential College in Port Hedland and other parts of Pilbara as required.
- b) This initiative would mean that our children can do their schooling in the Pilbara, staying in the Residential Colleges. This could also include the establishment of Aboriginal schools, as currently exist in places such as Fitzroy Crossing.

## Priority Items for: **Looking After our Body and Mind (Health)**

### **1. The Department of Health and the Mental Health Commission to work with our community to commission on-Country withdrawal and rehabilitation centres and services.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 2**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Since the closure of Mission Australia's after-hours service, there are currently no after-hours mental health services available to support mental health patients in the region. Community members are also unaware of any specific projects or programs helping to address mental health needs in the community. Our AMS's are not qualified or funded to deliver clinical services, meaning there are no clinical services being provided outside of hospitals. There is a frustration that to access mental health support, people can only self-refer to a hospital or become a threat to community. This gap is a serious problem.

To improve access, and more culturally appropriate, in-person mental health support for Pilbara Aboriginal People, and allow for a more holistic treatment approach for our mob to better support rehabilitation and address underlying traumas, we ask the Department of Health to:

- a) Share the status of current planning / strategy for increased access for Pilbara Aboriginal people to in-person mental health assessments and appointments, additional to Telehealth – including (if available) information on timing, locations, service providers and provision for cultural appropriateness. This should include expanded access to Step Up / Step Down services.
- b) Partner with Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance (PAHA) to consult with Pilbara Aboriginal health providers, ACCOs and community members to identify potential gaps in current planning and service delivery. This will involve going to each town and speaking with community members and ACCOs directly to make sure they deliver on community needs.
- c) Based on outcomes of a) and b), commission a culturally appropriate and accessible service response to deliver on this Priority Item.
- d) Urgently review access to clinical services beyond hospitals, as this is a key area of need.
- e) Deliver dedicated beds in psych wards throughout the region.
- f) Work with PAHA to undertake an audit of where money is being spent on our people. Community members want to know where the money is going and what it is being spent on, and any audit should be made publicly available.

Any resultant strategy should improve and address:

- a) Greater ability for family to be involved in rehabilitation and support programs.
- b) Policies affecting our community to have greater flexibility and responsiveness, to allow for people who are best placed to inform their design and implementation.

- c) The need for our Pilbara people to be helping us develop programs in this area and being trained up by Aboriginal medical professionals such as Dr Tracy Westerman, a Nyamal woman and nationally recognised Clinical Psychologist who is getting results.

## **2. Department of Health to increase and improve access to free dental services, through Pilbara Aboriginal Medical Services.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reform 3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 1** and **9b** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) We ask that dental services, including preventative programs, are planned for the Pilbara to be delivered via existing Aboriginal Medical Services. Work with Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance (PAHA) to develop and deliver these services.
- b) These services should be both town-based and mobile, to ensure smaller and remote communities have equitable access.
- c) Review the policy that only under eighteens can access free dental via schools. With a change to the school entry age in recent years, some students are losing access to these services as they turn eighteen before graduating from high school.

## **3. Review of the WA State Government's Patient Assisted Travel Scheme (PATS).**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3** and **4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 1, 2** and **9b** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) In the immediate-term, we ask the Department of Health to commit to implement the PATS as specified/intended, including an immediate directive to agency staff to stop the practice of telling community members to ask their PBCs (and associated entities) to subsidise PATS-eligible travel. Currently, too many community members are being told by doctors and hospital staff in the healthcare system to ask their PBCs or Trusts to subsidise their PATS eligible travel. This needs to stop.
- b) The Department of Health, through the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) to resource the Pilbara Aboriginal Health Alliance (PAHA) to undertake comprehensive consultation with Pilbara Aboriginal health providers, ACCOs and community members on the PATS system. Specifically:
  - a. Conduct an audit, identifying existing PATS issues.
  - b. Identify solutions to address existing, improper reliance on ACCOs, PBCs and charitable trusts to subsidise shortcomings in the PATS.
  - c. Provide solutions to existing shortcomings to meet the needs of Pilbara Aboriginal people and ensure the PATS is implemented and applied as designed.
  - d. Explore a better approach for ensuring people can access family support and culturally appropriate assistance when they are leaving their homes and support systems to access health care.

- e. Ensure hospitals throughout the region employ staff to work in a dedicated PATS position, providing support to community members who need to access the program. It is understood there is currently a six-week wait for a response to PATS enquiries at Hedland Health Campus due to the existing system.

## Priority Items for: **Maya That We Need – Our Way (Housing)**

- 1. Department of Housing and Works to commission a strategy that will support and fund Aboriginal community-led skill-building and service delivery provision to support much-needed improvements to housing in Pilbara Aboriginal communities.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3 and 4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 7, 8, 9a and 9b** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

Department of Housing and Works to commission the development of a strategy to achieve improvements to skills access, costs savings and contracting of Pilbara ACCOs and contractors for the repair, improvement and maintenance of remote community housing.

This strategy should include:

- a) Auditing and mapping current maintenance policies and procedures, existing opportunities and available local skills / services.
- b) Moving to immediately re-engage local ACCOs to deliver maintenance.
- c) Place-based consultation with Aboriginal communities, as well as Pilbara ACCOs, Aboriginal contractors, and training providers, to identify barriers and potential solutions.
- d) Capacity-building for local communities throughout the process, to ensure consistency (local knowledge) and ongoing renewal.
- e) Identification of potential organisations/Pilbara Aboriginal corporations to lead/partner in delivery in line with the state government commissioning strategy.

This would enable us to improve standards of both public and private housing. It would also ensure an increased standard in the quality of available and allocated public housing, and better address existing and associated environmental health issues.

Key to this is ensuring the contract for the head contractor in the region is given to a place-based ACCO – such as Meta Maya – instead of being contracted to a non-ACCO, non-Pilbara business as is currently the case.

Other functions and services that could be delivered by a local ACCO include:

- a) Divesting tenancy management for housing owned by the Department of Housing Works back to ACCOs, with a remit to prioritise local people for tenancies.
- b) Designing and implementing a cross-agency program to address anti-social behaviour, with the goal of keeping people in their homes instead of being evicted or blacklisted because of the Anti-Social Housing Policy.

- c) Involvement / leadership in planning and design process, to ensure new housing stock built by the Department of Housing and Works is built to be Culturally appropriate for Aboriginal people. This includes ensuring new housing meets community needs, such as bigger houses for bigger families.

**2. Department of Housing and Works to commission a needs assessment study with a view to funding the co-design, build, and resourcing of Aboriginal Short Stay Accommodation in the Pilbara, in locations of need.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1** and **2**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 9a, 9b, 10** and **14** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

We call on the Department of Housing and Works to commission a needs assessment study to address current lack of Short Stay Accommodation options available across the region to Pilbara Aboriginal people, which will significantly contribute to improvements in the physical and mental wellbeing of our community.

This needs assessment should include:

- a) Assessment of current short stay options in the region, including availability (demand), and accessibility.
- b) Identification of potential location/s in relation to available or planned health services, including palliative health and renal care facilities.
- c) Availability of local, culturally appropriate, community support.
- d) Co-design with community to identify accommodation needs.

## Priority Items for: **Strong Spirit, Strong Mind, Strong Mob (Community Wellbeing)**

- 1. The Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries, Department of Health, and the Mental Health Commission to co-commission a mapping study into existing lifestyle and On-Country programs, with a view to supporting and funding the establishment and/or expansion of integrated mental health and wellbeing services and programs for young Aboriginal people across the Pilbara.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, and 4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 1, 2, 6, 7 and 14** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

The study to include:

- Identifying existing programs offering a combination of prevention, resilience and wellbeing services and their success factors, including those offered by Local Governments (e.g. JD Hardie programs in Port Hedland) and ACCOs.
- Programs integrating Country and Culture, and therapeutic services.
- Undertaking place-based consultations with ACCOs, students, and other young Aboriginal people.
- Focus should be given to the link between employment and wellbeing – there is currently a lack of support for people struggling with these interconnected issues and it can have a significant impact.

Ensure that programs have stronger links to Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB). Funding in this area to be provided to local Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs) needs to be recurrent, allowing for long-term planning and benefit and impact.

## **2. We need an increase in resourcing for Suicide Prevention.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1, 2, 3 and 4**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 1 and 14** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- Additional to the request for an audit of health funding (i.e. primary health and clinical mental health) covered in *Health – Looking After Our Body and Mind* Priority Item 1. d), we want to know what money is being spent, and where, to address the suicide crisis facing our community.
- Resources for these services should match the incidence-rate relative to the population. We seem to get funded based on our population, but the overrepresentation of mental health issues and the higher suicide rate (28.0 and 17.2 per 100,000 persons in the

East Pilbara and West Pilbara respectively compared to the lower State average of 14.3 per 100,000 persons<sup>2</sup>) is strong evidence this funding should be increased in our region.

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<sup>2</sup> [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Deaths by suicide, Australia. Deaths by suicide, 2019-2023, age-standardised rate.](#)

## Priority Items for: **Looking After our People (Community Safety)**

### **1. We ask that the State Government commit to establishing more residential colleges for young people attending high schools in the Pilbara region.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 2**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 5, 6, 7 and 16** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) Noting that this is also priority #3 in the *Not Just Schooling – Teaching Our Way (Education)* section of this document, community members have requested this is reiterated as a key request, that will help to address ALL sections of the Yule River CTA and lead to significant improvements in meeting *Closing the Gap* targets.
- b) Any residential college needs to be co-designed with community, so that the space is culturally appropriate.
- c) We request that the Pilbara Development Commission also assist in identifying other streams of funding in the region to enable establishment of residential colleges, including the mining industry.

### **2. We support the proposal currently in development by Hedland Aboriginal Strong Leaders (HASL), Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation (JAC), and Yandi for Change for the site at the old Hedland Medical Centre to be repurposed for our young people.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 2**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 5, 6, 7 and 16** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

### **3. Over-policing in the Pilbara is an issue that needs to be addressed.**

This item addresses the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* via **Priority Reforms 1 and 3**.

This item seeks to deliver on **Outcomes 10 and 11** within the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*.

- a) Aboriginal people in the Pilbara are significantly overpoliced, with fines, charges and sentences far outweighing those given to our non-Aboriginal counterparts. This is leading to more of our people in jail.
- b) We request that the Department of Justice and WA Police share statistical information on policing and interactions with the justice system that our people are experiencing in the region, comparative to the non-Aboriginal community, and use this information to establish benchmarks to inform the foundation of community forums that will allow us to work together to improve outcomes.