

REGIONAL MINISTERIAL BUDGET STATEMENT 2023–24

WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD STRONG AND SUSTAINABLE REGIONS

A Statement by

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of the Commonwealth of Australia

and

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For the information of honourable members
on the occasion of the Budget 2023–24

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Acknowledgement of Country

In delivering the 2023–24 Regional Ministerial Budget Statement: Working Together to Build Strong and Sustainable Regions, we pay our respects to First Nations people and Elders who continue to care for lands, waters and sea.

First Nations people have loved, cared for and listened to Country for thousands of generations; it is important to reflect on this ancient connection and guardianship. First Nations cultures are the oldest living cultures on Earth, and First Nations people’s resilience is a source of inspiration for this Government.

The richness and diversity of First Nations people is critical to the social fabric of our nation. First Nations people live in all parts of Australia, from cities to regions, to remote tropical and desert areas. The voices and knowledge of our First Nations people are critical to the strength and sustainability of communities, including in regional Australia.

We are committed to listening to the voices and experiences of First Nations people as we deliver smart and responsible regional investments. In the spirit of reconciliation, we look forward to improving how these voices are heard and represented in Australian Government decision making, including as we support our regions to transform to a net zero economy.

We thank First Nations people for their continuing custodianship of the Country that we live and work on today.

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Foreword

Australia and its regions are in a defining decade. Now and over coming years, it is crucial that we leverage the economic shifts underway across the world for the benefit of our regions – embracing and supporting productive and inclusive change, the decarbonisation of existing industries and transformation to a net zero economy, and vibrant and diverse places built on future-focused industries, secure jobs and cohesive communities.

The 2023–24 Budget solidifies the Australian Government’s considered and collaborative approach to supporting strong, secure and sustainable regions across Australia. Building on the solid foundations laid in the October Budget, we are taking purposeful steps to implement our agenda for regional Australia, while setting a forward-looking framework for focused, coordinated investment over this and coming Budgets. Our October Budget included over 220 packages and individual measures targeted to strengthen regional communities and economies – we are underpinning our commitment to, and ambition for, regional Australia through an additional 129 new initiatives in this Budget.

In a period of global economic transformation and cost-of-living pressures here at home, Government investment – across places, policies and portfolios – must be as targeted and effective as possible. That is why this Budget is focused on smart, responsible investments that boost productivity, improve wellbeing, and pay economic and social dividends right across Australia.

It is also why the Government has developed a new Regional Investment Framework, outlined in this Budget Statement, which sets out a new approach to delivering regional investment. The Framework places regions and their people at the centre of decision making – valuing local voices and priorities, listening to and building on the latest evidence to inform investment, operating with flexibility and transparency, and coordinating across governments to make investment work better for regions. From forging net zero futures to recovering from natural disasters, the Framework provides a joined-up, flexible and cohesive approach to collaboratively seizing opportunities and responding to challenges across Australia’s diverse regions.

As evidenced by the breadth and diversity of initiatives included in this Statement, the Government knows that building strong and sustainable regions requires effort across all areas of government. For example, projects that improve regional liveability include our landmark Growing Regions and regional Precincts and Partnerships programs. Investments that improve health services and people’s wellbeing include tripling the bulk billing incentive for people under age 16, pensioners and other concession card holders, and reducing costs for ongoing Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) prescriptions. Major new initiatives that will underpin vibrant and prosperous economic futures for our regions include developing critical minerals supply chains, underwriting the production of green hydrogen, and a national Net Zero Authority to promote orderly and positive economic transformation across regional Australia.

We also know that success lies in listening to the communities and local voices that know their regions best. Our regional networks – like the Regional Development Australia committees – will ensure local priorities are heard and help shape outcomes. We know local solutions should be locally led and we value the work of local government and will continue to listen to this trusted delivery partner. We are committed to working hand in hand with First Nations people and communities on Closing the Gap, and implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full, as well as supporting greater equity for women, including through the development of our National Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality. We are also committed to ongoing implementation of Australia’s Disability Strategy 2021–31, mindful that our regional communities should be vibrant, inclusive and accessible for people of all abilities.

The Government will continue to strengthen the regional data and evidence base to better understand the trends and impacts communities are facing, and we will share this local intelligence and data and work collaboratively – across all levels of government – because joined-up approaches deliver better outcomes for communities.

Our broad and diverse staffing footprint across regional, rural and remote Australia embeds us in the communities we serve. Right across the map – from Townsville to Tennant Creek, Broome to Bendigo, and Nhulunbuy to Newcastle – Australian Government employees are making a difference in their communities and providing lived insights direct to Government on the needs, ambitions, opportunities and challenges across our regions.

Working in genuine partnerships with communities, other levels of government and the private sector, the Government is committed to positioning our regions to take advantage of a transitioning world. Now, and through this defining decade, we cannot miss the opportunity for our regions to drive the nation’s transition to a renewable energy super-power or to lay the groundwork for decarbonised, healthier and more sustainable environments for generations to come. We can set our regional industries and communities up for a future made in Australia, with secure and sustainable jobs and access to the services and support they need and deserve.

As a Government and as a nation we recognise that regions are incredibly diverse and are evolving to meet the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Together, we must set our regions toward vibrant and sustainable futures. Our new Regional Investment Framework – and the investments and initiatives outlined through this Statement – demonstrate this Government’s commitment to ensuring no Australian is held back or left behind, regardless of where they live.

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

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

9 May 2023

The Regional Investment Framework: Guiding our Investments

Building on the solid foundations of the October Budget, the 2023–24 Budget delivers smart and responsible investments – positioning regions to adapt and thrive – underpinned by a new strategic approach outlined through the Regional Investment Framework.

In announcing the Framework, the Australian Government recognises that effective regional development cannot only be achieved by restoring integrity and transparency to grants programs. All regional investments must meet standards of merit and integrity that are crucial to having trust and confidence in government. In addition, effective monitoring and evaluation processes across Government will ensure regional initiatives and investments are effective in meeting their objectives. The Government has a critical leadership role to play in supporting regions to seize their potential, with the help of regional investments that are coordinated, targeted, evidence-based and locally informed.

The Framework enables the Government to take a dedicated focus on investments and initiatives across the spectrum of portfolios that support people, the places they live in, the services they rely on, and the regional industries and local economies that are vital to the nation’s prosperity. It provides a whole-of-government approach that recognises the breadth of investment in regional Australia.

The Government knows that Australia’s regions are as diverse as the people who call regional Australia home. That is why the Framework places local voices and experiences at its core. Drawing on the intelligence and experience of local governments, communities, and representative groups (including Regional Development Australia committees) will enable investments to be tailored to the unique needs and strengths of regions.

The Framework is consistent with international best practice in regional development policy, including research by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. Good governance and effective coordination enable governments to make the most of public investment to address inequalities, megatrends and future shocks in regional Australia. This is particularly important in the current fiscal environment, and seeking opportunities to drive cumulative impacts will maximise outcomes across regional Australia.

In line with a commitment to deliver responsible investments that make a real and lasting difference in the regions, the Framework is a landmark step in ensuring the Government’s commitments to regional Australia are delivered in a joined-up, forward-looking and transparent way.

Regional Investment Framework

Purpose			
<p>The Framework is a new approach to how the Australian Government delivers regional investment – valuing local voices and priorities, being informed by and building the evidence, operating with flexibility, integrity and transparency, and coordinating across governments to make investments work better for regions. It provides an integrated and coordinated framework for regional development regardless of a region’s economic circumstances.</p>			
Guiding principles – <i>applied across all Australian Government investments in regions</i>			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Realising the Government’s ambition of ‘no one held back and no one left behind’ requires specific regional investment across portfolios. Australia’s regions and their economies are diverse, with each having unique strengths and challenges. Delivering on the potential of regional Australia requires building on each regions’ unique strengths, including helping regions undergoing significant economic change to transition or adapt to specific structural challenges. Place-based decision making that draws on the experience of local government alongside regional bodies must guide investment in our regions. 			
Priority focus areas – <i>our key objectives across Government</i>			
<p>√ Meeting the needs of, and providing opportunities for, First Nations people. √ Supporting the transformation to a net zero economy and decarbonisation. √ Achieving gender equality.</p>			
Investing in People	Investing in Places	Investing in Services	Investing in Industries and Local Economies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Listening to local voices and partnering with communities. √ Targeted investment in skills, education, training and local leadership capacity. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Supporting adaptive, accessible, sustainable and liveable regions. √ Delivering infrastructure where and when it is needed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Enhancing connectivity, accessibility and equity of services. √ Investment including across communications, health, water, and transport. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> √ Investment to help activate economic and industry growth. √ Supporting the conditions needed for regional industries to diversify and grow.
Implementation			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Government will embed engagement with communities – for example through Regional Development Australia committees – into decision making processes. Data and trends from across a range of sources will contribute to evidence-based decision making and delivery of regular State of the Regions reports. Regular and collaborative engagement with all states and territories will share information and work to leverage investments across governments. Across diverse policy and program areas, the Government will work together to ensure investment is delivering optimal, joined-up outcomes for regions. 			

Implementing the Regional Investment Framework

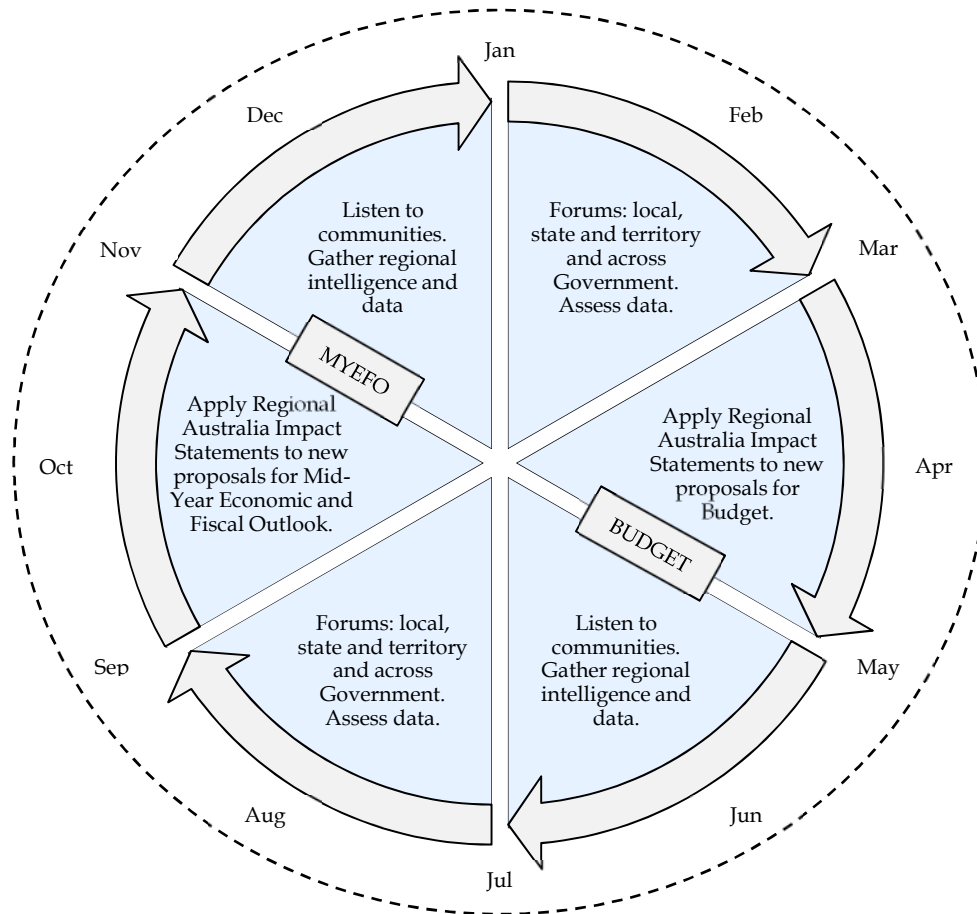
The Regional Investment Framework guides the Australian Government’s approach to the design and delivery of regional initiatives. It will influence decision making in Budget processes, drive meaningful collaboration across and between governments, embed data and evidence to support better outcomes, and ensure local voices are heard and influence responses.

Built into the Australian Government’s Budget and Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook processes (see diagram on following page), the Framework embeds collaboration through the establishment of a new and regular senior executive forum for engagement between Australian Government agencies. A refresh of the Regional Australia Impact Statement process will also enable all Australian Government agencies to embed the Framework’s principles and priorities in their regional investment proposals.

Through engagement with local communities, the Government has heard how important it is that regional investment is delivered in a coordinated and collaborative way – being on the same page makes a real difference to outcomes on the ground. Refreshed and regular forums with local, state and territory governments will drive better collaboration and build genuine partnerships, ensuring joined-up approaches that leverage investments, reduce duplication and deliver cumulative benefits for regions and their people.

Through the Framework, local insights, data and intelligence will inform decision making, including through drawing on a broad range of regional networks like local government and Regional Development Australia committees. This will contribute to evidence-based decision making and delivery of new and regular State of the Regions reports, informing and delivering better outcomes on the ground.

Implementing the Regional Investment Framework through the Budget cycle



The Regional Investment Framework in action

The opportunities, challenges and aspirations of regional Australia are varied and diverse, and government investments that support regional Australia – across multiple portfolios and jurisdictions – are equally broad to meet these needs.

The Regional Investment Framework is a new approach to how the Australian Government delivers regional investment that can be applied across different scales and types of investment across the whole-of-government. It is designed to complement other government frameworks, providing a common operating approach and guiding principles that embed local engagement, targeted solutions and collaboration into business as usual.

The Framework identifies 4 priority focus areas to support regional development – people, places, services and industries and local economies. These focus areas recognise that different types of investment are needed across regional Australia – from investing in the education and skills of regional Australians to driving industry diversification and attracting foreign investment across our regions. In addition, a number of key Government priorities are relevant across all of these focus areas, particularly Closing the Gap and the Priority Reforms – which changes the way governments work with First Nations people, supporting the transformation to a net zero economy and decarbonisation, and the commitment to achieving gender equality.

These investments will be enhanced by the Government’s ongoing commitment to evidence-based policy and integrity in the way it delivers programs. This Budget includes a new evaluation unit in the Treasury which will partner with Government agencies to evaluate key programs and support high-quality evaluation.

Consistent with the Framework’s priority focus areas, the following section outlines how this Budget builds on the foundations set down in October to deliver smart and responsible regional investments – across people, places, services and industries and local economies – to realise the Government’s ambition of ‘no one held back and no one left behind’.

Investing in Services

The Australian Government understands that quality services and amenities underpin the sustainability and success of communities and regions. It is investing to enhance the accessibility, connectivity and equity of the services regional Australians need and deserve.

Access to health and community services is essential for Australians living in regional and remote areas, at all stages of life. The October Budget continued funding for the Rural Bulk Billing Incentive, providing increased incentives for doctors to bulk bill according to the remoteness of the community, recognising the challenges of delivering healthcare in smaller rural and remote communities. This Budget includes an historic \$3.5 billion investment to triple the bulk billing incentive, in an immediate injection to support and strengthen the heart of Medicare. This will have particular benefits for communities in regional, rural and remote Australia, where bulk billing incentives go up the most.

The Government is also providing further support for regional Australians and easing cost-of-living pressures by allowing millions of Australians with stable and chronic diseases to buy 2 months' worth of medicine for the price of a single prescription. This will particularly support those in regional and remote areas by reducing the number of pharmacy visits and co-payments. Rural and regional pharmacies will be supported through doubling the funding for the Regional Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance program.

This Budget provides \$143.9 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to improve access to primary care through reform of after-hours programs, with Primary Health Networks required to target and assess the implementation of these programs in rural and regional areas. Additional funding of \$358.5 million over 5 years will continue supporting the expanded delivery of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics across the country, including in 10 locations in regional, rural and remote communities.

In the October Budget, the Government commenced rebuilding a better distributed, sustainable and skilled healthcare workforce, including \$74.1 million towards increased financial incentives for rural doctors. The 2023–24 Budget continues to fund innovative measures to boost health access and workforces in regional Australia, including \$445.1 million over 5 years from 2023–24 to increase Workforce Incentive Payments, promoting the employment of allied health professionals and improving access to multidisciplinary care. Targeted support will also be provided in thin markets, predominantly in regional Australia, with a commitment of \$44.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to support Primary Health Networks to commission critical services and to trial integrating services across primary health, disability, aged care and veterans' services.

The Government will boost the health workforce in regional and rural communities and areas of workforce shortage, through 10 more single employer trial sites. To improve the accessibility and affordability of general practice in rural areas, a new pre-fellowship program for non-vocational doctors will be established. The 2023–24 Budget includes \$50.2 million for changes to scholarship arrangements – with a focus on nursing, midwifery and First Nations health workers – to increase the health workforce in primary care, aged care, regional and rural areas and other areas of workforce shortage.

Recognising mental health services as a critical component of maintaining the wellbeing of people and communities, in this Budget the Government is delivering 500 additional postgraduate places, 500 one-year internships for provisional psychologists, and supervisor training to address urgent gaps and workforce shortages. It is also investing \$238.5 million to address inequities in cancer outcomes for First Nations people, including \$197.9 million towards the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services sector to support cancer care needs on the ground in community and over \$38.6 million to support mainstream cancer care to be culturally safe and accessible to First Nations people.

Workforce shortages in Early Childhood Education and Care are also being addressed, recognising this is an essential service for families, particularly in regional areas. In this Budget, \$72.4 million from 2022–23 to 2026–27 will support skills and training for the early childhood education and care workforce, including a focus on supporting the workforce in regional and remote communities.

The Government recognises the importance of essential services, like power and water, and delivered significant investments in the October Budget. This included the \$20.0 billion Rewiring the Nation plan which will rebuild and modernise Australia’s electricity grids and help drive down power prices – with most transmission infrastructure being hosted in regional Australia. The expansion of the National Water Grid Fund Investment Framework allowed for new investments to deliver essential town water supplies in regional and remote communities and delivered \$811.0 million for water security projects in the regions.

Building on this investment, this Budget delivers additional investments under the National Water Grid Fund, with \$197.1 million over 6 years from 2023–24 allocated towards the construction of 3 projects to provide safe and reliable water for regional and remote communities. A further \$150.0 million has been allocated towards First Nations water infrastructure projects.

To ensure regions benefit from essential digital and telecommunication services, the Government is continuing to deliver on its commitment of \$2.2 billion to strengthen regional connectivity, through \$1.1 billion for the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia – which includes initiatives such as the \$30.0 million On Farm Connectivity Program and \$20.0 million Broadcasting Resilience Program – and \$1.1 billion towards NBN upgrades for 660,000 regional fibre connections. In this Budget, the Government is funding a National Messaging System that will help keep communities safe during an emergency, by providing targeted, real time information to mobile phones and other devices. In addition, the Viewer Access Satellite Television service will continue to deliver commercial free-to-air satellite television services to regional and remote Australia, including First Nations communities.

The Government also continues to support the systems that allow goods and services to be delivered throughout regional Australia and for people to travel in and out of communities. In this Budget, an additional \$12.0 million over 3 years from 2023–24 is committed for a further round of the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program – building on \$8.0 million allocated for grants from rounds 6 to 9 of the program in 2023–24.

Investing in People

The Australian Government is investing in the millions of people that call regional Australia home. People are the bedrock of vibrant, safe and inclusive communities – it is critical to ensure they are safe, supported and have the backing to take up opportunities and participate to their full potential.

The Government is committed to enshrining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice in the Constitution and advancing the Closing the Gap agenda. The October Budget included investments in programs and services for First Nations communities across regional Australia, spanning areas such as housing, jobs, healthcare and education and justice – including \$636.4 million to expand the Indigenous Rangers Program and \$99.0 million to form new partnerships with First Nations people to reduce incarceration rates and deaths in custody. This has been complemented by the release of the Australian Government’s second Closing the Gap Implementation Plan in February 2023.

This Budget sees a continued commitment to work in partnership with First Nations people and communities, including through continuing funding of \$68.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations that deliver the 16 Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, providing culturally safe legal and non-legal services. In addition, \$38.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 is being invested to improve access to education for First Nations students, including through on Country learning opportunities and distance education in remote areas. Community-led models of distance education will be piloted in up to 5 remote locations.

Ensuring people and communities are safe and respected is paramount to having strong and inclusive regions. In October 2022, the Government released, in conjunction with state and territory governments, the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan). It committed a record \$1.7 billion investment towards women’s safety initiatives. This Budget builds on these commitments and delivers \$589.3 million for initiatives that will drive action under the National Plan and work to end gender-based violence in one generation. This includes funding of \$153.1 million to support priorities identified by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence and \$159.0 million to extend support for states and territories for frontline service delivery. Under the Plan, regional families will also be supported to access family law services with investments of \$33.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to roll out the Family Law Priority Property Pools program to regional areas for the first time, and \$13.4 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to continue the Lawyer-Assisted Family Law Property Mediation program.

The Government is committed to supporting Australia’s veterans and their families, recognising and valuing their commitment and ongoing contribution to our nation. Connecting people and providing services, the Government continues to expand the Veterans’ and Families Hub Network, with 8 new hubs servicing veterans and their families across Australia, including in regional areas, to be delivered over the next 3 years. Additionally, reforms to the veteran support system will better ensure veterans and their families thrive in their lives after service, regardless of where in Australia they call home. This includes efforts to reduce the time veterans have to wait to receive support and services.

Recognising that quality education opens doors for people, the Government continues to provide record-level funding to schools across Australia as well as targeted initiatives for regional communities. First Nations students will be supported with \$32.8 million to extend the Clontarf Foundation program, and \$21.6 million to extend the Indigenous Boarding Providers grants program, both into the 2024 school year.

Through its commitment to reform vocational education and training under a new National Skills Agreement, and building on the September 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit, the Government is ensuring regional Australians can access the training needed for secure and rewarding jobs. Building on the 12-month Skills Agreement to deliver 180,000 fee-free TAFE and vocational education places in 2023, the Government continues to work in partnership with states and territories to negotiate a 5-year National Skills Agreement to be in place by January 2024. This Budget also provides \$8.6 million over 4 years to 2026–27 and \$1.5 million per year ongoing from 2027–28 to design and implement the Australian Skills Guarantee, which will create more opportunities for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets

and increase opportunities for women apprentices and trainees on major projects funded by the Government, including across regional Australia.

The Government recognises the important role that migration plays in contributing to our communities. It helps to address labour and skills shortages across the country, including in the regions, with 14 per cent of migrants settling in regional Australia under current arrangements. Drawing on insights and feedback from stakeholders, and expert advice through the recent migration review, the Government is developing a strategy for Australia's migration system and continues to provide a number of educational and settlement support programs for migrants. This includes a commitment to deliver a new Adult Migrant English Program business model from 1 January 2025, enhancing flexible student tuition through online and mixed mode learning, building on \$20.0 million committed over 4 years in the October Budget to improve flexible delivery and case management.

Investing in Places

The Australian Government knows that place matters. From the bush to the beaches, the Top End to Tasmania, investments need to make the most of Australia's unique and diverse places across the map. This includes supporting regions through a broad range of investments that enable communities to thrive, harness local competitive advantages, improve infrastructure and enhance liveability.

The Government is continuing to support communities to respond and adapt to challenges in the places they know best. This includes building on the \$48.8 million investment in community safety announced by the Prime Minister in January 2023 and \$250.0 million under a landmark plan for A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia, announced in February 2023. The plan reflected the voices of local communities and will be delivered in partnership with them in multiple phases. The first phase includes investment of \$40.4 million over 2 years for on Country learning to improve school engagement and attendance and \$23.5 million to improve First Nations health outcomes, including the expansion of the Child and Youth Assessment and Treatment Service.

This Budget also supports community-led initiatives through investment of \$64.0 million over 6 years from 2023–24 to provide funding certainty for the 10 existing Stronger Places, Stronger People initiatives, 9 of which are in regional or remote communities. Funding will help enhance shared decision making and local solutions in 6 of these communities.

The investment of \$7.8 million over 2 years from 2023–24 towards the development of a Whole-of-Government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage will support the Government's approach to working in partnership with communities to address disadvantage, including in regional Australia. It will outline strategic objectives and key principles for the Commonwealth, supporting more impactful, integrated investments, backed by improved access to data and evaluation capabilities.

Strategic investments in places can provide the opportunity to seize on their competitive advantages. In the October Budget, the Government committed \$698.1 million (and \$1.9 billion in planned equity) for strategic investments in Middle Arm, the Pilbara and

Hunter region to build and diversify the economic potential of these regions. It also provided a \$50.0 million commitment towards a new Central Queensland University campus in the Cairns CBD. This Budget builds on this approach, increasing funding by \$30.0 million to \$180.0 million over 5 years from 2023–24 for delivery of an expanded Cairns Marine Precinct. This investment, to be matched by the Queensland government, will support Far North Queensland’s capacity to meet increased demand for marine services while further diversifying the region’s economy.

In February 2023, the Government announced \$3.4 billion and an Intergovernmental Agreement on venue infrastructure projects to support the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This included a commitment for the Government to fund up to \$935.0 million over the next 10 years to 2032–33 towards 16 new or upgraded Games venues, which will benefit a number of locations in regional Queensland, such as Barlow Park in Cairns and the Toowoomba Sports Ground.

During 2023–24, the Government is also refreshing the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia – the cornerstone document in the Government’s Northern Australia agenda – including development of a new action plan to support sustainable and resilient economic development across the North.

All across regional Australia, the Government is working in partnership with communities to invest in the projects needed to make the most of their unique advantages and opportunities. Committed in the October Budget, the Government is rolling out \$1.0 billion through 2 new flagship programs for regional Australia – the \$600.0 million Growing Regions Program and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships Program. These local community infrastructure and precinct investments will be delivered with transparency and integrity and targeted to deliver on what regions need.

Recognising the specific housing needs across regions, the October Budget included the \$10.0 billion Housing Australia Future Fund and Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee to support regional Australians to get into their own homes sooner. From 1 July 2023, the Government will expand eligibility for the First Home Guarantee and Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee to other eligible joint borrowers, beyond the current scope of married or de facto couples. The National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation – soon to be renamed Housing Australia – will be able to provide additional financing to Community Housing Providers for more social and affordable housing through the Australian Housing Bond Aggregator, with the Government increasing its guarantee of liabilities by \$2.0 billion, up to \$7.5 billion. In addition, the Government is investing around \$2.7 billion over 5 years from 2022–23 to increase the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15 per cent (around \$15 to \$30 per fortnight depending on the household type), benefitting around 300,000 recipients in regional and remote Australia.

To ensure regions stay connected throughout the country, the Government is maintaining its strong commitment to a 10-year \$120 billion infrastructure pipeline. The Government is commissioning an independent strategic review of the Infrastructure Investment Program. That makes this Budget a step towards a nation building infrastructure investment pipeline that lays the foundations for more credible projects selected on the basis of a range of economic and social objectives – including regional connectivity, liveability and safety.

Inland Rail – a major regional infrastructure project – will also be subject to a full cost verification and confirmation of the construction schedule, ensuring appropriate oversight for the project and better outcomes. The Government is also keeping regions connected and safe through ongoing funding for key transport programs including the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program, which includes: \$250.0 million in phase 4 for councils classified as rural, regional or outer-urban; the Bridges Renewal Program providing funding of at least \$85.0 million per year; and the Roads to Recovery Program which provides funding of \$500.0 million per year. In addition, 33 Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot Program projects will be delivered over 2023 and 2024.

Improving regional and remote road safety, the Government has committed \$43.6 million to deliver the National Road Safety Action Grants Program over 4 years from 2022–23. This builds on the Government’s ongoing commitment to improve road safety for all Australians, including through the significant Road Safety Program that will make \$976.7 million available across 2023–24 and 2024–25 to deliver further lifesaving road projects, many of which will be in regional and remote locations.

The Government is also investing to strengthen and protect the unique environmental assets across regions. The October Budget included bringing up to \$1.2 billion by 2030 investment for the Great Barrier Reef and further support for Kakadu and other national parks.

This support continues, with the Government committing \$355.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$68.1 million per year ongoing to protect Commonwealth National Parks, sustain core Parks business, and deliver critical infrastructure for the township of Muṭitjulu, within Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. This work will also benefit surrounding regions through the creation of new jobs for park management activities and supporting tourism in Australia’s iconic Commonwealth National Parks. The Government has also committed \$214.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$4.5 million per year ongoing to implement the Nature Positive Plan: Better for the Environment, Better for Business, with measures that will help improve environmental protection and management in regional areas.

As part of the Natural Heritage Trust, this Budget includes \$439.2 million to help protect Australia’s threatened species and internationally listed World Heritage properties and Ramsar wetlands. The Natural Heritage Trust delivers outcomes for sustainable agriculture and the environment.

Recognising that regional Australia is disproportionately affected by natural disasters, it will be supported through disaster risk reduction projects funded under the Disaster Ready Fund, with investment of up to \$200 million per year. Australia’s flood forecasting and warnings will be improved, with investment of up to \$236.0 million over 10 years from 2023–24 and \$13.9 million per year ongoing to remediate flood warning infrastructure. More reliable and accurate forecasts will support preparedness in regional areas and enable better informed emergency responses, helping to ease the disruption and damage caused by severe flooding. To ensure support is available when disasters do hit, an additional \$231.8 million in 2023–24 is also being invested for Services Australia to establish a cost-effective emergency response capacity. This will support the delivery of high-quality government services and payments when customers need them most.

The Government is also providing a further \$24.4 million in capital funding over 2 years from 2024–25 to complete stage one and 2 upgrades to rockfall and landslide infrastructure on Christmas Island, protecting the local community.

Supporting communities to come together, and celebrate art and culture, helps to build vibrant and inclusive places. Released in January 2023, the Government’s new National Cultural Policy, *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, is backed by \$286.0 million in dedicated funding over 5 years from 2022–23 to deliver increased investment in arts and culture right across Australia, and includes a number of regionally focused initiatives. In this Budget, funding for the Regional Arts Fund will be increased by \$8.5 million to support sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia, an \$11.8 million pilot program to support works from the National Gallery of Australia to be loaned to regional and suburban cultural institutions, and \$13.4 million to facilitate a First Nations-led partnership to develop stand-alone legislation to recognise and protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions. In addition, this Budget will provide \$33.4 million over 4 years and then \$8.1 million per year ongoing to support the Bundanon Trust’s long-term financial sustainability – enabling this important regional institution to make full use of its expanded facilities and the opportunities they present, supporting cultural, economic and social benefits for the surrounding region.

Investing in Industries and Local Economies

The Australian Government is making future-focused investments recognising the significant contribution Australia’s regions make to securing a productive and sustainable future for the nation, including to support the transition to a net zero economy.

The October Budget established the \$1.9 billion Powering the Regions Fund. It also committed to major enabling infrastructure in Middle Arm, Pilbara and the Hunter to lay the ground-work for new industry opportunities in clean energy export.

This work is continuing. The 2023–24 Budget finalised the design of the Powering the Regions Fund and allocated \$1.4 billion of the Fund to support industrial decarbonisation, the development of new clean energy industries, and workforce development. Three streams of grants will support regional industries, including trade-exposed industrial facilities covered by the Safeguard Mechanism and hard-to-abate sectors that provide critical inputs to clean energy industries. This Budget also allocated \$14.5 million over 4 years from the Fund to accelerate the development of the offshore renewable energy industry, including consultation with local communities.

Regional Australia will also benefit from new opportunities in the hydrogen sector. The Government has allocated \$2.0 billion to establish Hydrogen Headstart. This program will support Australia’s renewable hydrogen sector to mature by providing competitive hydrogen production contracts that bridge the commercial gap for early projects. Growth in Australia’s hydrogen industry will also benefit the manufacturing sector and related supply chains, many of which are located in the regions.

The Government's Net Zero Economy Taskforce has been working with local communities, state and territory governments, industries and unions to inform a path that ensures regional Australians benefit from the transformation. Following this work, the Government will establish a new national Net Zero Authority to help drive a positive and orderly transformation to a clean energy economy and ensure Australia's regions and workers benefit. The new, legislated Net Zero Authority will have powers to support workers in emissions-intensive sectors to access new employment, skills and support as the net zero transformation continues. It will coordinate programs and policies across government to support regions and communities to attract and take advantage of new clean energy industries and set those industries up for success, and help investors and companies to engage with net zero transformation opportunities. The Authority will be legislated following detailed design and legislative processes. In the interim, an agency will be established within the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio to immediately start work.

This Budget also includes \$7.8 million over 4 years from 2022–23 for a Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Assessment, Roadmap and Action Plan and a commitment to develop a Maritime Emissions Reduction National Action Plan, co-designed with industry and stakeholders. These plans will guide industry, government and other stakeholders – many of whom are located in regions – to navigate and work together through the net zero transition. The Government has also committed to developing a new Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles, as part of the National Electric Vehicle Strategy. Anticipated to increase the supply of electric vehicles to Australia, the Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles will be developed following a detailed consultation process that will include a focus on regional Australia.

The establishment of the \$15.0 billion National Reconstruction Fund was announced in the October Budget, which also continued funding for long standing programs that support regional businesses and industry to prosper, like the Export Market Development Grants. In this Budget, establishment of the National Reconstruction Fund continues, with funds to be invested over 7 years from 2023–24 to diversify and transform Australian industry through targeted investments in priority areas. The Fund will create secure, well-paying jobs in regional areas. The Government has also committed \$392.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 in this Budget to the Industry Growth Program, which will also provide support for small to medium enterprises and start-ups in regional Australia to either commercialise or grow their businesses.

Supporting the critical minerals sector will strengthen economic and employment opportunities in regional Australia. This Budget includes an investment of a further \$23.4 million over 4 years to support the continued operation of the Critical Minerals Office and \$57.1 million over 4 years to establish the Critical Minerals International Partnerships Program. Consistent with the Framework, this investment recognises the diversity across Australia's regions and seeks to capitalise on regions' strengths.

Building on already strong relationships with industry and academia, including in regional areas, the investment of \$3.4 billion over the next decade to establish the Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA) will ensure cutting-edge technology development is supported and coordinated to address Australian Defence Force priority needs. This will include providing opportunities for regional industries and universities to contribute to the ASCA programs.

The Australian Government recognises the importance of the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors to our regions and to Australia’s economy. The 2023–24 Budget invests \$1.0 billion over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$268.1 million per year ongoing towards a strong and sustainably funded biosecurity system. This will help minimise disruption and economic losses through outbreaks and incursions, support better yields through lower damage to produce, and maintain and provide new access to markets through greater biosecurity assurance.

To strengthen sustainable farming and natural resource management practices, an investment of \$302.1 million over 5 years from 2023–24 through the Natural Heritage Trust will reduce the agriculture sector’s emissions, build climate resilience, enhance market access and improve environmental outcomes. Additionally, the 2023–24 Budget commits \$38.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24, with an additional \$7.6 million per year ongoing, to bolster the foundational data capability of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences, supporting a stronger and more sustainable agriculture sector.

Agricultural and other regional employers are being supported to boost their workforces. In recognition of the need to address unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled labour shortages in regional Australia, the 2023–24 Budget embeds the Australian Government’s commitment to expand and improve the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme. The Government is investing \$370.8 million over 4 years from 2023–24 in measures to benefit regional Australia and the broader Pacific family, including to strengthen oversight of domestic operations.

2023–24 Budget: Portfolio investments in regional Australia

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

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry portfolio supports a more sustainable and prosperous future for Australia's regions by supporting its key local economies and industries: agriculture, fisheries and forestry. It does this by bolstering biosecurity efforts, production and trade, and through targeted policy, programs, and research and development.

Aquaculture and fisheries are important industries to communities around Australia and the Australian Government collaborates with the sector to anticipate consumer demands and trading partner requirements, such as sustainability, provenance, animal welfare and carbon footprint credentials.

The portfolio also works closely with the forestry industry through research and development, and innovative products and processes that enables Australia's forestry sector to deliver positive climate outcomes.

Additionally, the Government continues the Rural Financial Counselling Service which provides free and independent financial counselling to eligible primary producers.

An increase in biosecurity threats and the detection of significant pests and diseases at our border is intensifying pressure on Australia's biosecurity system. Investing in a robust biosecurity system is necessary to keep our regional industries and local economies resilient, sustainable and thriving.

The Government recognises that agriculture, fishery and forestry industries have long been at the forefront of managing and adapting to climate change, with droughts and natural disasters such as flooding and fires presenting ongoing challenges to the sector. Supporting the sector to continue through difficult times is a key objective of initiatives such as Farm Household Allowance and the Future Drought Fund. The portfolio works in partnership with farmers, businesses, and states and territories to tackle these challenges while taking advantage of opportunities to deliver more sustainable and climate-smart agriculture, supporting regional Australia's – and the national economy's – transition to net zero emissions.

New Initiatives

Towards a Strengthened and Sustainably Funded Biosecurity System

The Australian Government is delivering on its election commitment by investing \$1.0 billion over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$268.1 million per year ongoing to strengthen the national biosecurity system through the development of a long-term sustainable funding model. The model is based on shared responsibility and locks in ongoing biosecurity funding.

All Australians benefit from strong biosecurity and have a responsibility to contribute to its upkeep. From 1 July 2023, the Government will begin implementing a new long-term sustainable funding model. The new model will be more predictable, equitable, more transparent and more accountable than ever before. The cost will be shared between taxpayers, travellers, importers and producers.

Biosecurity is critical to maintaining Australia's healthy and prosperous economy and environment, and keeping our regional and remote communities viable.

A strong and sustainably funded biosecurity system will benefit regional, rural and remote regions by:

- helping to minimise disruption/economic losses (including stock losses and distribution channels) from outbreaks and incursions
- supporting better yields through lower damage to produce from biosecurity risks
- maintaining and providing new access to domestic and export markets through greater biosecurity assurance and reputation
- delivering the Simplified Targeting and Enhanced Processing System, a modern digital system to support safer and more efficient biosecurity clearance of imported cargo
- continuing the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program to support a strengthened biosecurity system in northern Australia, enabling the rangers to continue animal, plant and aquatic biosecurity monitoring and detection activities to protect our domestic industries and our overseas agricultural export status.

Renewed Australian Animal Welfare Strategy

The Australian Government is investing \$5.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to develop a renewed Australian Animal Welfare Strategy (AAWS), providing consistency and a shared vision for improving animal welfare across all jurisdictions.

A renewed AAWS will confirm Australia's commitment to modern, sustainable and science-based animal welfare practices. The Government also made commitments to animal welfare, including the establishment of an independent Inspector General of Animal

Welfare and Live Animal Exports. A robust stakeholder engagement strategy, with broad and wide-reaching engagement will be crucial for delivering the AAWS. This will include engagement with First Nations people and agricultural industries.

International trading partners expect stronger animal welfare standards. A renewed strategy will help demonstrate to consumers and our international trading partners that animal welfare, along with steps to improve sustainability, is a priority. This will help to maintain trade and improve our national reputation.

Implementation of the Live Sheep Exports by Sea Phase Out – Independent Panel

The Australian Government committed to phasing out live sheep exports by sea as part of its 2022 election commitments, and, as a result, is investing \$5.6 million over 2 years from 2022–23. An independent, 4-person panel has been appointed to engage and consult with a range of stakeholders to provide advice on how and when the Government will phase out live sheep exports by sea.

Natural Heritage Trust – Investing in Climate-Smart Agriculture

The Australian Government is committed to developing a climate-smart and sustainable agriculture sector and is investing \$302.1 million over 5 years from 2023–24, through the Natural Heritage Trust to strengthen sustainable farming and natural resource management practices that reduce the agriculture sector’s emissions and builds climate resilience, enhances market access and supports improved environmental outcomes. The investment includes:

- \$76.4 million to support national and regional natural resources management delivery partners, including peak landcare organisations, and a network of Sustainable Agriculture Facilitators to ensure actions can be delivered efficiently and at scale, and to provide extension services to accelerate the adoption of climate-smart agriculture practices.
- \$158.6 million to drive impactful on-ground projects, to strengthen agricultural sustainability and productivity, accelerate emissions reduction and preserve on-farm natural capital. This includes landscape-scale regional priority projects and projects to support the agriculture sector to transition to a low emissions future and foster sustainable agriculture.
- \$36.0 million to support farmers improve soil health and natural resources by preserving the natural capital integral to agricultural productivity and sustainability, including on-farm soil sample collection and monitoring through a new National Soils Monitoring Program and strengthening the Australian National Soil Information System.

- \$31.0 million for best practice program administration, including a co-design process and ongoing engagement with key stakeholders, and the development of a comprehensive monitoring, reporting and evaluation framework.

The Natural Heritage Trust is delivered in collaboration with the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water.

Supporting a Stronger more Sustainable Agriculture Sector

The Australian Government is investing \$38.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24, with an additional \$7.6 million per year ongoing, to bolster the foundational data capability of the Australian Bureau of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Sciences (ABARES). This will ensure the continuity of foundational agricultural statistics vital for biosecurity and disaster preparedness and response.

Investing in ABARES will also help the Government identify opportunities and risks of adopting new low emissions technologies on farm practices, track adoption rates, and evaluate the impact of domestic and international emission policies on Australian agriculture and regions. Farmers and regional communities will benefit through targeted policies that take into account the impacts of emissions and adaptation decisions on farm profitability, output, regional land-use and international competitiveness. Enhanced data capability will help inform farmers of more sustainable production choices and support the sector's contribution towards a net zero economy.

Partnering to Implement the National Soil Action Plan

The Australian Government is investing \$20.0 million in 2023–24 to partner with state and territory governments to progress priorities under the National Soil Action Plan 2023–2028. The Action Plan is the first of 4 plans under the National Soil Strategy.

Soil is one of Australia's most important natural resources. It is the foundation of every landscape and supports Australia's agriculture, environment, communities, economy, and way of life. Soil is a particularly critical resource for regions that rely on agricultural production. Soil can be part of the response to climate change but is also vulnerable to degradation from its impacts and will be a critical part of regional climate change resilience and opportunities for adaptation and mitigation. As soil is managed by thousands of land managers, a partnership approach is crucial.

The \$20.0 million for new funding agreements demonstrates the Australian Government's commitment to the Action Plan while encouraging state and territory commitment and cooperation. It will facilitate targeted, localised interventions to address soil health issues identified under the Action Plan priorities. Australia's regions will benefit from increased information sharing, education and knowledge about land management practices, aimed at improving soil health and opportunities to be part of a skilled soils workforce for the future.

Attorney-General's

The Attorney-General's portfolio improves law and justice outcomes across the nation, ensuring all Australians have access to services supporting their safety and security regardless of where they live.

With a strong focus on providing services, the portfolio's work spans a range of significant areas such as improving family law services and safety for women and children, strengthening privacy protection frameworks, and an ongoing commitment to justice reinvestment for First Nations communities who continue to be over-represented in the criminal justice system.

For example, the portfolio serves people in regional and rural areas through the \$2.4 billion National Legal Assistance Partnership (NLAP). The NLAP provides funding to Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) to provide vital legal assistance services. The NLAP provides baseline funding for these organisations, as well as specific funding for the specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships and Family Advocacy and Support Services that some LACs and CLCs operate. People residing in rural or remote areas are a national priority client group under the NLAP. There are approximately 80 LAC offices across Australia, with around 55 per cent of offices located in regional or remote areas. There are 7 ATSILS nationally which deliver services from over 70 locations, including regional and remote areas, court circuits, bush courts and outreach locations. The NLAP funds around 140 CLCs, and in 2021–22 approximately 13 per cent of their clients were people from rural and remote communities.

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government is funding the extension and expansion of 2 family law service programs, providing important services to vulnerable regional families. The Australian Government is also strengthening community safety in Central Australia by investing in improved security infrastructure, enhanced policing and community-led justice reinvestment to reduce incarceration rates of First Nations people.

Recognising the different needs, opportunities and challenges faced by diverse communities across regional and remote Australia, the portfolio conducts regular public consultations and place-based engagement to ensure local communities are heard and inform programs as they are delivered across the country.

New Initiatives

Women's Safety

The Australian Government is committing \$589.3 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to implement measures under the First Action Plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032. Key regional initiatives being delivered by the Attorney-General's portfolio are:

- \$33.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to roll out the Family Law Priority Property Pools program nationwide, making this highly effective program accessible in regional areas for the first time. This program helps separated couples and empowers vulnerable

women, including women affected by family violence, to achieve quick, fair and affordable settlements via a streamlined court process to resolve small property disputes.

- \$13.4 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to continue the Lawyer-Assisted Family Law Property Mediation program, which funds state and territory Legal Aid Commissions to provide legal advice, advocacy and practical support for vulnerable separating couples with small-value property pools to mediate and reach agreement on a family law property division. This service will particularly assist vulnerable groups in regional areas, as lower property values (and therefore property pools) are more common in regional Australia.

Further information on the Women’s Safety package and Women’s Safety – First Nations package can be found in the Social Services and Prime Minister and Cabinet chapters.

Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan

In January 2023, the Australian Government announced an immediate investment of \$48.8 million over 2 years from 2022–23 in Alice Springs to tackle crime, keep women and children safe, and provide support to young people, including:

- \$14.2 million for extra high visibility policing and compliance with liquor licensing laws
- \$2.0 million to improve security infrastructure.

In February 2023, the Australian Government announced a further \$250.0 million to improve community safety, tackle alcohol-related harm, and provide more opportunities for young people in Central Australia. This investment includes \$10.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 for justice reinvestment initiatives in Central Australia to reduce crime, contact with the criminal justice system and recidivism.

These measures are funded from the Confiscated Assets Account and build on the funding provided in the First Nations Justice measure in the October Budget.

Further information on the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan can be found in the Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter.

Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

The Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water portfolio works to ensure Australia supports the net zero transformation and is helping protect and restore nature, including in Australia's regions.

The portfolio is contributing to the creation of clean energy jobs and industries, and protection and restoration of Australia's environment through investing in people, places and sustainable businesses in regional areas. Recognising the diversity of regions and their economies, the portfolio will target local priorities to support the regions.

Through the 2023–24 Budget, the portfolio will support regional Australia with industry decarbonisation and workforce development to attract, retain and reskill existing and new workforces in regions. These efforts take advantage of the opportunities arising from global action on climate change. To support the Regional Investment Framework, the portfolio works with regional communities and industries towards decarbonisation and developing new clean energy industries.

The Powering the Regions Fund, the National Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Program, and the National Electric Vehicle Strategy will all create opportunities for local communities and businesses across Australia's regions, while supporting their transformation to net zero.

The portfolio is helping to protect and restore Australia's natural environment. By conserving the natural environment, we ensure the provision of ecosystem services, including raw materials, produce and clean water. Our environment also has intrinsic and cultural value and contributes to wellbeing. It is central to Australia's way of life, particularly in regional and remote communities.

New funding will deliver critical investments in flood warning infrastructure, national parks and scientific institutions. These investments will enhance public safety, support job growth in regional areas, protect World Heritage properties such as Kakadu, enable innovative science, and contribute to tourism.

New Initiatives

Powering the Regions Fund

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government finalised the design of the Powering the Regions Fund, established in the October Budget as a \$1.9 billion package to support the regions in their transition to net zero. The Government has allocated \$1.4 billion of the Fund over 7 years from 2022–23 to support industrial decarbonisation, the development of new clean energy industries, and workforce development. This will capture the opportunities arising from global action on climate change.

Administered grants of particular relevance to regional industry include:

- \$600.0 million for the Safeguard Transformation Stream, to support decarbonisation projects at trade-exposed industrial facilities covered by the Safeguard Mechanism
- \$400.0 million for the Critical Inputs to Clean Energy Industries grant program, to provide targeted support for hard-to-abate sectors providing critical inputs (primary steel production, cement and lime, alumina and aluminium) to clean energy industries.
- \$400.0 million for the Industrial Transformation Stream, to support investments at any existing regional industrial facility, or new regional clean industry developments, which will also foster new industries in regional Australia.

The funding will support decarbonisation projects and domestic manufacturing capability at industrial facilities, helping regional businesses to remain competitive in a lower carbon world.

The Powering the Regions Fund will also partially contribute to major energy transformation measures announced in the 2023–24 Budget recognising the importance of these investments to the transformation of regional Australia. It will also continue to purchase Australian Carbon Credit Units on behalf of the Government.

Establishing Offshore Renewables

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government allocated \$14.5 million over 4 years from the Powering the Regions Fund to accelerate the development of the offshore renewable energy industry. This measure will benefit regional communities by progressing an industry strategy and regulatory compliance activities. It will also support local groups affected by a new offshore renewables industry being established in marine areas by supporting consultation with regional communities about opportunities and effective and mutually beneficial coexistence.

Hydrogen Production

The Australian Government has allocated \$2.0 billion to establish Hydrogen Headstart. This program will support Australia’s renewable hydrogen sector to mature by providing competitive hydrogen production contracts that bridge the commercial gap for early projects. Much of Australia’s hydrogen industry growth is expected to occur in remote and regional areas. Regional communities will gain from the new employment and economic opportunities in the hydrogen sector, with spill over benefits for Australia’s manufacturing sectors and related supply chains, many of which are also located in regional areas. The funding also includes \$2.0 million to resource First Nations communities to engage with hydrogen project proponents and planning processes.

National Climate Change Adaptation and Risk Program

The Australian Government has committed \$27.4 million to deliver Australia's first National Climate Risk Assessment and start developing a National Adaptation Plan. With the impacts of recent flooding and bushfires still being felt by communities, the importance of building resilience and adapting to climate change is paramount. In light of new and changing risks from climate change, regions will benefit from better analysis, guidance and information about climate impacts on regional communities and key regional economic sectors. Regional communities will be better positioned to understand and respond to their climate risks, and the challenges they will need to consider due to climate change. This will include analysis and guidance on how multiple climate impacts could affect regions, including systemic risks that emerge across communities and businesses when climate driven disruption occurs. For example, a major flooding event could impact energy, health and transport systems simultaneously, or create risks specific to First Nations and other remote communities, and multiple overlapping events such as flood and cyclone would compound this impact.

National Electric Vehicle Strategy

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government set out a range of measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector. This includes the recently released National Electric Vehicle Strategy and the commitment to introduce Australia's first Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles – refer to the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts chapter for more detail.

Other new measures included in the Strategy will accelerate the transition to electric vehicles and help regional Australia develop skilled jobs and improve consumer confidence in choosing electric vehicles. Regional communities and economies will gain from investment in charging infrastructure, access to skills and training for emergency service workers to respond to electric vehicle related incidents, and prospective new opportunities in electric vehicle battery recycling, reuse and stewardship. The Australian Government will collaborate with state and territory governments to ensure a national approach to remote and regional electric vehicle charging infrastructure, recognising the importance of implementing a comprehensive national charging network. This will ensure regional communities are included in the planning of charging infrastructure locations and encourage greater connectivity between regional and metropolitan areas.

Natural Heritage Trust – Project Funding

In the October Budget, the Australian Government provided \$1.1 billion for the next phase of the Natural Heritage Trust to deliver sustainable agriculture and environmental outcomes, as well as the next phase of the Indigenous Protected Areas program. Programs delivered through the Trust will have positive regional impacts by supporting regional economies and jobs. The Trust is delivered in collaboration with the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry. In this Budget, the Government has allocated \$439.2 million of Trust funding to the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water over 5 years from 2023–24 to maintain capability of regional partners, deliver benefits to Australia's threatened species, support climate-smart agriculture, and protect internationally listed World Heritage properties and Ramsar wetlands.

Urban Rivers and Catchments Program

The Australian Government has allocated \$118.5 million over 6 years from 2023–24 to improve urban waterways and their catchments through the \$200.0 million Urban Rivers and Catchments Program. The program extends to outer-urban areas and regional centres. Around 100 projects will restore natural habitats and improve water quality to benefit native species, and improve the quality of urban green space for local communities.

Protecting Australia’s Iconic National Parks

The Australian Government has committed \$355.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$68.1 million per year ongoing to protect Commonwealth National Parks, sustain core Parks business, and deliver critical infrastructure to Muŋitjulu, a medium-sized remote community within Uluru-Kata Tjuŋa National Park. This initiative will have positive socio-economic impacts for First Nations and regional communities, including in the Northern Territory, Christmas Island, Norfolk Island and Jervis Bay Territory. Investing in our iconic Commonwealth National Parks will support tourism that contributes significantly to regional economies. Regional communities will also benefit from new jobs created through increased park management activities and the construction and maintenance of infrastructure. The delivery of essential services upgrades in Muŋitjulu will provide essential power, water and sewerage services to this regional community.

Securing the future of Australia’s Marine Science

The Australian Government has committed \$163.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$43.5 million per year ongoing to ensure financial sustainability for the Australian Institute of Marine Science (AIMS). This will ensure AIMS continues to provide world-leading science and research on Australia’s tropical marine ecosystems, providing significant social and economic value to coastal Australia. The funding will support new jobs creation and critical infrastructure upgrades to the AIMS headquarters in Townsville.

Nature Positive Plan: better for the environment, better for business

The Australian Government has committed \$214.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$4.5 million per year ongoing) to deliver the Nature Positive Plan: Better for the Environment, Better for Business. The measures in this package include:

- \$121.0 million over 4 years to establish Environment Protection Australia
- \$51.5 million over 4 years and \$4.5 million per year ongoing to establish Environment Information Australia
- \$34.0 million over 2 years to deliver the nature positive package of legislation, develop initial National Environmental Standards and critical guidance for protecting threatened species and ecosystems
- \$7.7 million in 2023–24 to continue work to establish the foundations of a Nature Repair Market.

These measures will improve environmental protection and management in regional areas. Regional economies will benefit from more streamlined environmental approvals as well as greater transparency and evidence-based regional planning.

Flood Warning Infrastructure Network Remediation

The Australian Government is investing up to \$236.0 million over 10 years from 2023–24 and \$13.9 million per year ongoing to remediate flood warning infrastructure in Australia’s highest priority areas. Australia experiences severe flooding, which disrupts communities, displaces people and damages regional economies. This initiative will increase the reliability of flood forecasting and warnings in the most flood-prone parts of Australia. Reliable and accurate flood forecasts help protect lives, and support informed emergency response, relief and preparedness in regional areas.

Future-proofing of the Murray-Darling Basin

The Australian Government has committed \$148.5 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to improve the sustainability of the Murray-Darling Basin. . The commitment will enable the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to undertake the first statutory review of the Basin Plan 2012 to future-proof the Basin. The review will deliver agreement on the settings for the next 10-year phase of water management in the Murray-Darling Basin, supporting communities and the environment to adapt to climate change. The review will involve Basin and First Nations communities in a transparent and inclusive process to improve water management. The commitment also supports the portfolio to work with Basin states and affected communities on the Basin Plan.

Water Market Reform – strengthening integrity and transparency

The Australian Government has committed \$32.7 million over 4 years and \$3.4 million per year ongoing to reform Murray-Darling Basin water markets. This initiative will deliver a digital platform for water market information, including new data standards and minute-by-minute updates to improve transparency. It will benefit participants and water users across the Murray-Darling Basin by restoring public confidence in water markets by providing reliable data to help water users make better decisions.

National Water Grid Fund – delivering commitments

The Australian Government is committed to responsible investment in water infrastructure to deliver water security in regional communities. This initiative allocates \$197.1 million over 6 years from 2023–24 from within the National Water Grid Fund toward the construction of 3 water infrastructure projects. The projects will deliver on the Government’s water security agenda by providing essential access to safe and reliable water for regional and remote communities. Improved regional and remote water infrastructure will provide a foundation for improved social and economic impacts for regional communities. Through the National Water Grid Fund, the Australian Government has also allocated \$150.0 million towards First Nations water infrastructure projects. More information on the First Nations water infrastructure projects can be found in the Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter.

Defence

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

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

Defence plays an important role in supporting delivery of the Australian Government's new Regional Investment Framework, which recognises the importance of building strong and sustainable regional communities. The Defence Innovation Hub has awarded 68 contracts totalling over \$130.6 million to small, medium and large enterprises and universities based in regional Australia between 5 December 2016 and 22 March 2023. These contracts have supported approximately 447 jobs for regional Australians. There are 24 Defence Innovation Hub projects for regional businesses and universities, worth a total of \$66.5 million, expected to remain active into 2023–24. The 2023–24 Budget measure Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator, which will take over from the Defence Innovation Hub from 1 July 2023, will further support jobs for regional Australians, support local industry capability and create more activity in local economies.

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

Defence maintains strong links with regional Australia through Army personnel undertaking service with Reserve units. Many of Army's Reserve units are headquartered in regional centres with staff and soldiers based in surrounding districts (Army has approximately 20,988 reservists with 33 per cent in regional locations).

The Defence estate consists of 639 owned properties and approximately 445 domestic leases. Facilities include 70 major bases, training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation including Defence Force Recruitment Centres. In addition, Defence Housing Australia manages almost 17,000 properties in capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations of Australia where the Australian Defence Force (ADF) has a presence, and has residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. Construction and maintenance activity associated with Defence facilities and housing in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

New Initiatives

Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator

The Australian Government is investing \$3.4 billion over the next decade to deliver the technologies needed for Australia's security through the establishment of the Advanced Strategic Capabilities Accelerator (ASCA).

ASCA will be innovation-centric and leverage technology development and the Defence innovation ecosystem to transition innovation into acquired capability at an unprecedented pace and scale.

Working with a range of partners, ASCA will build on already strong relationships with industry and academia, including in regional areas, to ensure cutting-edge technology development is supported and coordinated to address ADF priorities.

ASCA will commence on 1 July 2023 with a phased start up over the first 18 months to develop, test and refine the operating model and to complete transition from the Defence Innovation Hub and Next Generation Technologies Fund programs. This will include providing opportunities for regional industries and universities to contribute to the ASCA programs.

Enhanced High-Frequency Communications System

This initiative will equip Defence with an enhanced high-frequency communications system that will support regional and global operations. The upgrade of high-frequency communications under Joint Project 9101 commenced in October 2022 and is valued at \$2.0 billion inclusive of construction and sustainment costs to 2040.

This initiative will include a new communication site near Darwin and a software development centre in Adelaide. It is expected to create more than 150 new jobs, the majority of which will be located in Adelaide, with the remainder of staff located across multiple regional centres in Exmouth, Wagga Wagga, Townsville, Darwin as well as Canberra in the operations support facility. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$283.5 million.

Expansion of the F-35A Depot Maintenance Capability

This initiative will provide \$100.0 million from 2023–24 to 2026–27 to expand the F-35A depot maintenance capability at Newcastle Airport. It will expand the current 2 maintenance bays to 6 maintenance bays to meet the forecasted service and maintenance demand. The construction of the additional bays will provide opportunities for local jobs, local suppliers and subcontractors. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$23.8 million.

Defence Renewable Energy and Energy Security Program

This initiative will provide \$64.1 million from 2022–23 to 2028–29 to install Solar Photovoltaic systems which will diversify energy supply to sites beyond the energy grid to Robertson Barracks Northern Territory, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) Base Tindal, Larrakeyah Barracks and Harts Range. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$10.1 million.

This initiative is also in operation at the Australian Defence Satellite Communication Station Geraldton, Yampi Sound Training Area and Beecroft Air Weapons Range and in planning for Mulwala Renewable Energy, Northern Territory, South Australia and RAAF Base Curtin.

New Enterprise Estate and Infrastructure Projects being delivered in Regional areas in 2023–24

Defence estate and infrastructure investment is funded through the Defence Integrated Investment Program. Construction and maintenance activities associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities. Twenty-one subcontractor packages, with an approximate total value of \$51.3 million, were awarded to First Nations subcontractors, with a further \$43.4 million expended under First Nations prime contractors, during 2022–23. New approved projects with works at one or more regional locations are outlined below.

Airfield Capital Works P0010

This initiative provides \$427.9 million from 2022–23 to 2025–26 and involves maintaining aircraft pavements, aeronautical ground lighting, and drainage at HMAS Albatross and RAAF Base Richmond New South Wales, RAAF Base Amberley Queensland, and RAAF Base Pearce Western Australia. The works are scheduled for completion in early 2025. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$248.1 million.

Facilities to Support AIR 7000 Phase 1B Remotely Piloted Aircraft System

This initiative will provide \$427.2 million from 2022–23 to 2026–27. It involves providing fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure to support the introduction into service of the MQ-4C Triton aircraft system at regional and non-regional locations, including RAAF Base Tindal Northern Territory and the Edinburgh Defence Precinct South Australia. The works are scheduled for completion in late 2025. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$162.8 million.

Robertson Barracks Base Improvements Project

This initiative will provide \$389.1 million from 2022–23 to 2026–27. It involves upgrading engineering services (such as potable water, electrical and fire water), providing additional living-in accommodation, and providing a new combined mess at Robertson Barracks Northern Territory. The works are scheduled to commence construction in mid-2023 for completion in early 2026. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$100.1 million.

HMAS Harman Redevelopment Project

This initiative will provide \$116.4 million from 2022–23 to 2025–26. It involves delivering fit-for-purpose facilities and infrastructure at HMAS Harman Australian Capital Territory, including upgrading, replacing and providing new engineering services, command facility, entry precinct, office accommodation, and living-in accommodation. The works are scheduled to commence construction in late 2023 for completion in early 2025. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$67.8 million.

Cultana Training Area Redevelopment Phase 2

This initiative will provide \$79.8 million from 2022–23 to 2026–27. It involves providing new facilities and infrastructure to develop the expanded training area into a training range at the Cultana Training Area, South Australia. The works are scheduled to commence construction in early 2024 for completion in mid-2025. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$72.9 million.

RAAF Base Amberley Sewage Treatment Plant

This \$41.7 million project is providing a new sewage treatment plant and associated infrastructure and facilities, including administration and storage, at RAAF Base Amberley Queensland. The project is scheduled for completion in mid-2024. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$13.2 million.

Facilities for A Company 41st Royal New South Wales Regiment Tweed Heads Region

This initiative will provide \$17.4 million from 2022–23 to 2025–26. It involves providing administration, common user, training, storage, and hardstand facilities as well as minor refurbishment works to alleviate existing functionality and capacity issues at Tweed Heads, New South Wales. The works are scheduled for completion in mid-2024. The budget estimate for 2023–24 is \$12.4 million.

Education

The Education portfolio contributes to economic prosperity and social wellbeing by creating opportunities and driving better outcomes through access to quality education and learning. Education, and access to the opportunities it provides, is essential for our diverse regional communities, whether a student chooses to remain, or move away, from their hometown or region to study and work. Australia's first Regional Education Commissioner, the Hon Fiona Nash, was appointed in December 2021 to bring a national focus and direction to regional, rural and remote education with a remit to improve regional education from early childhood through to higher education, including university and vocational education.

The Australian Government is continuing to deliver its commitment to providing Cheaper Child Care, making early childhood education and care (ECEC) more affordable for around 265,000 families in regional and remote Australia from July 2023. The Government will provide \$55.3 billion of Child Care Subsidy from 2023–24 to 2026–27, as well as support for preschool to ensure all children have access to 600 hours of preschool in the year before full time school.

Australians in regional and remote areas will also benefit from grants to ECEC services. Community Child Care Fund (CCCF), including Connected Beginnings, will deliver \$575.1 million over 4 years from 2022–23 to 2025–26, and will improve access in regional and remote, disadvantaged, and First Nations communities. Over 60 per cent of the CCCF funding in 2022–23 and 2023–24 will support services in regional and remote locations, and currently CCCF supports around 900 services nationally. Further funding in this Budget will help support and retain ECEC workers in areas of critical shortage, including regional and remote communities.

The Australian Government continues to prioritise funding for schools. In 2023, the Government will provide \$27.3 billion in recurrent funding to Australian schools, of which \$6.1 billion is benefitting students in regional and remote schools. Additionally, \$20.8 million in 2023 from the Choice and Affordability Fund is quarantined to specifically support non-government schools in regional and remote locations. The Commonwealth Regional Scholarship Program will deliver 100 scholarships to students from regional, rural and remote communities to assist with the costs of boarding school. The Government has adjusted the scholarship program settings, including introducing 2 scholarship support tiers (one for low income families and one for low-to-middle income families experiencing financial hardship) and increasing the length of the scholarship from 3 years to up to 6 years. These changes were made in consultation with the Regional Education Commissioner to help students over the entire period of their secondary school education and better support families who are in greatest need of assistance.

The Australian Government continues to deliver programs that help students in regional and remote areas continue their education or access higher education without having to leave their community. This builds on the 20,000 additional university places the Government is providing to students underrepresented in our universities, including those from rural and remote Australia. The Australian Universities Accord process will make recommendations to improve access and participation for students from regional, rural and remote areas. As part of the University Accord process, the Government will work closely with peak bodies, and with regional universities and communities.

New Initiatives

Urgent actions to build sector capacity, strengthen supply and retain the Early Childhood Education and Care Workforce

This initiative invests \$72.4 million from 2022–23 to 2026–27 to support the skills and training of workers in the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. This includes \$34.4 million to support ECEC professional development, \$33.1 million to support ECEC paid practicum, and \$4.8 million to support ECEC practicum exchanges, to support course completion.

The measures aim to build supply and capacity across the sector, targeting providers and educators in critical areas of shortages – ranging from regional to very remote communities.

Teacher Shortages

The 2023–24 Budget announces a further \$9.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24 for initiatives in the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan, including targeted initiatives to improve our understanding of teacher workforce needs. This initiative builds upon the Australian Government’s commitment of \$328.0 million to implement actions from the Action Plan, which was agreed by all Education Ministers in December 2022. The Action Plan aims to address teacher workforce shortages, which can be particularly acute for schools in regional and remote parts of Australia, by increasing the number of people choosing to become teachers and ensuring existing teachers remain in the profession.

Clontarf Foundation

The Clontarf Foundation supports school engagement for First Nations young men to improve their confidence and school engagement. The Australian Government is investing \$32.8 million across 2023–24 and 2024–25 to extend Clontarf’s program into the 2024 school year. This program will have a positive impact on First Nations students, including regional and remote students based on academy locations across Australia.

Central Australia Plan: on Country Learning

The Australian Government will deliver an additional \$40.4 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for schools in Central Australia to enable locally-driven responses that support educational engagement, attendance and learning outcomes. This funding will be delivered through a bilateral agreement with the Northern Territory Government, with a focus on community engagement to inform activities, including on Country learning initiatives. This initiative is part of the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan package – refer Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter for more detail.

Supporting Quality Boarding for Rural and Remote Students

The Australian Government will invest a further \$21.6 million from 2023 to extend the Indigenous Boarding Providers grants program for the 2024 school year. This builds on the 2022–23 March Budget measure and enables support to continue while a design review is undertaken to identify sustainable, systemic reform options. This extension to the grants program is expected to support approximately 50 boarding providers who host and support around 2,300 First Nations students from remote areas. This initiative is part of the Closing the Gap – Further Investment package– refer Prime Minister and Cabinet chapter for more detail.

Employment and Workplace Relations

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (the department) supports people to have safe, secure and well-paid work with the skills for a sustainable future.

The department contributes to the delivery of the Government's Regional Investment Framework by supporting investment in people, industries and local economies across Australia. Initiatives in the 2023-24 Budget such as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme support businesses in key industries to fill workforce shortages, while providing opportunities for people from the Pacific and Timor-Leste to work in Australia. The department is ensuring continuity of employment services in the Broome Employment Region to ensure job seekers in that region receive the support they need to find work in a challenging job market. The department also contributes to a strong skills and training sector through initiatives such as reinvigorating foundation skills programs and strengthening the apprenticeship support system to better support completions.

New Initiatives

Foundation Skills

The Australian Government is redesigning the Skills for Education and Employment program to provide more pathways for Australians to access training to improve their language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills, improving their capacity to gain secure employment and career progression, and participate fully in the economy and society. The program will be delivered through a mix of national and local place-based solutions to improve access and delivery. This will include a specific focus on First Nations people with place-based, whole of community projects designed to meet community needs – this will be delivered through First Nations organisations in partnership with TAFEs and other Registered Training Organisations or Adult and Community Education sector providers.

The Government is also extending the Foundation Skills for Your Future Remote Community Pilots program by 12 months to 30 June 2024. This program currently supports people in 11 remote communities with foundation language, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills by providing tailored, flexible and locally-developed and delivered training.

Targeted Support for Australian Apprenticeships

In the 2022 Jobs and Skills Summit, the Australian Government committed to improve the Australian Apprenticeships system, increase the diversity of the apprentice workforce, and drive-up apprenticeship completion rates. The Government is introducing a new Australian Apprenticeship service delivery model which will put the apprentice at the centre of the model to improve the quality of apprenticeships and ensure the system continues to deliver the pipeline of skilled workers that industry needs. This change addresses feedback that some women, First Nations and other apprentices do not feel adequately supported by the existing Australian Apprenticeships system. Apprentices and industry in regional and remote Australia will benefit from greater access to the support they need to finish their training.

National Skills Agreement

Regional Australians will benefit from the Australian Government’s commitment to reform and provide stable and long-term funding for vocational education training (VET). Building on the 12-month Skills Agreement to deliver 180,000 fee-free TAFE and vocational education places in 2023, the Government is working in partnership with states and territories to negotiate a 5-year National Skills Agreement to be in place by January 2024. The Government will invest up to \$4.1 billion over 5 years in a new National Skills Agreement, including \$3.7 billion provisioned in the Contingency Reserve, along with over \$400.0 million to support 300,000 fee-free TAFE and VET places from the October Budget.

Priorities for the National Skills Agreement include building the workforce for critical and emerging industries; supporting modern and responsive TAFE at the heart of the VET sector; greater equity and access to training; ensuring Australians are not held back or left behind as the economy transforms; informed decision making; and balancing national and local priorities.

Skills Assessments Pilots

The Australian Government funds 3 Skills Assessment Pilots to provide onshore migrants with fast-tracked skills assessments, free employability assessments, and advice and access to further training to improve employment prospects. The Government is re-scoping 2 of the 3 Pilots to improve uptake and maximise their success following the reopening of international borders. This will improve employment outcomes for migrants in priority occupations, including those in regional areas, and will address critical skill shortages.

National Careers Institute

The National Careers Institute provides people, including those in regional and remote Australia, with access to authoritative and accurate careers information to enable them to actively manage their career pathways irrespective of their age or career stage. The Australian Government is providing an additional \$5.1 million in 2023–24 to the NCI to continue delivery of evidence-based careers information to support young people to understand available career pathways, to support people in mid and late career stages to up-skill or re-skill to support them in their career progression or make the transition to a new career. The funding will support better targeting of information for key groups of Australians including people from rural and regional backgrounds.

Australian Skills Guarantee

Regional Australians will benefit from the Australian Government’s election commitment to deliver and implement the Australian Skills Guarantee. This initiative will leverage the purchasing power of the Government through major construction, and information and communications technology projects to create more opportunities for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets across the country and increase opportunities for women in these sectors. This includes opportunities for people to work as apprentices and trainees on major projects across regional and rural Australia. The 2023–24 Budget will provide \$8.6 million over 4 years to 2026–27 and \$1.5 million per year ongoing from 2027–28 to design and implement the Australian Skills Guarantee.

Silicosis in the workplace

The Australian Government is committed to eradicating the incidence of silicosis and other silica-related diseases among workers in silica-dust generating industries. The Government will provide \$10.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to address the rise of silicosis in workers and investigate a national strategy for the prevention of silicosis and silica-related diseases.

The Government is acting to improve work health and safety outcomes for Australian workers, including those in regional areas, by expanding the functions of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency to include silica dust, and providing funding to Safe Work Australia social partners to deliver national awareness and behaviour change initiatives.

The Government is also undertaking an urgent assessment of a possible importation ban on engineered stone and its impacts. Safe Work Australia's analysis of an importation ban will provide the basis for further consultation with the states and territories, with the aim of a uniform national approach to the control of silica dust related hazards under the model WHS laws.

Unlocking sustainable growth in the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

The 2023–24 Budget includes enhancements to the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme across agencies. The PALM scheme is integral to delivering benefits for Australia and participating country economies. The scheme supports Australian businesses in key industries to fill workforce shortages, while providing opportunities for Pacific and Timor-Leste workers to find employment in Australia, develop their skills and remit income to support their families and communities.

As part of the Australian Government's enhancements to the PALM scheme, to strengthen domestic operations and to enhance oversight the Government will provide \$168.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to consolidate domestic operations into the department. This investment demonstrates the Government's commitment to grow and expand the PALM scheme in critical sectors across Australia, including in regional and remote areas, without compromising safeguards that ensure vulnerable migrant workers are adequately protected while they work in Australia.

The Office of the Fair Work Ombudsman will also receive \$27.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to ensure workers' rights are protected through education, monitoring, compliance, and enforcement activities. This will enhance protections for PALM workers and uphold the integrity of the PALM scheme.

These initiatives complement other enhancements to the PALM scheme – refer to the Foreign Affairs and Trade chapter for more information.

Continuity of employment services in Broome

The Australian Government is providing \$5.6 million over 5 years commencing in 2022–23 to support employment servicing arrangements in the Broome Employment Region. This measure will support the continuity of service for participants as the current Workforce Australia Services provider in Broome exits the program and during the transition to new arrangements with a new First Nations provider supported by APS personnel. This arrangement is suited to the unique local context and complex needs of the local community, largely impacting First Nations people.

Time to Work Employment Service

The Time to Work Employment Service (TWES) supports First Nations people who are incarcerated, including those in remote areas, to connect with employment services and transition into paid work post-incarceration. TWES is delivered in 65 non-remote prisons by TWES providers through the department, and in 8 prisons in remote regions through the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The Australian Government will provide \$5.7 million over 2 years from 2022–23 to extend TWES in non-remote areas to 30 June 2024 to ensure continuity of service to First Nations people who are incarcerated.

Foreign Affairs and Trade

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

The portfolio has a critical role in providing timely and responsive consular and passport services to Australians overseas, as well as supporting the growth of Australia's regional economies back home. The portfolio works as part of the Australian Public Service to lead Australia's international engagement to build the conditions for a peaceful, open, stable and prosperous regional and global environment where sovereignty is respected. This engagement ensures strong policy development and program delivery which supports the needs of Australia's regional and rural economies.

The portfolio works with other Australian Government departments, businesses and the states and territories to reduce barriers to trade for Australian exporters and importers, and leads in coordinating and representing Australia's interests to the world. Through trade and investment services, Australian businesses are able to grow and diversify through new markets and investment opportunities, and through programs that boost the tourism industry.

The portfolio also supports regional and rural Australia by assisting employers experiencing workforce shortages in important industries to access a reliable and productive workforce through the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme.

The portfolio has revised THRIVE 2030 (The Re-imagined Visitor Economy), Australia's national strategy for long-term, sustainable growth of the visitor economy. Updates to the strategy reflect the Government's priorities and policy agenda, including building the tourism workforce and business capability, supporting First Nations tourism, refreshing infrastructure, and supporting the transition to a green economy. Tourism plays a significant role for employment and economic growth in regional Australia, and the strategy aims to increase total regional visitor expenditure to \$100 billion by 2030.

New Initiatives

Expanding and Improving the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme

The Pacific Australia Labour Mobility (PALM) scheme is a temporary migration program which addresses unskilled, low-skilled and semi-skilled labour shortages in regional Australia. The PALM scheme supports economic growth in participating countries through remittances and skills development, and creates people-to-people connections between regional Australia and the Pacific and Timor-Leste.

The Australian Government is investing \$370.8 million over 4 years from 2023–24, with \$80.0 million for DFAT in measures to benefit regional Australia and the broader Pacific family through the combined efforts of DFAT, the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, Department of Home Affairs, Department of Health and Aged Care, Fair Work Ombudsman and the Australian Border Force. This includes additional resources to strengthen the Government’s oversight of domestic operations and extending access to Medicare for families who will participate in the Government’s Family Accompaniment pilot.

The Government’s investment in the PALM scheme will ensure more Pacific and Timor-Leste workers have the opportunity develop skills and generate income for their families while making a valuable contribution to Australia’s economy.

Supporting Australia’s resources – Critical Minerals International Partnership Program

Step up international engagement

In this Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$7.1 million over 4 years from 2023–24 for DFAT and Austrade to step up international engagement in the critical minerals sector. Critical minerals projects are predominantly located in remote and regional areas, where communities will benefit from increased investment and job creation. More information about the package can be found in the Industry, Science and Resources chapter.

Simplified Trade System

The Australian Government has committed \$24.4 million in 2023–24 to continue the Simplified Trade System reforms. This includes \$11.5 million for the Simplified Trade System Implementation Taskforce (the Taskforce) and \$10.8 million for agencies directly supporting the Taskforce, including the Australian Border Force, the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and the Australian Taxation Office, to simplify cross-border trade for Australian businesses, and \$2.1 million for Austrade’s Trade Information Service to continue helping Australian businesses navigate complex regulatory and international market requirements.

Many Australian traders are based in regional Australia, especially agricultural exporters.

Health and Aged Care

The Health and Aged Care portfolio invests in the health and wellbeing of Australians, supporting access to quality and affordable health care services across all parts of the country.

The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) implements the Australian Government's priorities to deliver better health and wellbeing for all Australians, now and for future generations. The department supports the Government to lead and shape Australia's health and aged care system, as well as deliver sporting outcomes through evidence-based policy, well targeted programs, and best practice regulation.

Investments made in the October Budget are leveraged and built on in the 2023–24 Budget, including tripling the bulk billing incentive and improving access to affordable high-quality primary care in all areas of Australia, including regional, rural and remote communities.

New strategic investments also help restore dignity to aged care, support the mental health of Australians, and deliver more support for cancer care. This Budget takes strong action on smoking and vaping, promotes multidisciplinary care, supports a better valued workforce, and safeguards Australians through a variety of health protection and preventative measures.

There is also a focus on improving access to care among our most vulnerable population groups. In the 2023–24 Budget, the Government is continuing to lay the foundations for longer-term reform of the health care system to better distribute the health and care workforce. These strategic investments and development of comprehensive workforce strategies will alleviate increased pressures and demands on Australia's health and care workforce, particularly in regional, rural and remote settings.

The Government continues to invest in measures to close the gap in health and wellbeing outcomes for First Nations people. Building on the significant investment in First Nations health in the October Budget, this Budget provides funding for early intervention and preventive health measures, along with measures to increase equity and access for First Nations people to health and aged care services.

The Government is building a stronger Medicare, relieving pressure on the hospital system, making it easier for people to see a primary care health provider, and easing cost-of-living pressures for people living in regional, rural and remote Australia. It has committed to expanding the Single Employer Model trials for GP registrars (doctors training to become specialist GPs) in regional, rural and remote locations across Australia, helping to provide a sustainable pathway to increase the number of GPs and services in those locations.

To ensure Australia's primary care system can meet current and future challenges, this Budget also includes immediate investments in primary care, to triple the bulk billing incentive and lays the foundations for longer-term reform in the primary care system. Guided by the recommendations of the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce, the Government is investing in targeted measures to strengthen Medicare, making it easier to access affordable high-quality care in the community and building a better health system that meets the needs of all Australians.

In responding to the unique needs of places, the role of Primary Health Networks will be enhanced to commission multidisciplinary care providers for communities served by smaller practices, including culturally and linguistically diverse, and rural and remote communities. In addition, the development and implementation of a comprehensive response to thin markets (initially in 10 locations) will address significant market gaps in regional, rural and remote settings. Workforce accommodation will also be provided to enable delivery of Better Renal Services for First Nations people at treatment units in regional Australia.

To help increase access to health services, the Government is expanding support for innovative multidisciplinary models of care. This is further supported by additional investments in health scholarship and training programs to build the pipeline of nurses, midwives and nurse practitioners to improve access to healthcare in critically under-served communities, including across regional, rural and remote Australia. Increased funding for nurse practitioners and greater flexibility in multidisciplinary case conferencing will help improve the viability and number of private practices.

New Initiatives

Strengthening Medicare

Tripling the bulk billing incentive

The Australian Government continues to provide targeted cost-of-living relief that does not add materially to the inflation challenge, including providing \$3.5 billion to triple the bulk billing incentive for patients aged under 16 years old, pensioners and other concession card holders.

The higher bulk billing incentive will support GPs to bulk bill around 11.6 million eligible Australians. This will ensure eligible patients can receive the care they need, without any out-of-pocket costs. The bulk billing incentive will continue to be higher for patients in regional and rural areas to support the ongoing viability of general practices in these communities.

Implementation of MyMedicare

The Australian Government is investing \$19.7 million over 4 years from 2023–24 from the Strengthening Medicare Fund for the implementation of MyMedicare from 1 October 2023. By registering with a general practice, patients will benefit from the improved quality and better outcomes associated with continuity of care, and over time, increased access to blended payments to support wrap around care for people who need it most. This initiative responds to the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce recommendations to introduce a voluntary patient registration program.

MyMedicare will be voluntary for both patients and practices, and available to all Australians, encouraging a long-term relationship between a patient and their primary care team and will be a foundational building block for primary health care reform. Over time, MyMedicare will also be extended to nurse practitioners and other primary care providers.

In most parts of Australia, patients will need to attend their usual practice at least twice in the last 2 years to register through MyMedicare. This initiative further encourages people living in remote areas or who access Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services/Organisations to register by only needing to attend their practice once to be eligible to register.

Wrap Around Primary Care for Frequent Hospital Users

The Australian Government is investing \$98.9 million over 4 years from 2023–24 from the Strengthening Medicare Fund to implement a model of care that connects frequent hospital users with chronic conditions with a general practice to receive comprehensive multidisciplinary wrap around care in the community. This initiative responds to a Strengthening Medicare Taskforce recommendation on improved support for general practices to manage complex chronic disease through blended funding models.

Under this initiative, Primary Health Networks will work in partnership with Local Hospital Networks to identify patients who are attending hospital more than 10 times per year with their chronic conditions, resulting in more appropriate care and reducing pressure on hospitals. This program will be scaled up to all 31 Primary Health Networks over 3 years from 1 July 2024, which will cover all regional, rural and remote areas in Australia.

Increased Workforce Incentive Payments to support Multidisciplinary Care

The Australian Government has committed \$445.1 million over 5 years from 2023–24 to improve the quality and accessibility of multidisciplinary primary care and improve the sustainability of general practices by immediately increasing the Workforce Incentive Program Practice Stream. The Standardised Whole Patient Equivalent (SWPE) threshold to receive the maximum payment will be lowered by 20 per cent and the cap for practices below this threshold will be increased to \$130,000 per annum.

The reduction of the SWPE threshold and increased cap for practices below this threshold will promote employment of additional allied health professionals in regional areas, improve access to multidisciplinary care and further contribute to the sustainability of regional general practices.

Primary Health Networks Commissioning of Multidisciplinary Teams

The Australian Government is investing \$79.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 from the Strengthening Medicare Fund to strengthen the role of Primary Health Networks to commission multidisciplinary care to increase patient access and improve the management of chronic conditions. This initiative responds to the Strengthening Medicare Taskforce recommendation to increase Primary Health Networks' commissioning of allied health and nursing services to supplement general practice teams in underserved and financially disadvantaged communities.

This initiative will enable Primary Health Networks to commission multidisciplinary care in smaller general practices that are too small to provide their own multidisciplinary workforce through the Workforce Incentives Program. Commissioned services will be based on needs analysis of the region's population, available workforce and service types that will have the greatest impact on health outcomes. This will improve access to multidisciplinary care for regional and rural communities served by smaller practices.

Reform of After Hours Programs

The Australian Government is investing \$143.9 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to improve access to primary care through comprehensive reform of after-hours programs, including extending and restructuring the Primary Health Networks After Hours Program, reviewing incentives for GPs to provide after-hours care, and promoting access to after-hours services delivered through Healthdirect Australia.

This supports more equitable access to health services for Australians living in regional and rural areas through targeted Primary Health Networks activities designed to improve access to after-hours care in these regions. Two new Primary Health Networks programs will be developed to improve access to primary care services for people affected by homelessness, and for culturally and linguistically diverse Australians. Primary Health Networks will be required to target and assess the implementation of these programs in rural and regional areas.

This initiative will also benefit regional and rural health access through enhancing Healthdirect's services which are available 24/7 everywhere across Australia with telephone coverage.

Medicare Urgent Care Clinics

After consultation with states and territories, the Australian Government is investing additional funding of \$358.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to continue supporting the expanded delivery of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics across the country. Medicare Urgent Care Clinics will provide free access to urgent care to all population cohorts as they need it. Ten of the clinic locations are in regional communities.

This initiative builds on the October Budget measure, Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.

Supporting Health, Care and Support Services in Thin Markets

The Australian Government has committed \$44.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to support the provision of and access to primary health and support services in thin markets through providing:

- Primary Health Networks with \$17.5 million over 2 years from 2022–23 to commission critical services in identified communities of need where services have, or are at risk of failing
- \$27.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to support trialling joint commissioning across primary health, disability, aged care and veterans' care services in up to 10 locations.

Thin markets are mostly identified in rural and remote areas. This initiative will promote improved integration of services in communities, reduced overhead costs and improved access to a sustainable, comprehensive service system.

Education for the Future Primary Care Workforce

The Australian Government has committed \$31.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to reform the More Doctors for Rural Australia program which terminates on 30 June 2023. The Government will reform this program to deliver enhanced training support to doctors working in regional, rural and remote primary care, particularly international medical graduates, while they are required to work under supervision, and to prepare doctors to enter specialist GP training in regional, rural and remote locations.

The Government will also transition delivery of the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship program, which supports development of the First Nations health workforce, to management by a First Nations organisation.

Expand the nursing workforce to increase access to primary care

The Australian Government has committed \$10.7 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to improve the availability of primary care services that meet the needs of consumers. The Government will increase the number of nurses in primary care by supporting an extra 6,000 clinical placements to enable student nurses to gain practical experience and exposure to work in primary care and aged care. This initiative will also provide funding to attract 500 previously registered Enrolled Nurses and Registered Nurses back to the nursing workforce, and facilitate more Nurse Practitioners training and working in primary care by encouraging primary care services to facilitate the completion of supervised practice requirements.

The Government will undertake a scope of practice review to examine current models of care against community needs and recommend appropriate changes to policy, including legislation, to enable expansion of scopes of practices and models of care for a range of health professionals providing primary care services.

Scholarships for Primary Care Nurses and Midwives

The Australian Government is providing \$50.2 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to expand the future nursing and midwifery workforce through a new Primary Care Nurse and Midwifery Scholarship program, which would fund an organisation to offer a total of 1,850 scholarships for nursing and midwifery students over the next 4 years, to develop the skills they need to deliver important primary care and aged care services.

Training Primary Care Professionals in Regional Australia

Funding of \$4.2 million over 2 years from 2022–23 to support James Cook University to train healthcare practitioners in Far North Queensland. This funding aims to connect investments in training across health workforce programs and to enhance services provided by James Cook University under contract with the GP Colleges.

Single Employer Model for Rural Health Professionals

The Australian Government has committed \$4.5 million over 5 years from 2022–23 to expand Single Employer Model trials for GP registrars in 10 additional regional, rural and remote locations (Modified Monash categories 2–7) in all states and territories. It is anticipated this will increase the number of young doctors attracted to general practice in regional communities.

Funding of \$29.1 million over 2 years from 2023–24 will support the Royal Flying Doctor Service to deliver essential services to people living in remote communities through additional primary care visits to address unmet demand to prevent the need for higher aeromedical evacuation services in rural and remote communities. It will also meet higher demand for evacuation services in rural and remote communities by increasing aeromedical evacuations.

Improving patient care through MBS nurse practitioner services

The Australian Government has committed \$44.5 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to increase standard nurse practitioner Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) rebates by 30 per cent and expand eligibility for items introduced in November 2021 to enable Nurse Practitioners to participate in multidisciplinary case conferences and remove the legislative requirements for collaborative arrangements.

Improving Cancer Outcomes

Supporting early detection of lung cancer

The Australian Government will implement a national Lung Cancer Screening Program, to be operable by July 2025. With a record investment of \$263.8 million over 4 years from 2023–24 (and \$101.1 million per year ongoing), the program will maximise prevention and early detection of lung cancer and achieve equity in cancer outcomes for vulnerable groups – in line with the Strategic Objective 1 of the Australian Cancer Plan – including people living in regional, rural and remote Australia, who have a higher lung cancer incidence and mortality rate compared to the population residing in major cities.

The provision of mobile screening services will ensure people living in regional, rural and remote communities are supported to participate in the new program, ensuring national coverage and equitable access, no matter where a person lives.

Improving First Nations Cancer Outcomes

The Australian Government is investing \$238.5 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to address inequities in cancer outcomes for First Nations people by enhancing comprehensive, culturally safe care. This includes \$197.9 million over the same period to build the capacity and capability of the Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services sector to respond to and support cancer care needs on the ground in community, tailored to local need and priorities (consistent with Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap). Programs will include employment of up to 260 new workforce positions.

Over \$38.6 million (of the \$238.5 million) will support mainstream cancer care to be culturally safe and accessible for First Nations people and provide coordinated delivery of cancer specialist and primary health care (consistent with Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and Strategic Objective 6 of the Australian Cancer Plan).

Aged Care

Increase in wages for aged care workers

The Australian Government supports continuing to improve wages and conditions for aged care workers so they properly reflect the value of the work performed. Delivering on the Government's commitment to support the Fair Work Commission's outcome, this Budget provides \$11.3 billion to fund a 15 per cent increase in the minimum wage for many aged care workers.

General Practice in Aged Care Incentive

The Australian Government is investing \$112.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to support every resident in a Residential Aged Care Home to receive continuity of high-quality primary care services from a regular general practitioner and practice through the introduction of a new General Practice in Aged Care Incentive, which will replace the existing General Practitioner Aged Care Access Incentive.

From 1 July 2024, each residential aged care resident would be eligible to receive access to a bundle of quality care by enrolling in MyMedicare. Primary Health Networks will match residents with a practice if they do not have one, supporting all residents to access better continuity of care, a strengthened relationship between the patient and their care team, and a more integrated, person-centred care support. The initiative will extend the existing boost to the General Practitioner Aged Care Access Incentive for an additional year to provide time for patients to register with providers and practices for the new payments.

This initiative includes funding for Primary Health Networks to assist Residential Aged Care Homes to attract GPs in areas of workforce shortage, which are predominantly regional and rural areas.

More equitable access to aged care for First Nations people and special needs groups

The Australian Government is investing \$77.3 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to improve the care experience for older First Nations people. Older First Nations people, including those living in rural and remote locations, will benefit from an investment in services in remote and very remote locations providing residential aged care under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care program, commitment to a more sustainable funding model, and support to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations entering and delivering aged care. This initiative will also embed culturally safe, trauma-aware and healing informed care principles into all of aged care, and establish arrangements for an interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner to partner with First Nations people on the design of a permanent Commissioner.

Aged care service providers located in remote areas or who provide support to First Nations people will be given professional support to improve organisations' workforce capability and financial sustainability. This has been made available through the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel. In the 2023–24 Budget, the Government announced the further expansion of the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel to enable providers in small and medium rural towns to access professional support from 2023–24 and 2024–25 respectively.

Market Adjustment Program

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government announced the continuation of aged care viability support programs, including through a new Market Adjustment Program to run until 30 June 2025. Building on the \$60.3 million that has already been awarded through the Structural Adjustment Program, an additional \$98.7 million will be invested, including:

- \$81.1 million over 2 years from 2023–24 will support residential aged care providers with financial viability concerns to prevent unnecessary closures and ensure service continuity for older Australians, and will assist some providers, where appropriate, to improve their operations
- \$2.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for the Business Advisory Services Program to provide free, professional business advice to residential aged care and home care service providers to improve their operations and viability
- \$3.0 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for the Workforce Advisory Services Program for residential aged care and home care service providers to assist providers, particularly those in regional, rural and remote areas, to develop more coordinated approaches to workforce planning
- \$7.7 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for the expansion of the Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance to enable providers in small and medium rural towns locations to access professional support from 2023–24 and 2024–25 respectively.

Lowering the cost of medicines

The Australian Government is continuing to make medicines cheaper for Australian households.

The new and expanded listings of vosoritide (Voxzogo®) (\$186.4 million), and elexacaftor/tezacaftor/ivacaftor and ivacaftor (Trikafta®) (\$380.6 million) on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) in this Budget means Australians with achondroplasia, cystic fibrosis in children aged 6 to 11 years will benefit from cheaper access to vitally important treatments. For some patients, listing these medicines on the PBS will save them hundreds of thousands of dollars per year.

In addition to this, a variety of medicines are added to and amended on the PBS every month, and these other listings from November 2022 to May 2023 are covered in a further \$1.2 billion investment in this Budget. These changes benefit all eligible Australians equally.

From 1 September 2023, the Government is easing cost-of-living pressures and making hundreds of common medicines cheaper, by allowing millions of Australians to buy 2 months' worth of medicine for the price of a single prescription. The Maximum Dispensing Policy doubles the amount of PBS medicines for at least 6 million Australians living with stable and chronic diseases. These patients would pay only one co-payment instead of 2 co-payments for the double quantity of a medicine.

To support rural and regional pharmacies, the Government will double the funding for the Regional Pharmacy Maintenance Allowance program, to continue to support the recruitment, training and retention of pharmacists in rural and remote areas.

Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

Ensuring continuity of psychosocial support for people with mental illness

The Australian Government is investing \$260.2 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to continue the Commonwealth Psychosocial Support Program (including associated advocacy and program support) and the SANE Australia digital service pilot for people with complex mental health needs. This extension will support Australians with mental illness living in regional and remote areas to continue to access essential non-clinical supports to help them live independently and safely in the community. The Commonwealth Psychosocial Support program includes a loading to improve service access in regional and remote areas, ensuring people living in these areas are also able to access these essential supports.

Closing the Gap – mental health support for First Nations people during the Voice Referendum

The Australian Government is committing \$10.5 million in 2023–24 to boost mental health support for First Nations people in the lead up to, during and following the referendum to recognise First Nations people as Australia's First Nations people through a constitutionally enshrined Voice. This initiative will promote wellbeing and provide additional mental health support for First Nations people, including in regional and remote areas, during a period of heightened mental health and wellbeing risk.

Longer term mental health supports for Australians impacted by disaster events

The Australian Government is investing \$7.2 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to provide mental health supports for Australians impacted by disasters, including through Black Dog Institute's National Emergency Worker Support Services and the Australian Psychological Society's Disaster Response Network. This initiative will provide mental health supports to Australians living in regional and remote areas that are most at-risk of experiencing natural disasters.

Other initiatives

Supporting Surf Life Saving Training

The Australian Government is investing \$3.3 million in 2023–24 to support surf lifesaving training. The funding will provide vocational education and training to surf lifesaving volunteers, trainers and assessors at clubs across the country, including regional coastal areas, and make enhancements to systems and administration to free up volunteers to deliver front line services and save lives.

Local Sporting Champions

The Australian Government is investing \$8.3 million in 2023–24 to continue providing financial assistance to junior competitors, coaches and officials to attend state, national and international sporting competitions through an extension of the Local Sporting Champions and Local Para Champions programs. Twenty-nine per cent of the recipients are from rural areas and 19 per cent are from provincial areas, where costs are higher to attend competition.

Home Affairs

The Department of Home Affairs is responsible for the centralised operations and coordination, strategic and policy leadership of the Home Affairs portfolio.

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

The portfolio operates within an evolving strategic and operational environment. Challenges to Australia's national interests occur across a broad spectrum, ranging from the impacts of geopolitical instability, foreign interference and cyber threats, threats to our national resilience such as natural disasters and climate change, and the need for border settings which support the social, economic and security needs of Australia.

These challenges are becoming increasingly concurrent and complex, with varying levels of national significance and impact on the delivery of the portfolio's support to people and places in rural and regional communities.

The portfolio has diverse responsibilities which support rural and regional communities, including managing Australia's migration program, cyber security policy and the protection of critical infrastructure, protecting Australia and Australians from threats to their security, countering terrorism and foreign interference, emergency management, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, social cohesion and democratic resilience, the protection of Australia's sovereignty, and facilitating legitimate trade and travel while maintaining the integrity of the border.

New initiatives in the 2023–24 Budget with particular relevance to supporting regional Australia relate to delivery of Australia's migration programs, supporting migrants in Australia, and emergency management.

The portfolio recognises the important role migration plays in driving economic productivity and addressing labour and skills shortages across the country, including in regional Australia. Drawing on insights and feedback from stakeholders and expert advice garnered through the recent migration review, the Australian Government is developing a new strategy for Australia's migration system, ensuring it serves Australia's interests and complements the skills and capabilities of Australian workers, with a focus on enhancing productivity. Under current arrangements, 14 per cent of all migrants settle in regional Australia. Of those, approximately 75 per cent have chosen to remain and be part of regional communities.

The portfolio is committed to integrating migrants into regional communities in Australia through a number of educational and settlement support programs, while combatting exploitation of migrant workers, who can be particularly vulnerable in rural and regional settings.

The portfolio works with partners across all levels of government to improve Australia’s capacity to anticipate, mitigate, respond, and recover from emergencies. This includes emergency management, disaster risk reduction and climate security to better enable the Government to respond to domestic crises, noting natural hazards disproportionately affect regional areas. NEMA is a critical resource to communities outside of Australia’s capital cities and is responsible for the delivery of national operational capabilities and programs. NEMA’s network of regional officials facilitate collaboration between all levels of government and ensures support to communities is efficient and targeted. NEMA also oversees a range of initiatives that support rural and regional Australia, including the Disaster Ready Fund, which provides up to \$200.0 million per year for disaster risk reduction projects.

New Initiatives

2023–24 Migration Program

The 2022–23 Migration Program more than doubled the 2021–22 allocation of permanent regional and state and territory nominated visas. The 2023–24 Migration Program has been set at 190,000 places and largely maintains the regional category planning level at 32,300 places and the state and territory nominated category at 30,400 places. This supports jurisdictions and regional employers to nominate visa applicants who can best meet their specific local and regional needs.

Regional and state and territory nominated skilled visas account for 33 per cent of the 2023–24 Migration Program. This allocation allows regional employers to attract and retain skilled workers by directing migrants to areas where skill and labour shortages are impacting the delivery of essential services, such as the completion of key housing and infrastructure projects. The allocation also facilitates the retention of temporary migrants who have worked or studied in regions, enabling their contribution to local growth.

Adult Migrant English Program Business Model Settings

50,000–60,000 students access the Adult Migrant English Program each year at roughly 300 locations across Australia, including over 100 regional and remote locations.

The Australian Government has committed to deliver a new Adult Migrant English Program business model from 1 January 2025, to further improve English language, employment and settlement outcomes for clients. This builds on the legislative reforms that commenced in April 2021 that increased access to the program, and is further supported by the additional \$20.0 million commitment over 4 years announced in the October Budget, to improve flexible delivery and case management.

A key element of the new model relates to enhancing flexible student tuition through greater access to online learning and mixed mode learning (in addition to traditional face to face tuition). Under the model, clients will continue to have access to distance learning, which allows those located more than 50 kilometres from an Adult Migrant English Program site to learn at home, supported by regular contact with a qualified teacher, particularly benefiting those in regional areas.

Increasing the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold

The Australian Government made an election commitment to increase the Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold (TSMIT). The Government will increase the TSMIT from \$53,900 to \$70,000 from 1 July 2023. The new \$70,000 income threshold is approximately where the TSMIT would have been if it had been indexed to average weekly ordinary time earnings growth over the previous 10 years.

Resetting the income threshold will ensure the skilled migration program remains focused on its objective of attracting skilled migrants who complement the skills of the Australian workforce.

National Emergency Management Stockpile

The 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires followed by 3 years of successive multi-jurisdictional flooding events have significantly affected many regional communities. The increasing scale and intensity of disasters in Australia due to climate change has demonstrated the need for a greater national investment in emergency stockpiles that will better position the Australian Government to be ready and able to step in when states and territories are overwhelmed by the impact of significant disaster events.

In 2023–24, the Government is building on the initial \$10.0 million investment in the National Emergency Management Stockpile, announced in the October Budget. The investment of \$8.6 million in 2023–24 will establish a procurement panel and purchase critical disaster resources that can be deployed nation-wide within 24 to 48 hours of a disaster. These resources include emergency shelter, safe water for drinking and hygiene purposes, and emergency power generation to enable continuity of local infrastructure, such as local supermarkets and medical facilities.

The National Emergency Management Stockpile will alleviate economic stressors to regional communities impacted by disasters, and reduce the reliance on the Australian Defence Force, by providing rapid access to critical disaster resources, mitigating potential disruptions to regional communities and businesses.

Government Response to Public Safety Mobile Broadband Review

A national Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability would equip public safety agencies with modern technology and digital connectivity to improve operational preparedness, effectiveness and coordination during disaster events. This capability can provide real time, data-rich analytics, situational awareness and cross-border communications between ground crews, aerial assets and incident control centres. This supports coordination of responses across organisational and geographic boundaries, and mitigates loss of life and damage to property.

The Australian Government is fulfilling a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and responding to the 2022 PSMB Review by leading and expediting the delivery of this important capability across all jurisdictions. It is

investing \$10.1 million over the next 2 years from 2023–24 to establish a Taskforce to drive the delivery of a national PSMB capability and establish an Inter-Governmental Agreement. This work will be done in partnership with states and territories, with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts also participating in the Taskforce.

A national PSMB will facilitate interoperability of services between public safety agencies, both within and between jurisdictions. This will increase the safety of regional emergency services personnel, improve the effectiveness and timeliness of responses to emergencies and critical incidents, and lead to better outcomes for regional communities.

Rollout of a Cell Broadcast Technology Capability

Targeted messages, warnings and alerts are critical to safeguarding communities during an emergency or disaster. The 2022 Queensland and New South Wales flooding events highlighted the need for a fit for purpose hazard warning system.

Over the next 4 years, the Australian Government is investing in the rollout of a National Messaging System, which will allow government agencies to rapidly coordinate and deliver targeted, real time information to the public on mobile phones and other devices during emergencies. This work will build on initial seed funding allocated in the March 2022–23 Budget to complete the end-to-end system build, cover ongoing costs and educate communities about how the messaging system will work. The National Messaging System is being developed with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

Investing in a National Messaging System will address key findings of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. It will have a positive impact on regional areas which can be disproportionately impacted by emergency and disaster impacts, and are often serviced by a single telecommunications provider. Visitors to regional and remote areas, not serviced by their provider, will receive messages if in a coverage area. The new National Messaging System will also allow messages to be sent in multiple languages for culturally and linguistically diverse communities based on user phone settings, and will complement existing communication channels such as radio, television and emergency services websites, to ensure all regional and remote communities are informed.

Industry, Science and Resources

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources (the department) and its agencies help the Australian Government build a better future for all Australians through a productive, resilient, and sustainable economy, enriched by science and technology. This includes supporting the diverse strengths of Australia and its regions by: growing innovative and competitive businesses; industries and regions; investing in science and technology; and supporting a strong resources sector.

The portfolio's role in revitalising Australian industry benefits local economies in our regions, as well as national productivity. Investment creates productive, sustainable, and high-value jobs, ensuring tangible and sustainable economic benefits for people living and working across regional Australia.

The portfolio is backing regional communities to navigate economic transition with initiatives that will drive industry growth. The National Reconstruction Fund will transform Australia's industry, creating a strong advanced manufacturing capability in Australia and creating high-value and secure jobs in regional areas. The new \$392.4 million Industry Growth Program will support small to medium enterprises and startups to commercialise their ideas, which will create jobs in Australia and its regions.

The portfolio's support for critical minerals and renewable energy technologies will create new economic opportunities in regional Australia and help enable the transition to net zero in Australia and around the world. Additionally, the portfolio's support for emissions reduction and decarbonisation of Australia's resources sector will help create both direct and indirect employment for businesses in regional Australia. Initiatives include establishment of the Powering Australia Industry Growth Centre and partnership between the Australian Government and Queensland Government to support emissions reduction and energy security.

The portfolio's support for industry is complemented by investment in the scientific and technological capability of regional Australia. Key initiatives will promote excellence in STEM, support availability of nuclear medicine in regional Australia and access to Questacon's programs in regional and remote areas.

New Initiatives

National Reconstruction Fund – establishment

The Government will invest \$15.0 billion over 7 years from 2023–24 through the National Reconstruction Fund (NRF), to support, diversify and transform Australian industry and the economy through targeted investments in 7 priority areas: value add in resources; value add in agriculture, forestry and fisheries; transport; medical science; renewables and low emission technologies; defence capability; and enabling capabilities.

As a number of these priority areas have a significant presence in regional areas, the NRF will complement the Regional Investment Framework. The NRF investment aims to boost economic growth and job creation, and diversify industrial capability.

Industry Growth Program

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$392.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and approximately \$68.2 million per year ongoing, through the Industry Growth Program. The program will support small to medium enterprises and start-ups in regional Australia to commercialise their ideas and grow their operations. Support will be targeted towards businesses operating in the priority areas of the NRF.

Supporting Australia’s Critical Minerals Sector

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$57.1 million over 4 years to establish the Critical Minerals International Partnerships Program and \$23.4 million over 4 years to support the continued operation of the Critical Minerals Office.

Australia has world-class reserves of critical minerals primarily located in remote and regional areas. These measures will enable the Government to continue supporting strategically significant critical minerals projects that help underpin new supply chains, build our downstream processing capabilities, and create economic opportunity for regional Australia, where our critical minerals mining and processing projects are overwhelmingly located.

Powering Australia Industry Growth Centre

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$14.8 million over 4 years to establish the Powering Australia Industry Growth Centre (PAIGC), consistent with the Government’s election commitment. The PAIGC will provide advanced technology and skills development to businesses looking to locally manufacture renewable energy technologies and commercialise local ideas. The PAIGC will support regional businesses to better leverage competitive advantages in their regions, tap into opportunities in renewables, and transition to net zero.

The PAIGC will also hire a First Nations Adviser, who will support regional and First Nations’ businesses to build management capabilities and contribute to the development of renewable technologies. The First Nations Adviser will facilitate early engagement between businesses and First Nations people in regional areas in accordance with principles of free, prior and informed consent.

Supporting emissions reduction in Queensland’s energy resources sector

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$14.3 million over 3 years to establish a partnership with the Queensland Government to fund research and development projects that support emissions reduction and enhance energy security. Queensland’s oil and gas industry has grown rapidly over the last decade, driven by investment in onshore gas development and Liquefied Natural Gas production.

The majority of resources activity in Queensland, including infrastructure, is located in regional areas, providing economic opportunity across many regional townships including direct and indirect employment to local businesses. As of February 2023, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported 68,100 people were employed across Queensland’s resources sector. This project will support the shared objective of the Australian and Queensland Governments to reach net zero by 2050.

Securing the future of Questacon

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$59.7 million over 4 years, with annual ongoing investment of approximately \$15.2 million in the out years. The funds keep Questacon safe, accessible, and affordable for visitors and staff. Questacon is a critical pipeline to STEM jobs of the future and for promoting diversity in STEM.

This investment delivers positive impacts to communities across Australia with continued provision of trusted, educational, safe facilities and experiences for all visitors to Questacon. Questacon’s activities include national travelling programs, which provide access for under-served communities from regional and remote areas. The programs build excitement and increase science and technology interest, capability and skills in young Australians, families, teachers, communities, women and girls, and increase inclusion of First Nations people in STEM.

Safely managing Australia’s radioactive waste

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed \$320.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24, and approximately \$39.0 million per year ongoing from 2030–31 to enable the Australian Radioactive Waste Agency to perform its waste management functions on an ongoing basis and set a responsible and sustainable approach for the long-term management and disposal of Australia’s radioactive waste from temporary storage sites around Australia.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

The Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts portfolio helps connect and enrich the lives of Australians and their communities – enabling economic development and connecting people, places and services through road, rail, air, shipping and communications infrastructure, and enriching lives through access to media, arts and culture. The portfolio achieves this by partnering with state and territory governments, the local community and First Nations people, with a key focus on ‘place’ through its responsibility for driving the developing Northern Australia agenda and managing Australia’s external territories.

The portfolio is setting a new agenda for regional investments across Government, bringing increased transparency and a strategic approach to decision making. The portfolio is responsible for the Regional Investment Framework, and will work to embed the framework within and across governments to ensure investment in all regions is better coordinated and targeted to regions’ needs, and informed by evidence.

The portfolio’s new Budget measures are diverse and support investment across all of the areas of the Regional Investment Framework: people’s lives will be enriched by a renewed focus on the arts and culture in regional Australia; Cairns and Toowoomba will benefit from investment in new venues infrastructure that will bring people together and provide a lasting legacy; regional services will be boosted by funding to support disaster readiness; and local industries will benefit from certainty in the Government’s clear commitment to the net zero transition, such as through a new Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles.

A net zero lens is being applied across the portfolio to reduce CO₂ emissions and assist regional Australia to transition and benefit from new opportunities in clean energy. To decarbonise the transport sector, responsible for 19 per cent of Australia’s greenhouse gas emissions, and infrastructure sector, the Government will undertake a Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Assessment, Roadmap and Action Plan to clearly articulate these sectors’ pathway to net zero.

The portfolio is committed to working in genuine partnership and transforming the way we work with First Nations people, communities and organisations, as part of embedding the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms. Under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the portfolio has Commonwealth responsibility to deliver on 3 socio-economic targets: target 9b aims to see essential services delivered to discrete First Nations communities; target 16 aims for an increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken; and target 17 aims to ensure equal levels of digital inclusion.

Through the continuation of key measures, the portfolio is providing the building blocks for productive, connected and inclusive regional communities and industries. This includes delivering the Government’s new flagship regional programs – the \$600.0 million Growing Regions Program and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships program,

which will both deliver funding to regions in a more transparent way and with greater consultation and involvement of local communities. The portfolio is continuing to support the Regional Development Australia Committees, which are a critical element of Australia's regional architecture, facilitating connections between communities and governments, and creating economic development opportunities for all Australians. The portfolio also continues to support local governments through the Financial Assistance Grant Program, which will provide funding to 546 local governing bodies across Australia in 2023–24.

Major regional infrastructure projects also continue, such as the Inland Rail, which will be subject to a full cost verification that will also confirm the construction schedule – ensuring appropriate oversight for the program to deliver for local economies and industries.

The portfolio is continuing to keep regions well connected and safe, by prioritising the needs of rural, regional and remote areas through ongoing funding for key transport programs. For example, in 2023–24 to 2024–25, phase 4 of the Local Roads and Community Infrastructure Program will include \$250.0 million for councils classified as rural, regional or outer-urban to spend on road projects. The Road Safety Program will make \$976.7 million available across 2023–24 and 2024–25 to deliver further lifesaving road safety projects, many of which will be in regional and remote Australia. The Bridges Renewal Program is providing at least \$85.0 million per year, Roads to Recovery Program \$500.0 million per year, and Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program at least \$65.0 million per year, helping to maintain and upgrade local infrastructure and improve community access and safety. In addition, 33 Remote Roads Upgrade Pilot Program projects will be delivered over 2023 and 2024, under the \$150.0 million program established in 2021. The Regional Airports Program will also deliver 44 new projects from 2022–23, through grants of \$27.9 million.

To ensure regional Australians continue to have access to essential services, the portfolio is continuing to fund regional and remote community access to commercial free-to-air television via the Viewer Access Satellite Television service; and is increasing digital connectivity, improving mobile coverage and funding solutions for telecommunications disaster resilience through the Government's commitment of \$2.2 billion to strengthen regional connectivity. This comprises \$1.1 billion for the Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia and \$1.1 billion towards NBN upgrades for 660,000 regional fibre connections. The Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia includes initiatives such as the \$30.0 million On Farm Connectivity Program, \$20.0 million Broadcasting Resilience Program and upgrades to the NBN fixed wireless and satellite networks.

New Initiatives

Regional Development in Far North Queensland

The Australian Government has increased its funding for the delivery of an expanded Cairns Marine Precinct by \$30.0 million to \$180.0 million over 5 years from 2023–24. This investment, to be matched by the Queensland Government, will see delivery of a common user facility including a ship-lift and work areas, supporting Far North Queensland's capacity to meet the forecast increase in demand for marine-related services and further diversify the local economy. The Government is further investing in regional development

in Cairns through a \$50.0 million commitment over 4 years from 2023–24 to support the delivery of a new Central Queensland University campus in the Cairns CBD, as announced in the October Budget.

Place based co-investment in Launceston precinct

The Australian Government has committed \$305.0 million over 5 years from 2023–24 to place-based co-investments in Hobart and Launceston.

As a component of this package, the Government has committed \$65.0 million toward the next stages of development of the University of Tasmania Stadium project in Launceston.

Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games – Venue Infrastructure

On 17 February 2023, the Australian Government announced \$3.4 billion and an Intergovernmental Agreement on venue infrastructure projects to support the Brisbane 2032 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This announcement included a commitment from the Government to fund up to \$935.0 million over the next 10 years until 2032–33 toward 16 new or upgraded Games venues. Several of these venues are located in regional Queensland, such as Barlow Park (Cairns) and Toowoomba Sports Ground.

The Government’s investment in Games venue infrastructure will generate significant legacy benefits including for regional Queensland communities. These benefits include providing sustainable, modern facilities suitable for a range of sports and community use before and after the Games to meet the growing needs of Australians living in regional Queensland.

Infrastructure Investment Program

The Australian Government is maintaining its strong commitment to a 10-year \$120 billion infrastructure pipeline, while ensuring the land transport infrastructure projects that are delivered are nationally significant projects. The 2023–24 Budget is a step toward a nation building infrastructure investment pipeline, laying the foundation to build a more sustainable, credible pipeline of projects that will be selected based on a range of economic and social objectives, including regional connectivity, liveability and safety. An independent Strategic Review, in consultation with government and industry stakeholders, will be undertaken within 90 days of its commencement and will make recommendations for transitioning to a sustainable pipeline as well as assessing projects funded under the Infrastructure Investment Program to help ensure these economic and social objectives are met, including in regional Australia.

The Government will continue its commitment to enable regions to reach their full potential through land transport infrastructure investments, aligning them to be consistent with the 4 focus areas of the Regional Investment Framework.

These focus areas will ensure regional infrastructure investments are considered in a way to support regional and First Nations communities, and will result in improved access to affordable and reliable transport, services and products they need.

Increasing job and business opportunities for First Nations Australians in Regional Australia

All states and territories agreed to the Australian Government’s National Partnership Agreement on Land Transport Infrastructure Projects, which includes the Indigenous Employment and Supplier-use Infrastructure Framework. The framework aims to create opportunities for First Nations job-seekers and businesses on Australian Government funded infrastructure projects primarily through the Infrastructure Investment Program.

The Framework aligns with Outcome 8 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, by improving socio-economic participation through the provision of increased opportunities for First Nations businesses and individuals to work in the road and rail construction industry.

Under the framework, funding recipients (state, territory and local governments) are required to develop a First Nations Participation Plan establishing employment and supplier-use targets for: new construction projects receiving \$7.5 million or more of Australian Government funding; projects funded under the Roads of Strategic Importance initiative in Northern Australia; and where there is high potential to support First Nations outcomes.

Services to the Indian Ocean Territories Program

The Australian Government is providing a further \$24.4 million in capital funding over 2 years from 2024–25 to complete stage one and 2 upgrades to rockfall and landslide infrastructure on Christmas Island. The funding will be used to replace critical rockfall infrastructure in the Kampong, a residential and commercial precinct in the Flying Fish Cove area, to protect the community.

Supplementary Local Roads Funding for South Australia

In addition to its Financial Assistance Grant program allocation, South Australia will receive supplementary funding to manage its local road network. The funding –\$20.0 million annually for 3 years from 2023–24 – brings funding in line with other states under the program.

National Road Safety Action Grants Program

The Australian Government has committed \$43.6 million over 4 years from 2022–23 to deliver the National Road Safety Action Grants Program (NRSAGP).

Improving regional and remote road safety are 2 key priorities identified in the National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030. The NRSAGP provides non-infrastructure grants to deliver the Government’s National Road Safety Action Plan 2023–25 through focusing on

5 priority funding streams: First Nations road safety; Vulnerable Road Users; Community Education and Awareness, including workplace road safety; Technology and Innovation; and Research and Data.

While funding will benefit all road users, the program will contribute to road safety outcomes in regional and remote areas where young drivers and First Nations people are over represented in road crashes.

Strategic Local Government Asset Assessment Project

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Strategic Local Government Asset Assessment Project (SLGAAP) is being extended, with further funding of \$22.3 million over 6 years from 2023–24. Infrastructure assessments will be undertaken from 2024–25 to 2026–27. SLGAAP assists local government road managers to undertake capacity assessments of bridges and culverts on key routes for heavy vehicles, many of which are in regional areas. This provides information on the safe operating capacity of road infrastructure and facilitates safe access for heavy vehicles. Greater access to local roads enables freight to move more efficiently on Australia’s road networks, reducing supply chain costs and associated cost-of-living pressures. Greater flexibility to utilise the road network also delivers more resilient supply chains that can better respond to route disruptions. Delivery of the program will be reviewed by the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts to maintain efficient and effective administration of the program.

Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government has committed an additional \$12.0 million over 3 years from 2023–24 for a further round of the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program, a competitive grants program to support safety and access upgrades at airstrips in remote and very remote areas of Australia. This is in addition to the \$8.0 million allocated for grants from rounds 6 to 9 in 2023–24.

Projects funded under the program improve safety for aircraft, operators and passengers. Safe, operational airstrips are vital for the delivery of essential goods and services in remote communities, particularly where road access can be disrupted for extended periods due to seasonal weather conditions. The airstrips support the delivery of health care services such as those provided by the Royal Flying Doctor Service or other aeromedical providers, and offer access to work and education opportunities for remote communities.

Successful projects under round 9 of the program were announced on 4 August 2022, with 55 successful projects receiving \$14.9 million.

Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Assessment, Roadmap and Action Plan

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government announced \$7.8 million over 4 years from 2022–23 for a Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Assessment, Roadmap and Action Plan. Transport emissions are set to be the largest source of CO₂ emissions in Australia by 2030 and coordinated effort across the transport system is required to achieve the Government’s economy-wide target of net zero CO₂ emissions by 2050.

The Roadmap and Action Plan will present an integrated approach to advance the reduction of emissions across transport modes, alternative fuel, new technology and enabling infrastructure. This will complement other transport emissions reduction related announcements this Budget – A Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles and the Maritime Emissions Reduction Action Plan – by looking across the transport system to include heavy vehicles, rail, freight, aviation.

Maritime Emissions Reduction National Action Plan

Transport is the enabler for economic growth and regional connectivity. In particular, the maritime sector connects Australia’s regional industries and agricultural produce to the world market. Reducing transport emissions will necessarily encompass all modes of transport and in all geographical locations in its contribution to the national target.

The Australian Government has committed to develop a Maritime Emissions Reduction National Action Plan (MERNAP), co-designed with industry and stakeholders – many of which are regionally based – that is inclusive of the energy-port-ship interface. The MERNAP will provide a roadmap to facilitate a smooth energy transition for the domestic maritime sector and contribute towards the reduction of global shipping emissions. This will ensure the long-term sustainability and resilience of Australia’s globalised supply chains and contribute towards the creation of green shipping corridors. It will also establish the baseline for domestic maritime emissions and opportunities to encourage the domestic maritime energy transition.

A Fuel Efficiency Standard for Light Vehicles

As part of the National Electric Vehicle Strategy, the Australian Government has committed to developing an Australian fuel efficiency standard. A fuel efficiency standard is anticipated to increase the supply of electric vehicles to the Australian market and decrease fuel costs through the introduction of the latest fuel saving technology. The Fuel Efficiency Standard will be developed following a detailed consultation process with key stakeholders and the Australian community, and will include a focus on regional Australia. Funding will be used to undertake detailed modelling to assist in designing a standard that is appropriate for Australians. This consultation process will ensure the new standard enables continued access to a wide range of vehicles regional Australians need for work and leisure. Increased access to electric vehicles and more efficient internal combustion engine vehicles have the potential to bring greater benefits to regional Australians through reduced fuel costs over a greater distance.

Fuel efficiency standards require the average efficiency of vehicles to improve over time in a technology neutral way. A fuel efficiency standard works by incentivising car suppliers to make more electric vehicles available in the Australian market and provide Australians with the latest fuel saving technology in internal combustion engine models. This means the utes and 4-wheel drives that Australians love can continue to be sold, and manufacturers will have greater incentives to add to the range of electric utes, SUVs and 4-wheel drives by developing new models.

Safety Regulation for Maritime Industries

The Independent Review of Domestic Commercial Vessel Safety Legislation and Costs and Charging Arrangements commenced in January 2022. The first part of the review (focusing on the safety legislation framework) will be released in the second quarter of 2023, and the second part of the review (focussing on costs and charges) will be released in mid-2023. To ensure the Australian Maritime Safety Authority (AMSA) can continue delivering vital safety regulation for domestic maritime industries, the Australian Government is providing \$15.3 million funding in 2023–24 to AMSA for the operation of the national system to allow for Government consideration of the Review outcomes and implementation. This approach will benefit commercial fleets for fishing and tourist operators, many of which are based in regional areas.

Refresh of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia

The 2015 Our North, Our Future: White Paper on Developing Northern Australia is the cornerstone document in the Australian Government's Northern Australia agenda for sustainable and resilient economic development. The Government has committed to a refresh of the White Paper and to develop an action plan for Northern Australia development. The action plan will align with Government priorities and policies, including the Government's new Regional Investment Framework and will be developed during 2023–24.

The refresh of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia will be supported by information from an assessment of the socio-economic baseline, supply chains and economic drivers in 3 Northern Australia Regions of Growth corridors: Mount Isa to Townsville, Queensland; Beetaloo Basin to Katherine to Darwin, Northern Territory; and Broome to Kununurra to Darwin, Western Australia and Northern Territory.

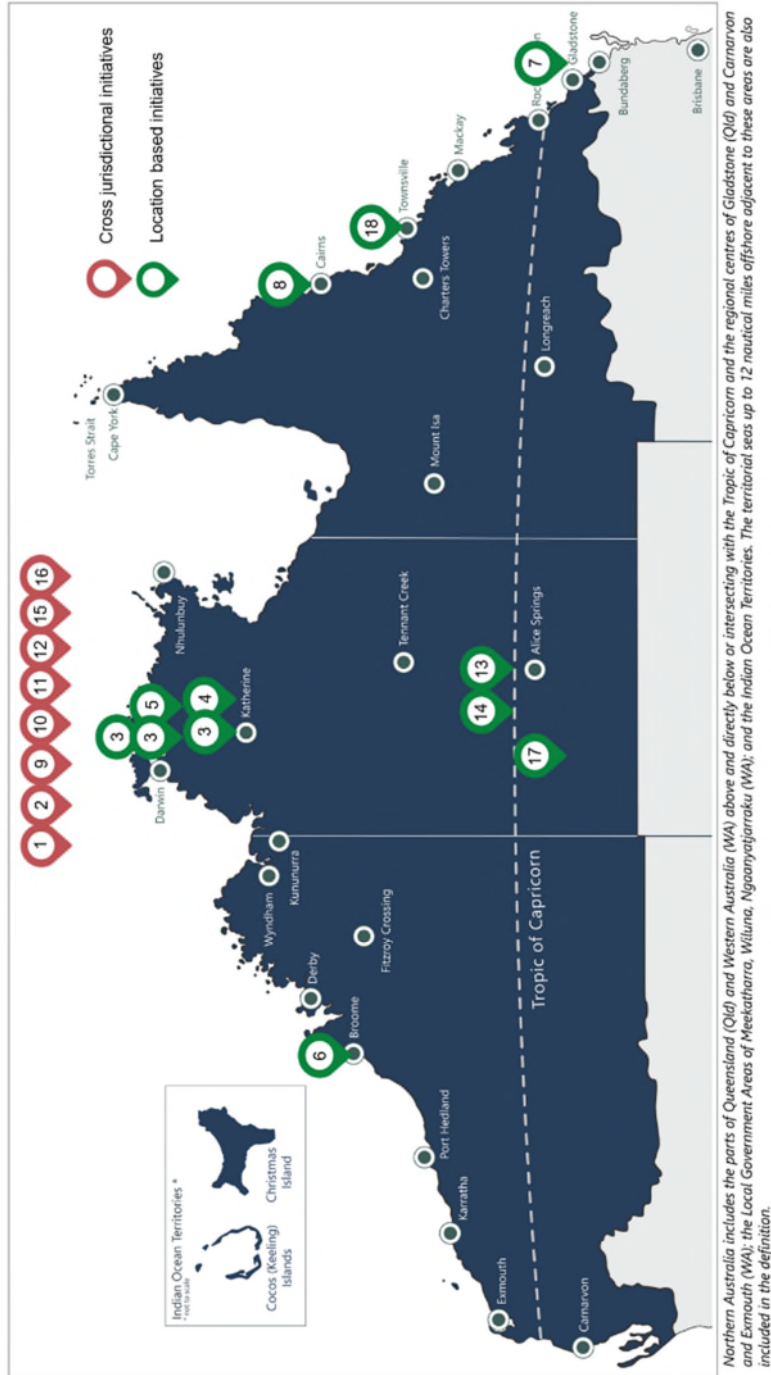
Highlights for Northern Australia

Northern Australia has a significant role to play in growing national prosperity.

The Australian Government continues to support the developing Northern Australia agenda through investment in sustainable and resilient growth across Australia’s north.

Highlights of the Government’s investments outlined in this Statement that significantly benefit Northern Australia are summarised below.

	Initiative	Investment	Portfolio
1	Continuation of the Indigenous Ranger Biosecurity Program	\$40.6 million	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
2	Enhanced High-Frequency Communications System	\$283.5 million	Defence
3	Defence Renewable Energy and Energy Security Program	\$64.1 million	Defence
4	Facilities to Support AIR 7000 Phase 1B Remotely Piloted Aircraft System	\$427.2 million	Defence
5	Robertson Barracks Base Improvement Project	\$389.1 million	Defence
6	Continuity of employment services in Broome	\$5.6 million	Employment and Workplace Relations
7	Supporting emissions reduction in Queensland’s energy resources sector	\$14.3 million	Industry, Science and Resources
8	Regional Development in Far North Queensland – Cairns Marine Precinct	\$30.0 million, bringing total to \$180.0 million	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts (DITRDCA)
9	Refresh of the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia	Nil	DITRDCA
10	Improve Remote Food Security	\$11.8 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C)
11	Improving on Country Education for First Nations students	\$38.4 million	PM&C
12	Transitioning from the Community Development Program to a New Jobs Program	\$97.7 million	PM&C
13	Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan	\$298.8 million	PM&C (cross-portfolio)
14	Northern Territory Remote Housing One Year Agreement	\$111.7 million	PM&C
15	Increasing the Commonwealth guarantee of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation’s liabilities	\$2.0 billion	Treasury
16	Powering the Regions Fund	\$1.4 billion	Climate Change, Energy, the Environment & Water (DCCEEW)
17	Protecting Australia’s Iconic National Parks	\$355.1 million	DCCEEW
18	Training Primary Care Professionals in Regional Australia	\$4.2 million	Health and Aged Care



Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place

On 30 January 2023, the Australian Government released its landmark National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place. Backed by \$286.0 million in dedicated funding over 5 years from 2022–23, Revive will reinstate the arts, entertainment and cultural landscape as central to Australia’s future. Key initiatives with a regional focus include:

- \$8.5 million in increased support for the Regional Arts Fund, an ongoing program that provides support for sustainable cultural development in regional and remote Australia
- \$11.8 million to establish a pilot program to facilitate long-term loans of works from the National Gallery of Australia’s collection to regional and suburban cultural institutions across Australia
- \$199.0 million to establish Creative Australia as a restored and expanded Australia Council and increase its investment in arts and culture across Australia, including in rural, regional and remote areas, with the functions of Creative Partnerships Australia to transfer to Creative Australia to assist artists and arts organisations in both regional and metropolitan Australia to attract and maintain support from donors and businesses
- \$13.4 million to facilitate a First Nations-led partnership to develop stand-alone legislation to recognise and protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions
- \$2.6 million for specialist arts education programs to deliver outcomes that meet identified gaps in arts education in schools.

Aligning with Revive, additional funding of \$9.3 million is being provided to support the 8 national arts training organisations: the Australian Ballet School; the Australia Film Television and Radio School; the Australian National Academy of Music; the Australian Youth Orchestra; the Flying Fruit Fly Circus; NAISDA Dance College; the National Institute of Circus Arts; and the National Institute of Dramatic Art. This funding will enable these organisations to continue to provide world-class training and career pathways for Australia’s most talented performing and screen artists, with their national reach ensuring access to all Australians, including those in regional and remote areas.

These measures will have tangible outcomes for regional, rural and remote communities across Australia.

Bundanon Trust

In 2023–24, the Australian Government will provide an additional \$33.4 million over 4 years and then \$8.1 million per year ongoing to support Bundanon Trust’s long-term financial sustainability. This will enable this important regional institution to make full use of its expanded facilities and the opportunities they present. Bundanon Trust is a wholly-owned Commonwealth company limited by guarantee, established in 1993 to own and manage the properties and art collection donated to the Commonwealth by Arthur and

Yvonne Boyd ‘as a means of a gift to the nation’. Bundanon Trust supports arts practice and engagement with the arts through a diverse range of programs such as its artist in residence, education, performance and environmental programs which have long-term cultural, economic and social benefits for the New South Wales Shoalhaven region and beyond.

Better funded national broadcasters

The Australian Government will provide 5-year funding terms to the national broadcasters commencing 1 July 2023. The ABC will receive in the order of \$6.0 billion over 5 years, and SBS will receive approximately \$1.8 billion over 5 years.

Funding for the ABC Enhanced News Gathering program, which was scheduled to terminate on 30 June 2025, will become part of ongoing ABC funding. The ABC will use this funding to support journalist positions in regional bureaus to deliver local news across digital platforms as well as traditional TV and radio channels.

Support for the Australian Associated Press

The Australian Government will also provide \$5.0 million over 2 years from 2022–23 to help sustain the Australian Associated Press (AAP) while the News Media Assistance Program is developed as an enduring capability to guide news media policy intervention and support public interest journalism and media diversity. The AAP is an independent, fact-based wholesale newswire service that provides news content to around 450 news media publications – over 300 of which are located in regional areas – as well as fact checking services to address misinformation on digital platforms.

Ongoing Funding for the eSafety Commissioner

The Australian Government is providing the office of the eSafety Commissioner (eSafety) with \$42.5 million per year in ongoing funding from 2023–24, up from \$10.3 million. This funding will ensure eSafety can fulfil its statutory obligations under the *Online Safety Act 2021* and support Australians to participate safely online, including those in regional communities. eSafety improves and promotes online safety, providing a critical safety net for when things go wrong online. A key focus of the Government’s investment will be improving education and outreach, including in regional communities. eSafety will be funded to visit regional centres to meet community members and organisations and attend regional events to raise awareness of eSafety’s available resources and support.

Viewer Access Satellite Television

The Australian Government will continue to fund the Viewer Access Satellite Television (VAST) service to 30 June 2031, building on the \$172.7 million to support the service from 2009–10 to 2023–24. The Government will also provide additional funding in 2023–24 to ensure the VAST service continues in Central and Eastern Australia, while the new contract is negotiated.

VAST is a safety-net service that delivers free-to-air satellite television and radio services to regional and remote Australia, including First Nations communities, that cannot access terrestrial television due to remoteness or difficult terrain. Over 1.5 million people rely on VAST, with 625,000 people directly accessing the service via direct-to-home satellite, and 92 per cent of those receiving the service living in regional and remote Australia. A further 875,000 people watch television from 124 terrestrial television towers in remote areas that take their program feed from VAST.

Access to commercial television through VAST provides significant benefits to both communities and viewers, including social and cultural inclusion, education, and access to news services. It is also a source of information during natural disasters.

Funding will also be provided in 2023–24 to commence work to assess the state of broadcasting transmission and reception equipment in remote and regional Australia, including gaps and deficiencies in service provision, with a focus on First Nations communities.

Government Response to Public Safety Mobile Broadband Review

The Australian Government is providing \$10.1 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to establish a Taskforce led by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), with participation from the portfolio, to drive the delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability. PSMB capability will equip public safety agencies with modern technologies and digital connectivity to deliver fast and secure voice, video and data communications and instant access to data, images and information in critical situations. This will improve operational preparedness, support the coordination of responses across organisational and geographic boundaries, and enhance Australia's ability to manage emergencies, hazards and threats, particularly for those communities in regional areas where connectivity can be challenging.

Cell Broadcast National Messaging System

Targeted messages, warnings and alerts are critical to safeguarding communities during an emergency or disaster. The recent Queensland and New South Wales flooding events highlighted the need for a fit for purpose hazard warning system.

The Australian Government is developing a National Messaging System as a joint initiative between the portfolio and NEMA, which will allow government agencies to rapidly coordinate and deliver targeted, real time information to the public on mobile phones and other compatible devices during emergencies. The initiative will build on initial seed funding allocated in the March 2022–23 Budget to complete the end-to-end system build, and cover ongoing costs for operation of the system in the mobile telecommunications carriers' networks.

The National Messaging System will have a positive impact on regional areas which can be disproportionately impacted by emergency and disaster events, and are often serviced by a single telecommunications provider. Visitors to regional and remote areas not serviced by their provider will receive messages if in a coverage area. The new system will complement existing communication channels such as radio, television and emergency services websites, to ensure all regional and remote communities are informed.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio works in partnership with First Nations people and communities to shape the design of policies, services and the Closing the Gap agenda across the Australian Government. It delivers a number of programs, supporting First Nations people to thrive, advancing equity in access to services and helping Indigenous businesses and economies to grow, with a focus on the strengths of communities and places.

The portfolio is responsible for setting the direction of Indigenous affairs policy across the Australian Government as well as delivering a number of specific funding programs. It includes programs aimed at ensuring First Nations people are able to take up the full range of opportunities our nation has to offer.

The portfolio is supporting regional economic transformation as Australia decarbonises and the energy system changes. The Government will legislate a new, national Net Zero Authority to drive a positive and orderly transformation to a clean energy economy and ensure Australia's regions and workers benefit. A particular focus will be industries that traditionally powered Australia's economy. As old industries phase out, the Net Zero Authority will work to ensure new industries are coming online, and workers, communities and regions are supported through the change.

The Government will expand the Indigenous Rangers Program (IRP), grow the Indigenous rangers sector and provide funding for junior ranger initiatives. The IRP expansion will double the number of First Nations rangers by the end of the decade and work towards greater representation of women in ranger positions. This will have positive impacts in regional, rural and remote areas nationally, as it will encourage applications from regions currently without First Nations rangers and increase opportunities for rangers on dedicated Indigenous Protected Areas. It will create First Nations ranger jobs in areas where employment opportunities may be limited and will improve Indigenous-led land management services in regional, rural and remote communities, enabling them to be better positioned to reduce or respond to natural disasters.

The portfolio is committed to stimulating economic activity in regional Australia and helping local economies thrive. Indigenous Business Australia assists First Nations people to construct new homes through the Indigenous Home Ownership Program and partners and invests in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business. The Indigenous Land and Sea Council assists First Nations people to realise economic, social, cultural and environmental benefits that ownership and management of land and water can bring.

The portfolio works closely with local service providers and communities to design and deliver services to improve the lives of First Nations people across metropolitan, regional and remote locations.

New Initiatives

Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan

The Australian Government is investing \$250.0 million in a plan for a Better, Safer Future for Central Australia (announced on 6 February 2023). This is in addition to the \$48.8 million investment in community safety announced during the Prime Minister's visit to Alice Springs on 24 January 2023. The Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan will be delivered in multiple phases, with the first phase including:

- \$50.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 from the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts portfolio for community and regional infrastructure projects in Central Australia
- \$40.4 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for schools in Central Australia to improve school attendance and education outcomes through on Country learning, prioritising community engagement and locally driven responses in partnership with local community organisations – refer Education chapter for more detail
- \$23.5 million over 4 years from 2022–23 to expand the Child and Youth Assessment and Treatment Service, and support the development of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Aboriginal Corporation's 'Health Hub' in Alice Springs
- \$10.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 for justice reinvestment initiatives in Central Australia to reduce crime, contact with the criminal justice system and recidivism, funded through the Confiscated Assets Account – this initiative is also detailed in the Attorney-General's chapter
- \$10.0 million over 3 years from 2023–24 for broadband and mobile services upgrades to support digital connectivity needs for First Nations Australians in Central Australia through the Regional Connectivity Program
- \$9.2 million over 3 years from 2023–24 to address community safety and early intervention and crime prevention projects for First Nations Australians in Central Australia
- \$7.5 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for coordination and governance activities, including for the Office of Central Australians Regional Controller
- \$3.9 million over 3 years from 2023–24 for the development of a Youth Services Action Plan for Central Australia
- \$1.2 million in 2023–24 to establish up to 5 junior ranger sites in Central Australia
- \$300,000 in 2022–23 to provide mobile and internet for Wi-Fi connectivity in Alice Springs Town Camps through the Digital Connectivity Project.

These new investments build on the \$48.8 million announced on 24 January 2023 to improve safety in Alice Springs, including:

- \$25.0 million to extend funding for safety and community services, which are currently scheduled to end in June 2023 to provide certainty to providers and their employees, and ensure this work continues
- \$14.2 million in additional funding for extra high visibility police and law enforcement operations including targeting grog running, and increasing liquor licensing compliance inspectors and boosting security guards in public places, funded through the Confiscated Assets Account
- \$5.6 million in 2023–24 for additional emergency accommodation and safe spaces to give young people a place to go to at night and boost the effectiveness of the night patrol program, which starts in February and will help get young people off the streets
- \$2.0 million to improve CCTV, lighting and safety measures throughout Alice Springs, funded through the Confiscated Assets Account
- \$2.0 million for Tangentyere to boost domestic violence services.

Importantly the bulk of first-phase funding will focus on improving outcomes for Central Australia’s children and young people – recognising their importance in the region’s future.

They also follow consultations with Central Australian communities, by the Australian Government in partnership with the Office of the Central Australia Regional Controller, to listen to and respond to community priorities. These initiatives, and those developed in future phases, will be delivered in partnership with local communities.

Closing the Gap – Further Investment

First Nations Grid Fund – First Nations Water Infrastructure

Through the National Water Grid Fund, the Australian Government has allocated \$150.0 million for First Nations water infrastructure projects in remote locations. The delivery of safe and reliable drinking water plays a critical role in the viability, self-determination and sustainability of First Nations communities. This investment will deliver on the Government’s water security agenda by providing essential services to regional and remote communities, and commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. More information on the National Water Grid Fund can be found in the Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water chapter.

Northern Territory Remote Housing One Year Agreement

In 2023–24, the Australian Government will provide \$111.7 million to a new one year partnership with the Northern Territory Government to accelerate building of new remote housing in Northern Territory.

Transitioning from the Community Development Program to a New Jobs Program

The Australian Government will provide \$85.8 million in 2023–24 in supplementary funding to meet the costs associated with the sustained increased number of participants being serviced through the Community Development Program (CDP) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of its election commitment, the Government will replace CDP with a new program with real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions – developed in partnership with First Nations people. The Government will provide \$11.9 million over 3 years from 2022–23 towards the New Jobs Program Trial. Community organisations will be engaged in a genuine partnership to trial and test local approaches that will inform the design of the new program and support community priorities through real job outcomes.

Wreck Bay Housing

The Australian Government will invest \$45.1 million over 8 years from 2023–24 for housing and housing-related infrastructure works on Aboriginal land in Wreck Bay Village, Jervis Bay Territory.

The funding will be used to improve the residential housing stock and bring all housing in Wreck Bay Village to a reasonable state of repair. The capital works program will include repairs/upgrades, demolition/rebuilds, new housing and related infrastructure work.

The housing program will be implemented in partnership with the Wreck Bay Aboriginal Community Council and will provide local employment opportunities.

Improving on Country Education for First Nations Students

The Australian Government will invest \$38.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to improve access to education for First Nations students and provide families with more choice in how their children engage in school, by extending the range of education options available locally that reflect community needs and aspirations. This measure will expand on Country learning opportunities and distance education for First Nations students from remote areas. This includes investing in new junior rangers sites and conducting a distance education pilot, which will implement community-led models of distance education for First Nations students in up to five remote locations.

Supporting Quality Boarding for Rural and Remote Students

The Australian Government will provide \$21.6 million in 2023–24 to extend the Indigenous Boarding Providers grant program for an additional year in 2024, while a design review is undertaken to identify systemic reform options. Grants will be provided to up to 50 boarding providers who support around 2,300 First Nations students from remote areas. The design review will identify systemic reform options to better support First Nations boarding students from rural and remote areas. This initiative is also detailed in the Education chapter.

Aboriginal Hostels Limited Reform Agenda

The Australian Government will invest \$20.8 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for operational expenditure to improve Aboriginal Hostels Limited's (AHL) service offering and to undertake urgent repairs and maintenance, and capital works. This will ensure hostels are fit for purpose and AHL is able to continue to provide culturally safe accommodation to enable First Nations people to access vital services, particularly people that need to travel to regional and urban areas to access these services.

Alcohol and Drug Treatment Services in the Northern Territory

The Australian Government will provide \$14.1 million over 2 years from 2022–23 to reduce alcohol related harm in the Northern Territory.

Improve Remote Food Security

This measure will provide \$11.8 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to support development of a National Strategy for Food Security in Remote First Nations Communities and implement early priority actions.

- \$10.4 million in grants to address priority needs of remote communities
- \$1.4 million for community consultations, project management and evaluation activities, ensuring actions are developed in genuine engagement with First Nations people.

The Strategy is being developed in partnership with First Nations peak health bodies and state and territory jurisdictions. It seeks to address the unique and specific barriers to food security experienced in geographically isolated locations, including complex supply chains, difficult road access, limited commercial markets, seasonal isolation and high operating and maintenance costs.

Custody Notification Service

The Australia Government will provide \$3.4 million in 2023–24 to maintain funding for the 4 Custody Notification Service (CNS) providers whose contracts expire this year. These CNS providers are delivering services across 5 states and territories to ensure First Nations people taken into police custody get legal advice and a health and wellbeing check to reduce deaths in custody.

Women's Safety – First Nations

Further information on the Women's Safety package is in the Attorney-General's and Social Services chapters.

Family Violence Prevention Legal Service Providers

The Australian Government is investing \$68.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to maintain base funding for the 16 Family Violence Prevention Legal Service (FVPLS) providers. The FVPLS providers are Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, with a presence in each state and territory. FVPLS providers have long-standing relationships with the communities in which they operate and deliver culturally safe legal and non-legal services to support First Nations victim-survivors of family and domestic violence and sexual assault.

This initiative builds on the Government’s election commitment to First Nations people to provide \$3.0 million over 3 years from 2022–23 to support the work of the National FVPLS Forum, to act on behalf of FVPLS providers and the delivery of frontline services for First Nations women, families and communities.

Healing Programs for First Nations Families

The Australian Government will invest \$23.2 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to partner with First Nations organisations to design, deliver, and evaluate Indigenous-led, place-based, trauma-aware and culturally responsive healing programs for First Nations children and families who are impacted by family violence and have engaged in the child protection system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan Activities

The Australian Government will invest \$17.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to maintain base funding for critical family violence service provision in high needs communities, in order to reduce the prevalence and impact of family violence experienced by First Nations people. This funding will also establish up to 5 community networks to improve collaboration and service integration across the family safety sector.

Revive – National Cultural Policy and Location Incentives

Digitisation of At-Risk First Nations Cultural Heritage Material

The Australian Government will invest \$3.8 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to allow the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, in partnership with the First Nations Media Australia, to digitally preserve at-risk audio and video collections held by First Nations broadcasters and community organisations. The contents of magnetic audio and video tapes are at risk of being lost forever if not preserved by 2025. Funding will also help community organisations to deliver media preservation training. Refer to the Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts chapter for more detail on Revive.

Net Zero Authority

The Australian Government will establish, through legislation, a new national Net Zero Authority to promote an orderly and positive transformation to a clean energy economy and ensure Australia’s regions and workers benefit. The Net Zero Authority will help key industries, workers, and regions to proactively manage the transformation. This will include a focus on facilitating economic development and diversification, supporting workers to transition to new opportunities, and helping smooth changes as we move to a clean energy economy. The Net Zero Authority will be legislated following a detailed design and legislative process. In the meantime, the Government will establish an interim agency in the Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio to immediately start work.

Social Services

Through the Social Services portfolio, the Australian Government delivers essential social services, including through Services Australia and the National Disability Insurance Agency, to improve the wellbeing of individuals and their families across the nation. By tailoring and targeting support, particularly for vulnerable Australians, the portfolio responds to the needs of individuals and promotes participation in the social and economic life of Australia's regions. In particular, Services Australia and the National Disability Insurance Agency contribute to the Government's regional investment priorities with their significant presence across Australia.

The portfolio recognises the importance of partnering with local, state and territory governments and community organisations, to deliver place-based programs. Through initiatives with a strong community-led focus, the portfolio responds to the local needs of regions and to ensure no one is held back or left behind.

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government is providing funding to deliver initiatives that will support service delivery in remote and regional Australia for women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence, under the National Redress Scheme and to address entrenched community disadvantage, including supporting income support recipients. The portfolio will work closely with other portfolios to deliver some key Government priorities, such as the Closing the Gap agenda, and commitments under Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–31. Investments to establish the National Disability Data Asset will also support a deeper understanding of the diversity of people with disability, wherever they live and work.

The portfolio will continue to support all Australians through its programs and support services including further investment in initiatives that provide better support to around one third of National Disability Insurance Scheme participants that currently reside outside major cities. The Government is partnering with communities to pilot alternative commissioning to improve access to supports in remote and First Nations communities.

New Initiatives

Supporting income support recipients

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australian Government is delivering additional support to income support recipients across Australia, including around 402,000 income support recipients in regional and remote Australia. This support includes:

- Around \$1.9 billion over 5 years from 2022–23 to extend eligibility for Parenting Payment (Single) to single principal carers with a youngest child under 14, benefiting around 22,000 recipients in regional and remote Australia
- Around \$4.7 billion over 5 years from 2022–23 to increase the rate of eligible working age and student payments by \$40 per fortnight, benefiting around 360,000 recipients in regional and remote Australia

- This includes increasing the rate of JobSeeker Payment by over \$90 per fortnight for those who are single, aged 55-59, and on payment for 9 continuous months by expanding eligibility for the existing higher single rate of JobSeeker to this cohort, to match that applying to those aged 60 and over. This measure will benefit around 20,000 recipients in regional and remote Australia.

In addition, to help people on income support pay their rent, the Government is investing around \$2.7 billion over 5 years from 2022–23 to increase the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 15 per cent (around \$15 to \$30 per fortnight depending on the household type), benefitting around 300,000 recipients in regional and remote Australia.

These measures demonstrate the Government's ongoing commitment to tackle disadvantage and provide targeted, additional support to those in greatest need.

Targeting entrenched community disadvantage

The Department of Social Services (DSS) will be working collaboratively across government and with community partners to develop long-term, genuine partnerships to better leverage existing resources to deliver real change that makes a difference to the lives of Australians experiencing disadvantage, including in regional, rural and remote Australia. This includes:

- \$7.8 million over 2 years from 2023–24 for Treasury and DSS to develop a Whole-of-Government Framework to Address Community Disadvantage. The framework will outline strategic objectives and key principles for the Government to work in partnership with communities to address disadvantage, including through place-based approaches and social impact investing initiatives. The framework will also support more impactful, integrated investments, backed by improved access to data and evaluation capabilities, which will help address community disadvantage across Australia, including in urban, regional, rural and remote communities.
- \$64.0 million over 6 years from 2023–24 to provide funding certainty for the 10 existing partnerships with community-led initiatives under Stronger Places, Stronger People, with 9 of these existing partnerships in regional or remote communities. This includes funding to enhance shared decision making capability and local solutions in 6 of these communities.
- \$11.6 million over 3 years from 2023–24 under the Social Enterprise Development Initiative for eligible organisations to purchase services that strengthen the organisations' business planning, financial management, contract negotiations and legal support, and outcomes measurement and evaluation so organisations are equipped to achieve their goals in addressing disadvantage, including in urban, regional, rural and remote communities. Online education and mentoring programs will also be available to organisations, intermediaries and investors, to help grow and connect the social impact investing community with capacity building grants.

Women’s Safety

In the 2023–24 Budget, the Australia Government is committing \$589.3 million over 5 years from 2022–23 under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022-2032 (National Plan). Initiatives of particular relevance to regional and remote Australia include:

- \$153.1 million to deliver key measures under the dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan aimed at preventing, addressing and responding to family, domestic and sexual violence against First Nations women and children. It recognises the complexity of experiences of violence by First Nations women, children, Elders and communities as well as service delivery in remote and very remote communities. Priorities will be identified by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Council on family, domestic and sexual violence through consultation to ensure they meet the needs of communities in a culturally appropriate manner.
- \$159.0 million to extend support for states and territories under the National Partnership on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Responses. This measure will support frontline service delivery in regional Australia, improve data collection, and address emerging issues.
- \$38.2 million to extend the current Escaping Violence Payment and Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot to January 2025.

Further information on the Women’s Safety package and Women’s Safety – First Nations package can be found in the Attorney-General’s and Prime Minister and Cabinet chapters.

Future National Redress Scheme Funding

The Australian Government has committed \$142.2 million over 5 years from 2023–24 to support the continued delivery of the National Redress Scheme for Survivors of Institutional Child Sexual Abuse and to finalise the Government’s response to the Second Year Review of the Scheme.

Funding will allow the Department of Social Services to continue to deliver the Scheme to survivors across Australia. This funding supports the department to continue Scheme operations and associated employment in regional areas, including Batemans Bay, Wollongong and Wagga Wagga in New South Wales.

National Disability Insurance Scheme

The Australian Government will provide \$7.6 million over 2 years from 2023–24 to address service gaps and improve access to supports in remote and First Nations communities. This will be achieved by working in partnership with First Nations’ representatives, communities, participants and other government agencies (including state and territory agencies) to pilot alternative commissioning arrangements.

Enduring Emergency Response Capability

Services Australia will receive an additional \$231.8 million in 2023–24 to establish a cost-effective emergency response capability.

This will ensure Services Australia is able to continue responding rapidly to natural disaster events, and deliver government services to customers that need them the most, across all of Australia, including regional and rural areas.

This measure will benefit Australians impacted by emergencies through timely access to high-quality government services and payments.

Additionally, this will enable Services Australia to continue to deliver core programs without impacting on customers receiving their assessments and payments in a timely manner.

Sustain myGov

The Australian Government is investing \$134.5 million in 2023–24 for the myGov system, to ensure myGov capabilities remain contemporary, stable and secure.

myGov is the critical entry point for access to whole-of-government services throughout Australia, including in regional and rural areas.

It delivers essential government services with more Australians using myGov each day than public transport to travel to work.

This measure will enable the provision of ongoing customer support, call centre and SMS services, and ICT business maintenance services.

In particular, this measure will enable the continued support of the myGov app, released in December 2022, which helps people around Australia to interact with government services in a timely and effective way.

Health delivery modernisation program – enabling health reform

The Australian Government continues to invest in phase 3 of the Health Delivery Modernisation Program. This measure will provide Services Australia \$69.7 million over 4 years to 2026–27 to deliver new digital health services and modernise Services Australia’s critical health payment system for all Australians, including those in rural and regional Australia. The measure will also expand health system capabilities to support the delivery of critical reforms.

The measure will support the continued delivery of Voluntary Patient Registration improvements to Health Identifiers matching and data quality improvements, and additional digital services across Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme.

Treasury

Treasury's role is to support and implement informed decisions on policies for the good of the Australian people, consistent with achieving strong, sustainable economic growth and fiscal settings.

The portfolio supports the Australian Government to deliver a more resilient and modern economy and improve the supply and affordability of housing.

The portfolio undertakes regional engagement, including through visiting the regions, to deepen its understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional economies. There are a number of entities in the portfolio that are nationally dispersed, such as the Australian Taxation Office and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The ABS supports local communities and all levels of government to access a range of data about Australia's regions, including through the Census of Population and Housing, and other household and business collections. Much of this data is available through its regional data portal (Data by Region). Recently, the ABS has expanded the range of regional statistics in response to the need for information to support regional recovery from bushfires and floods. These statistics include detailed regional data on housing, health and disability.

The 2023–24 Budget will add to Treasury's role through the establishment of a centralised evaluation unit. This unit will partner with agencies across government to evaluate key programs and support the enablers of high-quality evaluation. This will improve understanding of the effects of government policies, including on regional communities.

New Initiatives

Enhancing the Home Guarantee Scheme

From 1 July 2023, the Australian Government is expanding eligibility for the First Home Guarantee and Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee to: any 2 borrowers jointly applying beyond the scope of spouse or de facto couples; and non-first home buyers who have not held a property interest in Australia within the previous 10 years. The Government is also expanding the Family Home Guarantee to single legal guardians of dependants, in addition to natural and adoptive parents. The Home Guarantee Scheme will also be made available to permanent residents.

Increasing the Commonwealth guarantee of the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's liabilities

From 1 July 2023, the Australian Government will increase the National Housing Finance and Investment Corporation's (NHFIC) liability cap by \$2.0 billion to a total of \$7.5 billion. This increase will enable NHFIC to provide additional financing to Community Housing Providers for more social and affordable housing through the Australian Housing Bond Aggregator, including in regional Australia.

Life Course Data Initiative

The Australian Government is providing \$16.4 million over 4 years from 2023–24 to the ABS under the Life Course Data Initiative to develop a pilot Life Course Data Asset. This asset will provide greater insights about the experiences of communities experiencing concentrated, intergenerational disadvantage. It will deliver new longitudinal data and publish selected statistics at the community level. The funding will also enable the ABS, in partnership with place-based experts, to help communities improve their access to existing data sources, which can support evidence-based solutions at the community level. This measure is linked to the Targeting Entrenched Community Disadvantage initiative included in the Social Services chapter.

Driving Collaboration with Small Business to Reduce the Time Spent Complying with Tax Obligations

The Australian Government is providing \$9.0 million over 4 years from 2023–24 and \$1.4 million per year ongoing to expand the National Tax Clinic program to include 5 new tax clinics from 1 January 2025. The clinics will assist small businesses and vulnerable individuals who do not currently have easy access to professional tax advice and assistance. Competitive grant funding will be opened to TAFE institutions (which have a greater presence in regional areas) for the first time and funds will be reserved for at least 2 TAFEs for the 2025 and 2028 rounds. Eligibility criteria for the next round of grants will also be refined to include a greater focus on assisting regional communities, while an additional \$200,000 per annum will be set aside specifically for programs targeted at outreach projects to assist regional and First Nations communities.

Veterans' Affairs

The Australian Government has supported veterans and families for more than a century, empowering them to continue life after service in a society that understands and values their commitment and ongoing contribution to the community.

For veterans and their families in regional areas, the Government understands the importance of connecting people and providing the right services. The Department of Veterans' Affairs continues to expand the Veterans' and Families' Hub Network, with 8 new hubs servicing veterans and their families across Australia, including in regional areas, coming online over the next 3 years.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to deliver meaningful and long-lasting change to the way we support our veteran community. The Government is committed to addressing its recommendations, including developing a pathway to reform the complex system of veterans' compensation and rehabilitation legislation. This reform will create a simpler and easier system for the veteran community.

The Government is committed to reforming our veteran support system to ensure veterans and their families thrive in their lives after service regardless of where they live. Initiatives include investment in technology to improve the experience of veterans and families and reduce the time veterans have to wait to receive support and services.

The geographic reach of the department enables the delivery of a wide range of services and support to veterans and families across Australia, including those in regional areas through the department's Veteran Access Network.

