



# Budget

## 2026–27

### **REGIONAL MINISTERIAL BUDGET STATEMENT 2026–27**

#### **INVESTING IN AUSTRALIA'S REGIONAL GROWTH AND PROSPERITY**

A Statement by

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For the information of honourable members  
on the occasion of the Budget 2026–27

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# Acknowledgement of Country

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

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

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



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# Foreword

The Albanese Government is building a future of prosperity, resilience and sustainability for regional Australia. The 2026–27 Budget helps deliver on this vision, furthering a broad productivity agenda focused on skills, connectivity and investment in a Future Made in Australia.

The current context of significant global uncertainty compels us to prioritise Australian economic resilience and reform. The Government has responded quickly to shifting conditions in the global supply chain which are already affecting all Australians. In securing Australia’s fuel supply outlook in the near term, monitoring fuel affordability and installing supply chain safeguards, we have demonstrated the importance of keeping Australia moving and – importantly – keeping fuel flowing to the regions. By acting to insulate more fuel-exposed industries, we can reinforce productivity in our regions to the benefit of all Australia.

This Government understands the importance of investing in resilience and productivity. To this end, we continue to focus on building regional Australia, which takes many different forms of investment in Australia’s regions. Our regions are at the heart of planning and building for a stronger, more resilient future. This is why we are committed to genuine, nation-building infrastructure, connecting our regions to our cities via efficient transport networks and critical infrastructure upgrades, and recognising the wealth of opportunity in high speed rail connectivity as a nationally significant act of regional economic development.

The Government is putting in place a range of cost-of-living initiatives to ease the pressure on regional Australians in these uncertain times, ensuring local supply chains keep moving and providing improved health and education support for families. The Budget includes cuts to the fuel excise, as well as increasing financial support to grow the supply of housing to our regions. The Government is also continuing to roll out tax cuts in 2026–27 and 2027–28.

The 2026–27 Budget builds on around 560 regional initiatives introduced through our first four Budgets – guided by our Regional Investment Framework – with new packages and initiatives in this Budget including:

- **Supporting the unique needs of regional Australia while providing meaningful cost-of-living relief**

The Government recognises that regional Australia faces more complex challenges compared to our urban cities and in the current climate these are being exacerbated. This includes local supply chain impacts, which have affected the supply of fuel and goods to and from the regions. Our farmers in regional and remote areas have been particularly impacted, not only through fuel price escalations but also through the cost and supply of fertiliser. The Government is responding to the changing conditions and

the impact on regional Australians to insulate Australia from market disruption and further supply chain shocks.

The Government has secured a deal for 250,000 tonnes of additional agricultural-grade urea to provide security for the upcoming planting season, as well as underwriting the purchase of fertiliser by the private sector to ensure availability and streamlining border processes, including reducing port clearance times. Further, initiatives such as the implementation of the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement and access to concessional loans through the Regional Investment Corporation and the Economic Resilience Program are insulating our farmers and regional businesses from the impact of tariffs and other market disruptions as well as supply chain interruptions.

The Government has more than halved the fuel excise and excise equivalent customs duties and reduced the heavy vehicle road user charge to zero for a temporary three-month period. State and territory governments will provide up to \$400.0 million to support the fuel excise reduction. In addition, this year all Australian taxpayers will see further tax cuts implemented from 1 July 2026.

- **Strengthening health systems and education outcomes for regional communities**

The Albanese Government is committed to providing support in education and health care services for regional Australians, where both cost of living and distance to key services impact on education and health outcomes.

This year’s Budget includes a number of targeted initiatives aimed at improving education and health services so that no one is left behind. Crucially, this year sees a landmark investment of an additional \$220.3 billion to be provided to public hospitals through the 2026–31 National Health Reform Agreement. The agreement provides an uplift in reporting capabilities of regional, rural and remote Local Health Networks. It also provides for an increase in culturally appropriate and safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Government’s recently announced Thriving Kids initiative will enable delivery of equitable and accessible services in regional, rural and remote locations. Together with the state and territory governments, the Albanese Government will establish new Thriving Kids services, and scale existing services, building on existing local mainstream health, early childhood and community supports.

The 2026–27 Budget continues the delivery of meaningful and targeted assistance with the cost of living for regional Australians. The Albanese Government understands the real financial pressures faced by Australian families and businesses and will always act on cost-of-living relief as a first priority. It’s why we have strengthened Medicare, opening 40 Urgent Care Clinics so far across regional Australia, and invested further in bulk billing.

- **Boosting regional housing availability**

As a priority, the Albanese Government is addressing the unique challenge of housing in regional Australia and maintaining our regions as strong, connected and well positioned to provide opportunity to those who live and work there. Housing supply, affordability and enabling infrastructure in our regions are key drivers influencing the attraction and retention of families and workers in places where they are needed most.

Responding to the growing concerns about housing security, particularly in regional Australia, the Government has an over \$47.0 billion Homes for Australia plan to build more homes, help first home buyers, and support renters. Underpinning the plan is a shared commitment to deliver 1.2 million new well-located homes by 30 June 2029 under the National Housing Accord.

The Government has prioritised regional Australians across major housing initiatives, with several programs underway that are already delivering better housing outcomes in our regions. Programs like expanding the 5% Deposit Scheme and the Help to Buy Scheme have seen new homeowners getting the keys to their own home. The Government has committed to deliver 55,000 social and affordable homes across the country. The first two rounds of the Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) are supporting the development of around 2,800 social and affordable homes in regional and remote areas, and more are expected in round three. The Social Housing Accelerator Payment is on track to deliver over 1,350 social homes in regional Australia. Responding to the concerns of regional Australia about increasing housing supply, the Albanese Government has created a new \$2.0 billion Local Infrastructure Fund under the Housing Support Program, with \$500.0 million of this fund dedicated to local infrastructure in the regions. The Government is responding to the demand for housing-enabling infrastructure, as demonstrated through the Community Enabling Infrastructure Stream of the Housing Support Program.

As important as providing equal access to health services is providing equal access to education for regional Australians. The Albanese Government is implementing new, and extending existing, initiatives in education. These range from early childhood programs such as the National Voice for Our Children – Early Years Support Program, which provides culturally safe, holistic environments that support children’s identity, wellbeing and development, while strengthening families and communities where they live, to the higher education program providing 20 medical Commonwealth Supported Places for the University of Tasmania which will help address rural and regional health workforce shortages and support general practice and primary care outcomes in northern Tasmania.

The Albanese Government will always take seriously the responsibility – and opportunity – to serve all Australians and value all Australians. We remain ambitious for regional Australia and we look to the future with the same optimism and vision which prevails in our regional communities.

**The Hon Catherine King MP**

**Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government of the Commonwealth of Australia**

**The Hon Kristy McBain MP**

**Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories**

**Minister for Emergency Management of the Commonwealth of Australia**

12 May 2026

# Guiding our Investments: Regional Investment Framework in action

The Regional Investment Framework (the Framework) continues to make investment work better for regions. The Framework supports an approach that values local voices and priorities, is informed by evidence, operates with flexibility, integrity and transparency, and coordinates across governments to leverage and maximise outcomes.

Introduced in the 2023–24 Budget, the Framework remains embedded in decision-making across government, supporting a joined-up approach to regional investment across people, places, services, industries and local economies – recognising that action across the breadth of Government portfolios is essential to meeting the needs and opportunities of Australia’s diverse regions.

As the Government advances its agenda to strengthen productivity and resilience and build Australia’s future, the Framework guides investments that ensure regional communities and local economies are engaged and empowered – building on local strengths to seize new opportunities.

Consistent with the Framework, the Government’s approach to regional investment continues to be informed by, and respond to, the voices and views of regional Australians, drawing on the knowledge and experience of local governments and regional bodies, including Regional Development Australia (RDA) committees. Strengthening links between government and on-the-ground knowledge and priorities, the Government continues to work closely with the Australia-wide network of RDA committees to support place-based development and net zero transition initiatives, and help connect communities to Commonwealth programs and priorities.

The Government is responding quickly to world events as they emerge, to alleviate the impact on regional economies and the lives of regional Australians. This year’s Budget initiatives help to support and insulate our regional businesses from fluctuations in world markets as well as ensuring regional Australians have access to the services they need. Through the Growing Regions, Thriving Suburbs and Stronger Communities Programme, the Government is investing in much needed community infrastructure in our regions to support community connectivity, social cohesion and liveability. The Framework continues to inform Government decision-making to ensure that together with support for local government, the necessary investments are made so that regional Australia continues to grow and prosper, delivering long-term financial stability.

## Investing in services

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

Across all Budgets since October 2022, the Government has invested in the services regional Australians rely on, including through making healthcare more accessible and affordable. The Government is building on the success of the Medicare Urgent Care Clinics program (Medicare UCCs), ensuring that regional, rural and remote locations benefit from ongoing access to urgent care. With 47 new clinics already open in regional communities, including recent openings in Whyalla, Cairns North, and Nowra, Medicare UCCs are taking pressure off the hospital system. The historic investment in bulk billing continues, with 3,700 Medicare bulk-billing medical practices now registered. The Government is ensuring these investments are supported by the healthcare workforce needed, with 166 new Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) for medical students since 2022.

The Government continues to build on the transformational reforms to the aged care system cemented through the *Aged Care Act 2024*. It will ensure dignity and equitable access for older Australians in regional and rural communities.

The Government is keeping regional Australia connected, with 1.5 million premises upgraded to NBN fixed wireless and satellite services by December 2025, including 660,000 premises in regional areas. The Government is committed to Closing the Gap Target 17, which aims for equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians. In 2025, it was announced that 53 remote communities will receive free Wi-Fi services as part of the contestable First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program.

Budget measures have also delivered services to regional veterans and their families, delivering on recommendations of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide. Services such as the regional Veterans' and Families' Hubs and the Veterans' Access Network are strengthening community connections and improving outcomes for veterans and families outside metropolitan centres.

Through the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), the Government is supporting regional Australia to prepare for and respond to disasters and is committed to reducing the disproportionate impact of natural hazards on regional communities. During 2025, NEMA provided support to 206 local government areas during 76 disaster events, the majority in regional areas.

The 2026–27 Budget builds on these foundations, ensuring regional Australians have improved and more equitable access to the services they need.

- The Australian Government has provided additional funding of \$20.8 million in 2025–26 and 2026–27 through the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025–26* and the 2026–27 Budget for the Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme to support the continued operation of the scheme.
- Funding of \$3.9 million in 2026–27 has been granted in the Budget over one year to continue funding the national elder abuse peak body, frontline services such as 1800ELDERHelp (national hotline) and Compass.info (national knowledge hub), and policy oversight for the second National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People and the first Action Plan to implement it.

- The Government will provide \$2.3 million over two years from 2025–26 to continue the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) – National Voice for our Children Early Years Support Program until 31 December 2026. The program provides tailored support to Aboriginal community controlled organisations delivering early years services in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia. First Nations community-controlled early learning services provide culturally safe, holistic environments that support children’s identity, wellbeing and development, while strengthening families and communities where they live.
- The Government will provide additional funding of \$312.1 million over five years from 2025–26 (and \$35.9 million per year ongoing) to help deliver a strengthened employment services system and support future reform.
- A new Commonwealth Government investment of \$2.0 billion (to be matched with funding from states and territories) for Thriving Kids will ensure children aged eight and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs can access the support they need outside of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), including children in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- A landmark investment of an additional \$25.0 billion will be provided to public hospitals through the 2026–2031 National Health Reform Agreement. This investment will ensure that Australians experience shorter waiting lists and will reduce emergency department wait times regardless of their location. It will also provide uplifts in reporting capabilities for regional, rural and remote Local Health Networks, and provisions for an uplift in culturally appropriate and safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- The Government is providing \$31.1 million over three years from 2026–27 to extend the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program to people aged 45–49. It will ensure Australians continue to have access to a free mail-out screening test that can be completed at home, reducing geographic and service-access barriers and supporting earlier detection of bowel cancer in high-risk populations. This measure delivers significant benefits for people aged 45–49 living in regional and remote Australia. The program reduces reliance on specialist services in regional areas, contributing to more equitable health outcomes for regional and remote communities.
- The Government is providing \$18.9 million over three years from 2026–27 to increase funding for 13YARN, the national, culturally safe crisis support service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The increased investment will extend availability and establish a text messaging service, enabling more First Nations people to access culturally safe crisis counselling.
- The Government is providing an additional \$44.4 million over four years from 2025–26 to extend the Birthing on Country program. Birthing on Country provides culturally safe maternal care to 1,100 mothers and their babies each year.
- The Government has committed ongoing funding of \$1.8 billion over five years from 2025–26 and \$579.6 million per year ongoing from 2030–31 for Medicare Urgent Care

Clinics (UCCs). Building on the success of the program, a total of 137 Medicare UCCs will be embedded as a permanent fixture of the primary care landscape. Medicare UCCs provide accessible and affordable urgent care services across Australia. Once all clinics have been established, there will be a total of 47 Medicare UCCs supporting communities in regional, rural and remote Australia.

- The Government is investing a further \$25.3 million over three years from 2026–27 to establish up to six new fully bulk billing general practices in the Central Coast, Newcastle, Lake Macquarie and Hunter regions. This investment will increase regional bulk billing rates and support improved access to affordable care in an area with historically low bulk billing rates. This funding will uplift access to affordable primary care for residents in these regions.
- The Government has committed \$598.3 million over two years from 2026–27 to continue operating the My Health Record system. This investment will also deliver targeted initiatives to support more reliable and timely access to information for all Australians and their healthcare providers. Timely access to shared health information empowers patients and supports safe, connected care for all Australians, including those living in regional areas, who often navigate care across dispersed providers, locations and increasingly, through virtual models of care.
- The Government has committed funding for the operation and sustainment of the new national cell broadcast messaging system, known as AusAlert. From October 2026, AusAlert will provide Australia’s first responders and communities with a faster, more secure and reliable public warning system, using modern cell broadcast technology to deliver geographically targeted warning information during emergencies and disasters.
- The Government is investing in the National Measurement Institute (NMI), Australia’s national measurement authority, to provide trusted measurement for a fair, safe and productive Australia. Continued investment in NMI capabilities will ensure that quality services are accessibly delivered and that regional industries and economies are positioned for sustainable growth.
- The Government has committed \$842.6 million over six years from the 2025–26 Budget for the Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. This funding supports essential services and community safety while enabling locally designed solutions that improve service effectiveness and support economic participation in remote communities.
- The Government has committed \$32.7 million over three years from 2026–27 to expand the Stores Efficiency and Resilience Package, building on the successful \$11.8 million initiative from the 2023–24 Budget which supported 25 remote stores. Under this expansion, up to an additional 75 remote stores will be able to maintain adequate stock levels and improve food security during periods of transport disruption or natural disaster, such as seasonal power outages and adverse weather events.

- The Government has committed \$48.3 million over two years from 2026–27 to support the ongoing delivery of critical, culturally safe short-term accommodation services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Aboriginal Hostels Limited.
- The Government has committed \$218.3 million over five years from 2025–26 to deliver a package of initial actions under *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036*. The majority of the funding will support the establishment of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation across the country to deliver community-led specialist support services that help families who are experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence. The funding will provide culturally safe, frontline services tailored to local needs including expanding access to crisis accommodation for women and children, healing supports for children and young people, early intervention services, and men’s wellness centres.
- The Government is investing \$39.0 million over four years from 2026–27 and \$10.0 million per year ongoing to expand the reach and availability of specialised financial counselling services to address the impacts of gambling harm. These services support people who are experiencing financial hardship as a result of gambling harm to address their financial problems, make informed choices and build long-term financial capability. Additional funding for specialist gambling financial counselling services will ensure broader coverage across a greater number of regions.

## Investing in industries and local economies

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

The Government has worked to support the long-term strength of regional industries and economies – recognising the importance of Australia’s regions in transitioning to a net zero economy and continuing to provide the produce and resources that feed and strengthen the nation.

This includes the Government’s joint investment with the South Australian Government to support the long-term future of the steelworks and to support workers and the community in Whyalla.

Investments in supporting industry, such as establishing the Net Zero Economy Authority will help to ensure workers, industries and communities can seize the opportunities of Australia’s net zero transformation. The Government has provided \$1.0 billion over 11 years from 2029–30 to decarbonise aluminium production at the Boyne Island Aluminium Smelter in Gladstone, and \$15.0 billion for the National Reconstruction Fund (NRF). The NRF has made five investments valued at \$351.0 million including support for advancing economic and social benefits for regional Australia.

Significant support has also been provided for the growth of emerging sectors like critical minerals and hydrogen, through initiatives including Resourcing Australia’s Prosperity. These initiatives are driving growth and productivity, including across traditional regional sectors like agriculture. The Government has invested an additional \$1.0 billion in loan funding through the Regional Investment Corporation, and through the new Drought Hardship Loan which opened on 31 March 2026.

The 2026–27 Budget continues the Government’s strategic support for strong and sustainable regional economies and Australian businesses across the country.

- The Government is investing \$23.8 million over four years from 2026–27, and a further \$6.1 million in ongoing funding to sustain the department’s critical non-regulatory agricultural trade technical market access functions. This supports Australia’s agricultural, fishery and forestry exports, which are valued at over \$83.0 billion annually. These investments not only support the stability of market access but ensure the flow-on effects benefit those in the manufacturing, transport and agriculture sectors.
- The Government is investing \$45.1 million over four years from 2026–27 to 2029–30, and a further \$11.4 million in ongoing funding to sustain specialised international leadership and standard-setting activities that support Australia’s agricultural trade sector. Delivering these activities supports Australia’s place in the international agriculture market and ensures that Australia continues to play an enduring role in international agricultural leadership.
- The Government has committed \$8.9 million in 2026–27 to provide essential funding to the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme. The ACCU Scheme provides abatement opportunities by incentivising voluntary carbon abatement activities. It is nation-wide and encompasses regional economies and communities. Many landholders benefit from the diversified income offered by ACCU Scheme projects.
- The Government has provided \$28.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to support the transition of forestry operations under Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) to new regulatory arrangements under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Following reforms to national environment laws, the RFA exemption under the EPBC Act will sunset from 1 July 2027, bringing RFA forestry operations under the same environmental standards and legislative requirements that apply to other industries. The governments of New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia have RFAs in place with the Commonwealth. The funding will help these jurisdictions progress an approval pathway for RFA forestry. This will provide stronger environmental protections alongside regulatory certainty, supporting a sustainable and prosperous future for the timber and forestry industries, which mainly operate in regional areas.
- The Government has committed \$36.9 million over two years from 2026–27 to deliver robust, accessible and timely environmental offsets through the Nature Repair Market. Supporting a well-functioning Nature Repair Market will create opportunities for land managers and First Nations people across regional Australia, as well as private

investors and corporates looking to have a positive environmental impact. The market will allow land managers to optimise land use and diversify revenue streams. This will unlock economic productivity benefits through increased Nature Repair Market participation. To support supply and demand of market projects, this measure includes capability building and targeted engagement to support informed participation by landholders, First Nations people, intermediaries and investors.

- The Government has invested \$176.0 million in partnership with Ocius to deliver a fleet of Bluebottle uncrewed surface vehicles over the next five years. Bluebottles will provide the Royal Australian Navy with near-persistent long-range surface intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. The Bluebottle fleet will be manufactured in Sydney with support from an additional facility in the Hunter region (New South Wales). The Hunter facility will create approximately 15 jobs and provide around \$11.0 million in economic benefits.
- The Government has invested \$754.0 million over three years until the end of 2028–29 with Boeing Defence Australia to further the MQ-28A Ghost Bat capability. Boeing Defence Australia will design improvements to the MQ-28A Ghost Bat and support the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to transition it into service. The contract also provides for the manufacture of six additional operational Block 2 MQ-28A aircraft, and development of an enhanced Block 3 prototype, bringing the RAAF's MQ-28A Ghost Bat fleet to ten by 2030. Boeing's new production facility at Wellcamp, Toowoomba, will manufacture at least one of the new Block 2 MQ-28A Ghost Bats.
- On 24 March 2026, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the conclusion of the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement (A-EU FTA) negotiations. The A-EU FTA will deliver benefits to businesses, producers, and consumers in regional Australia, through opportunities to diversify and expand Australia's trade to a high-income market of 450 million people.
  - The Government has committed \$38.6 million over four years from 2026–27 and \$7.1 million per year ongoing to enable Australia to implement commitments entered into under the A-EU FTA. This includes ensuring that Australian exporters are able to fully utilise the new and improved access to the EU market.
- The Government has committed \$9.2 million over two years from 2026–27 to expand the Go Global Toolkit to continue to support businesses across regional and metropolitan Australia to diversify their exports and take full advantage of Australia's free trade agreements. The Go Global Toolkit is an integral part of Austrade's trade services delivery model and response to tariff threats and trade disruptions. The expansion will focus on delivering enhanced interactive and tailored market information and integrated digital trade services, to assist more Australian businesses to start exporting and diversify into new markets.
- The \$15.0 billion National Reconstruction Fund Corporation (NRFC) facilitates increased flows of finance into the Australian economy through targeted investment in manufacturing businesses. The Government has announced three new sub-funds

delivered by the NRFC offering concessional finance. The \$1.0 billion Economic Resilience Program, \$5.0 billion Net Zero Fund, and \$150.0 million Forestry Growth Fund will expand the scope of support available to Australian businesses, including those in regional Australia.

- The Australian Government, alongside the South Australian Government, is providing support to finalise the Whyalla Steelworks administration process and to support its transition to a sustainable future. This will help to preserve Australia’s sovereign steelmaking capability and advance our transition to green iron and steel. It will also provide benefits to the region as well as the state and national economies.
- The Government has committed \$1.0 billion over 11 years from 2029–30 to support green aluminium at Boyne Island Aluminium Smelter in Gladstone. This commitment, along with commitments from the Queensland Government and Rio Tinto, will secure the long-term future of Australia’s second largest aluminium smelter and support the Government’s commitment to green metals under the Future Made in Australia agenda.
- The Government is funding the Australian Space Agency to maintain its regulatory function, continue developing international partnerships, and lead whole-of-government civil space-related policy. Many space industry facilities and private sector industry participants are located in regional Australia, providing job opportunities and demand for goods and services in regional cities and towns, as well as in remote areas of the country.
- The Government is progressing the 2022–23 October Budget commitment of \$440.0 million planned equity to support development of Regional Logistic Hubs in the Northern Territory by releasing \$10.0 million of this funding to the National Intermodal Corporation in 2026–27 to progress further project planning.
- The Government has delivered a \$2.9 billion package to more than halve fuel excise and excise-equivalent customs duties (excise) and reduced the heavy vehicle road user charge to zero for a temporary three-month period, providing relief for regional communities and industries that are more fuel exposed and helping to keep freight and essential supplies moving and supporting regional productivity. In total, the rate of excise on fuels like petrol and diesel has been reduced from 52.6 to 20.6 cents per litre, cutting the cost of a 65-litre tank of fuel by nearly \$23.
  - The Government has directed the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission to intensify fuel price monitoring, with weekly public reporting including coverage of more than 190 regional locations.

## Investing in people

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

The Government has been supporting regional Australians with cost-of-living relief, including through energy bill relief for every regional household, delivering over \$684.0 million back into people’s pockets through cheaper Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme medicines, and reducing the Higher Education Loan Program debt of more than 3 million Australians, many in regional locations. The Government is delivering on investment in education and skills development, including through the Regional University Study Hubs program, which is currently supporting over 6,400 students, including 622 First Nations students. With 56 Hubs now located across regional Australia (including 53 located in regional, 12 in remote and 19 in very remote Australia), regional students are being supported to progress their education in their home town. Additionally, over 252,900 Free TAFE enrolments have been taken up in regional and remote Australia between January 2023 and December 2025, improving skills development and workforce outcomes across regional Australia and ensuring no one is held back and no one is left behind.

The Government is also working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in progressing the Closing the Gap agenda, including through investing in improving access to affordable and nutritious food in remote communities and strengthening remote store governance.

The 2026–27 Budget continues investment in the people of regional Australia through initiatives that help with cost-of-living pressures, support access to education and training, and strengthen social supports, through:

- enhanced training for law enforcement – building police capability when responding to victims and survivors of family, domestic, and sexual violence (FDSV), increasing awareness of coercive control and improving recognition of indicators that help identify the subtler behaviours of FDSV, such as technology-facilitated abuse.
- \$300.0 million over ten years in partnership with CAE Australia to deliver a contemporary, immersive and scalable air mission training system for the RAAF. This investment will upgrade training systems that support initial training for personnel operating the RAAF’s advanced air and ground-based capabilities and deliver a new regionally based facility for the Air Mission Training School.
- \$5.0 million over four years from 2025–26 to help build the capacity of teaching assistants and teachers in regional and remote Australia. To build this local regional capacity, the Government committed this funding to Good to Great Schools Australia.
- \$5.8 million to extend higher Parliament and Civics Education Rebate levels for schools in regional and disadvantaged areas for a further two years from 2025–26. The program supports educational visits to national democratic, historical and cultural institutions in Canberra.
- \$113.0 million to support First Nations education outcomes and continue to maintain a genuine commitment to ensuring that First Nations students can thrive academically and culturally, including through \$30.0 million to extend funding to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation for a further two calendar years from 2027,

\$55.5 million to extend funding to the Clontarf Foundation for two calendar years from 2027, \$2.2 million in additional support for the First Nations Languages Education Program over 2026–27, \$23.8 million to extend Indigenous Boarding Provider Grants for one calendar year to December 2027, and \$1.5 million to extend the First Nations Education – MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) program for one calendar year in 42 regional and remote primary schools with a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

- 20 additional medical CSPs per year at the University of Tasmania from 2026 to support enhanced primary care. These additional CSPs will help address rural and regional health workforce shortages and support general practice and primary care outcomes in northern Tasmania.
- reforms to the apprenticeship system, delivering savings of \$266.2 million over four years in response to findings of the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System. This will include implementing a revised methodology for the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List to better target incentives at key Government priorities.
- \$27.0 million over three years from 2026–27 (and an additional \$3.0 million in 2029–30) to expand the TAFE Technology Fund to support mobile vocational education and training delivery in remote First Nations communities.
- support for refugees and humanitarian entrants through early-intervention, targeted settlement services designed to achieve positive settlement outcomes, including in regional areas, to enhance economic participation and longer-term integration which in turn will have a positive impact on social cohesion.
- \$27.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to support the continuation of the Protecting Migrant Workers – Information and Education grant program, which delivers targeted information and education for migrant workers and their employers, many of whom are in regional towns, on migration-related workplace rights and obligations.
- \$2.8 million over four years from 2026–27 in Questacon to help take its Travelling Exhibits Program into regional and remote Western Australia – bringing interactive science, technology and mathematics programs into more regional venues. The Government will also contribute \$100.0 million over four years from 2026–27 in funding to build a new, upgraded Scitech Discovery Centre in Perth, conditional on co-investment by the Western Australian Government.
- \$299.0 million over four years from 2026–27 to double the scale of the Remote Jobs and Economic Development program from 3,000 to 6,000 jobs by 2030. The investment supports sustainable, long-term employment by increasing workforce participation and strengthening skills development and capability building, contributing to improved social and economic outcomes for individuals, families and communities across remote Australia.

- extension of the Local Sporting Champions and Local Para Champions programs (\$8.0 million in 2026–27). Over 40 per cent of program recipients are from rural and regional areas (where costs are higher to attend competition).
- extension of the Sporting Schools program (\$36.3 million in 2026–27). More than one-third of schools supported are in regional areas and five per cent are in remote areas.

## Investing in places

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

The Government has recognised and responded to the importance of place in impactful regional investment, including through transparent regional community infrastructure programs like:

- the Growing Regions and Thriving Suburbs programs, which together are provided with an additional \$750.0 million over four years from 2026–27. These programs will provide funding of between \$250,000 and \$15.0 million to projects that enable place-based benefits. Investing in broad-use community-focused infrastructure that creates and enhances amenity, and in venues where programs and activities can be held that encourage connection and a sense of belonging and identity, contributes to improved social cohesion and liveability throughout regional Australia.
- the Stronger Communities Programme, which continues to support small-scale capital projects that enable and encourage community participation and help build vibrant, connected and resilient communities throughout Australia’s regions. With a \$22.5 million funding commitment over two years from 2026–27, Round 10 of this program will provide funding between \$2,500 to \$20,000 to small-scale projects that deliver direct benefits to communities and support local government–community partnership.
- supporting housing availability and affordability through the \$47.0 billion Homes for Australia plan, funding critical infrastructure to unlock regional housing through the Housing Support Program and delivering more social and affordable homes in the regions through the Housing Australia Future Fund.
- expansion of the 5% Deposit Scheme to help more Australians buy their first home sooner, with all regional first home buyers now having access to the scheme with no caps on places or incomes.

The Government also continues to prepare for, respond to, and support recovery from climate-related natural hazards like bushfires, heatwaves, storms and floods.

The 2026–27 Budget continues the Government’s targeted approach to making regions better places to live, work and invest.

- Deployment of consumer energy resources (CER) has been proportionally higher in regional areas. The Government has provided \$97.2 million over five years from 2025–26 to continue implementing the National Consumer Energy Resources Roadmap to help consumers save on bills and benefit from the energy transition, including establishing a National Technical Regulator. The National Technical Regulator will provide increased electricity security, reliability and affordability by enhancing the interoperability of CER devices.
- The Government has committed \$13.3 million in 2026–27 to maintain the capability of Australia’s National Greenhouse Accounts (NGA). The NGA provides authoritative and transparent information on Australia’s historical and projected greenhouse gas emissions data, covering all sectors of Australia’s economy – including regional economies and communities. The funding commitment will support Australian landholders’ continued participation in the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme by maintaining low-cost land sector models and tools. It will also maintain all Australians’ access to free NGA datasets and tools to understand Australia’s emissions and progress towards national emission reduction targets.
- The Government has provided \$250.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to establish the National Environmental Protection Agency (National EPA) from 1 July 2026, with funding from 2028–29 to be announced once bilateral approval agreements are in place with states and territories. Once fully delivered, the National EPA will result in positive outcomes for business, regional communities, First Nations communities, and the environment.
- The Government has provided \$13.2 million over two years from 2026–27 to establish the new restoration contribution system under reformed national environment law. The restoration contributions system will deliver better outcomes for regional communities through a simplified process for environmental offsets. This will reduce uncertainty and delays for proponents and enable faster approvals for the delivery of essential projects such as housing.
- The Government is providing \$110.8 million over two years from 2026–27 to extend the Saving Native Species program, in support of saving Australia’s most imperilled native species. Guided by the Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–32, the program has delivered compelling outcomes to date. The program extension will strengthen and expand critical actions to safeguard many of Australia’s most vulnerable native plants and animals, including interventions for species at high risk of extinction. Increased investment in First Nations communities through projects will support employment and First Nations-led biodiversity recovery, strengthening cultural connections, self-determination, and care for Country.
- The Government is investing \$91.8 million over two years from 2026–27 to build on and accelerate outcomes under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan. This funding will deliver benefits for regional and coastal Queensland by improving the health and resilience of marine ecosystems that underpin Reef-dependent communities and industries. Continuation of locally driven restoration projects that involve citizen scientists and Reef Traditional Owners will create local jobs.

- Through the Defence Integrated Investment Program, the Australian Government is providing facilities and infrastructure at the Puckapunyal Military Area in Victoria to support the operation and maintenance of long-range fire capability at a value of \$3.0 million. The scope includes new and refurbished training, storage and maintenance facilities. This project is scheduled for completion in late 2028.
- The Government will provide \$144.1 million over two years from 2026–27 to meet the outstanding urgent infrastructure needs of the Aboriginal community controlled health services sector. The funding will deliver new or renovated health clinics and associated housing for health professionals to address seriously deteriorating or non-existent infrastructure, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- The Government is supporting a capital works program for the Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP), located in the Geelong region of Victoria – the ACDP Part Life Refit – with funding commencing from 2026–27 for four years.
- The Government has committed to deliver Australia’s host country infrastructure obligations for the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) observatory project. For regional Western Australia, the construction of the host country infrastructure will create jobs and generate business supplier activity. The Government’s investment in the SKA project is already realising economic benefits, with over 1,000 people employed on the project and over \$700.0 million contracted to Australian companies, many working in regional and remote areas on the construction of the telescope.
- The Government will create a new \$2.0 billion Local Infrastructure Fund under the Housing Support Program, to help local governments and state-owned utilities build critical ‘last mile’ infrastructure to unlock new housing. This targeted funding will unlock development-ready land and improve the feasibility of new housing projects, by providing water, sewer and electricity connections, with a focus on regional Australia. As part of this funding, \$500.0 million will be dedicated to local infrastructure in the regions. The first funding round will open later this year, with a second round to follow in 2027.
- The Government will provide \$59.4 million to provide states and territories with funding for community housing providers to supplement rental income for social housing for over 4,000 eligible young people, aged 16–24, who are in receipt of the Away from Home rate of Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY and who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. This will benefit eligible young people in regional and remote Australia, who made up almost half of 16–24 year olds presenting alone to specialist homelessness services in 2024–25.
- The Government is continuing to invest in road and rail projects that build connections between Australia’s regions, communities and major gateways for agriculture, tourism, resources, retail and manufacturing. Through the 2026–27 Budget, the Government is making an investment towards new projects in the Infrastructure Investment Program which will improve productivity and resilience, liveability and sustainability in regional Australia, including:

- \$24.0 million towards Bagot Road Safety and Capacity Upgrades in the Northern Territory
- \$4.0 million towards the Great Northern Highway Improvements – Broome to Kununurra in Western Australia.
- The Government is providing an additional \$20.6 million per annum, indexed and ongoing, to South Australia to support the delivery of priority local road projects, improving safety, freight efficiency and connectivity for regional communities. The additional investment supports the timely delivery of road upgrades that are critical to regional productivity and access to markets, services and employment.
- The Government has provided \$659.6 million over three years for the High Speed Rail Authority to commence a development phase for a high speed rail service between Newcastle and Sydney. The development phase will further develop the design, cost and schedule for the project. This funding maintains the Government’s momentum towards delivery of high speed rail for Australia.
- The Government is committing \$1.8 billion in additional funding towards the Australian Rail Track Corporation’s Network Investment Program, representing a total combined investment of \$2.79 billion in the program. This investment will improve the productivity, reliability and resilience of the existing rail network and prioritise the improvements that can be made to the rail network used today.

## Regional Investment Framework

### Purpose

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

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

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

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

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

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

### Implementation

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



# Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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

Agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries play an integral part in the continued prosperity, growth and security of regional Australia. In this context, the Australian Government recognises that farm businesses face many risks, including droughts, pests and diseases, and market disruptions. By committing an additional \$1.0 billion in loan funding through the Regional Investment Corporation (RIC), the Government is ensuring farmers and producers can continue to access concessional lending during times of need. Through the RIC, the Government continues to support eligible farm businesses when they need further assistance, including through the new Drought Hardship Loan, which opened on 31 March 2026.

The Government has progressed a new RIC concessional loan product for marine harmful algal blooms and marine heatwaves, which will assist South Australian wild-catch fishers and aquaculture operators affected by recent algal blooms. The Government has also announced it will broaden the RIC's loan scope to include assistance for improving climate resilience, boosting sector productivity and supporting agriculture to be part of Australia's net zero transition.

The Government is building on previous investments in Australia's forestry industry by establishing a \$300.0 million Forestry Growth Fund. This funding will support more secure jobs and provide opportunities to future-proof and improve the sustainability of the industry. Through this continued investment, and by designating the forestry industry as a priority under the Government's Future Made in Australia plan, the Government recognises the industry's integral role in supporting communities across regional Australia.

Australia continues to be at the forefront of premium agricultural exports, and the Government is committed to maintaining and growing access to international markets. The Government is providing ongoing funding to strengthen export arrangements and Australia's leadership role in agricultural trade. The Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry plays a critical role in international negotiations, especially to reduce technical barriers to trade and ensure rules related to food safety, biosecurity, religious beliefs and environmental sustainability are science and risk based. This is an essential step in gaining and maintaining market access.

International markets are vital to economic growth in regional Australia as exports account for around 80 per cent of our agricultural, fisheries and forestry production value. Supporting the maintenance of international relationships in an uncertain geopolitical climate ensures the portfolio continues to advocate for Australian exports on the international stage and further enables the Government's commitment to support economic participation of regional communities.

In this ever-shifting landscape, agricultural exports are the engine that sustains jobs, incomes and local economies across regional Australia. As a result, the Government remains responsive to secure both market access, and the interests of Australian farmers, fishers and foresters. Funding handed down in the 2026–27 Budget for these initiatives will strengthen the sector, drive diversification, and better manage risk in an uncertain global environment – helping to maintain the security and resilience of regional industries and local economies.

## **New initiatives**

### **Delivering maintenance, restoration and enhancements to market access for Australian agriculture**

The Government is investing \$23.8 million over four years from 2026–27 (and \$6.1 million per year ongoing) to sustain the department’s critical non-regulatory agricultural trade technical market access functions, supporting Australian agricultural, fishery and forestry exports valued at over \$83.0 billion per year. As markets become increasingly complex, these trade functions perform critical tasks in securing trade agreements with international markets and boosting agricultural productivity and supply chain flexibility, as well as promoting investment and innovation in agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries. These functions not only support the stability of market access but ensure that the flow-on effects favour those in the manufacturing, transport, farming and regional sectors that rely on this trade to occur.

### **International agricultural leadership and standard setting**

The Government is investing \$45.1 million over four years from 2026–27 (and \$11.4 million per year ongoing) to sustain specialised international leadership and standard-setting activities that support Australia’s agricultural trade. Funding delivered in this Budget will enable the department to continue to advocate for Australian agriculture and influence the rules and standards that underpin market access on the world stage. This will help keep international markets open and secure, and reduce regulatory burden through unifying standards, while continuing to strengthen relationships with key trading partners at a time of increasing uncertainty in the international trade environment. Delivering these activities supports Australia’s place in the international agriculture market and ensures Australia continues to play an enduring role in international agricultural leadership.

# Attorney-General's

The Attorney-General's portfolio delivers programs and policies to improve law and justice outcomes, ensuring that Australia's legal and justice frameworks are responsive to the unique needs of regional, rural, and remote Australia.

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

The portfolio continues to support regional and remote communities through the funding of services such as the Family Violence and Cross-examination of Parties Scheme and services under the Protecting the Rights of Older Australians measure addressing elder abuse, ensuring essential protections are accessible to all. Complementing these frontline services is the strengthening of regulatory systems that regions rely upon, such as the national training for law enforcement on family, domestic and sexual violence (FSDV) and the Working with Children Checks (WWCC) reform. These investments reflect a nationally coordinated, evidence-based approach across jurisdictions that ensures regional areas remain integrated within the broader safety net and are not disadvantaged or left behind.

## Existing initiatives

### Family Violence and Cross-examination of Parties Scheme

The Australian Government has provided additional funding of \$20.8 million in 2025–26 and 2026–27 through the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025–26* and the 2026–27 Budget for the Family Violence and Cross-Examination of Parties Scheme (the Scheme) to support the continued operation of the Scheme.

The *Family Law Act 1975* (Cth) and *Family Court Act 1997* (WA) ban on direct cross-examination protects victim-survivors of FDSV from having to personally cross-examine, or be directly cross-examined by, perpetrators in Australian family law proceedings. To facilitate this, the Scheme funds state and territory legal aid commissions to provide legal representation to self-represented litigants in matters before the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia or the Family Court of Western Australia, where the ban applies. Since its commencement in 2019, the Scheme has provided essential legal representation to approximately 8,400 individuals in family law matters.

The legislative ban and the Scheme ensure statutory protections and access to legal representation, particularly for women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and those in regional and remote communities, who are disproportionately affected by family

violence. It supports trauma-informed and culturally safe delivery of legal services and helps maintain court efficiency and equitable outcomes in high-risk, resource-constrained regional settings. It also aligns with the Regional Investment Framework to the extent that it prioritises continuity of legal services in regional areas.

### **Enhancing National Training for Law Enforcement on Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence (FDSV)**

The Enhancing National Training for Law Enforcement on FDSV package focuses on building police capability when responding to victims and survivors of FDSV, increasing awareness of coercive control and improving recognition of indicators that help identify the subtler behaviours of FDSV, such as technology-facilitated abuse. It employs virtual reality and 360-degree videos to deliver victim-centred training in an immersive and interactive format. National training is rolling out from April 2026 onwards through facilitated face-to-face, facilitated face-to-screen and online self-paced modalities.

### **Protecting the Rights of Older Australians**

The Government is continuing to provide support to protect the rights of older Australians including through funding of \$3.9 million in 2026–27 for the continuation of initiatives under the National Plan to End the Abuse and Mistreatment of Older People 2026–3036. This includes funding to the national elder abuse peak body, the national elder abuse hotline 1800ELDERHelp and the national elder abuse knowledge hub (Compass.info). Many of these services are based in or service regional, rural and remote communities. These services are for older people who are at risk of or experiencing abuse and mistreatment. The services support older people and their families.

1800ELDERHelp is a single Australia-wide, free and confidential phone line that automatically redirects callers to a help line in the state or territory from where the call originated, making it easier for callers to access relevant local information, support and referrals. Compass.info is a national website that helps people navigating the complex issue of elder abuse in Australia by providing trusted, evidence-based information and advice. The site's service directory helps people across Australia to find the right services for their needs.

### **Working with Children Checks**

In the 2025–26 MYEFO, the Government provided \$36.8 million over four years from 2025–26 (and \$2.4 million in 2029–30) to reform WWCCs with states and territories. This includes \$0.5 million in 2025–26 to the Attorney-General's Department to enable the National Office of Child Safety to continue work on national child safety arrangements and implement the National Standards for Working with Children Checks.

The Government has granted a one-year extension of funding of \$0.4 million in the 2026–27 Budget to continue work to prevent all forms of child abuse and maltreatment, including child sexual abuse, in organisational settings and continue development of a nationally consistent approach to WWCCs.

The investment in WWCC reform has positive implications for regional populations. Improving inter- and intra-jurisdiction information sharing and progressing mutual recognition of WWCCs will support greater workforce mobility across state and territory borders. Streamlined, portable screening arrangements will reduce duplication, costs and delays and make it easier for appropriately screened workers and volunteers to undertake roles in regional areas. These benefits will be especially evident in cross-border communities such as Albury–Wodonga, Echuca–Moama, Queanbeyan–Canberra and Coolangatta–Tweed Heads, where workers currently need to obtain multiple WWCCs to work across neighbouring towns despite operating in a single regional labour market.



# Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

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

The conflict in the Middle East has impacted on energy supply chains and households across the world and across Australia, with regional supply chains coming under particular pressure. This crisis has emphasised the criticality of electrifying the nation and building Australia's sovereign capability through renewables. Regional Australia has the opportunity to lead in and benefit from tackling the dual crises of energy security and climate action.

The new Australian Strategic Fuel Reserve of around 1 billion litres will ensure the Government can quickly direct fuel that our regions need to where it's needed in the event of a severe or prolonged fuel shock. Extending the Dealership and Repairer Initiative for Vehicle Electrification Nationally (DRIVEN) program will also ensure regional Australia can access the benefits of electric vehicles. Together these programs will deliver cross-sector benefits in the regional energy and transport systems, and secure reliable and lower cost electricity for consumers. Establishing a National Technical Regulator will ensure that the solar panels and home batteries installed across Australia, provide the best value for money. Reforms and continuous improvements to the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme will deepen the scheme's integrity, enabling material benefits for regional Australia. Investment in Australia's National Greenhouse Accounts will ensure regional Australians can continue to access emissions data and low-cost models and tools that make it easier to participate in the ACCU Scheme.

Establishing the National Environmental Protection Agency (National EPA) is key to delivering the central architecture of the Australian Government's 2025 landmark environmental law reforms. The reforms will deliver stronger protections, faster project approvals and more transparency in a way that is better for the environment and better for business. The National EPA will also play an important role in supporting Australia's economic growth and productivity, by helping to speed up approvals for projects important to our nation's future prosperity, like housing, renewables and critical minerals projects.

The sustainable management of Australia’s environment and water resources is essential to the culture and prosperity of regional communities and economies. Supporting sustainable land use is vital to our regions, with our agriculture and rural industries underpinning regional employment and economic growth. Our work to minimise climate-based threats and support ecosystem recovery and resilience is also pivotal in protecting the natural capital we depend on. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Great Barrier Reef, where continued and targeted investment is ensuring the Reef and its communities are increasingly climate-ready. Key achievements of the portfolio include cracking down on feral animals and weeds, increasing private investment in nature, expanding Australia’s National Reserve System and marine parks, protecting our iconic nature and ecosystem services that benefit regional communities, and improving water security.

The portfolio continues to support First Nations groups to protect precious land and sea through the expanded Indigenous Protected Areas program, ongoing support for our beloved National Parks, and protecting cultural heritage through national and world heritage protections. These initiatives, including expansion of the highly successful Ghost Nets Initiative, First Nations-led biodiversity recovery through the extended Saving Native Species (SNS) program, and the introduction of two new savanna fire carbon credit methods, will increase opportunities for First Nations peoples to participate in an economy that recognises the value of First Nations knowledge and connection with Country, while creating job opportunities to protect and manage these important places and values.

## **New initiatives**

### **Climate change and energy**

#### **Driving the Nation – Dealership and Repairer Initiative for Vehicle Electrification Nationally (DRIVEN)**

The DRIVEN program is the Government’s flagship initiative supporting the automotive industry’s transition to electric vehicles. The Government is expanding DRIVEN to provide more comprehensive support for dealerships, service centres and electric vehicle repairers. The expansion broadens the program to include workshop fit out expenses targeted to support the industry to sell, service and repair electric vehicles, safely and at a scale aligned with increased demand. By strengthening local automotive businesses and expanding charging and repair capability including in regional areas, DRIVEN supports local jobs, improves the automotive sectors resilience, and ensures regional Australians can confidently purchase, service and repair electric vehicles close to home, delivering lasting benefits for regional communities.

#### **Establishing the National Technical Regulator for Consumer Energy Resources**

Deployment of consumer energy resources has been proportionally higher in regional areas. The Government has provided \$97.2 million over five years from 2025–26 to continue implementing the National Consumer Energy Resources Roadmap to help consumers save on bills and benefit from the energy transition, including establishing a National Technical Regulator to develop, coordinate and streamline regulation of consumer energy resources.

## **National Greenhouse Accounts**

The Government has committed \$13.3 million in 2026–27 to maintain the capability of Australia’s National Greenhouse Accounts (NGA). The NGA provides authoritative and transparent information on Australia’s historical and projected greenhouse gas emissions data, covering all sectors of Australia’s economy – including regional economies and communities. It is a critical tool for targeting, monitoring and refining policies and investments to support new green industries and achieve an orderly and efficient transition to net zero emissions by 2050 that shares the benefits across the country, including regional Australia. The funding commitment will support Australian land holders’ and First Nations communities’ continued participation in the ACCU Scheme by maintaining low-cost land sector models and tools. It will also maintain all Australians’ access to free NGA datasets and tools to understand Australia’s emissions and progress towards national emission reduction targets.

## **Ensuring the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme supports essential decarbonisation goals**

The Government has committed \$8.9 million in 2026–27 to provide essential funding to the ACCU Scheme. The ACCU Scheme provides abatement opportunities by incentivising voluntary carbon abatement activities. The scheme is nation-wide and encompasses regional economies and communities. Many landholders benefit from the diversified income offered by ACCU Scheme projects. The scheme also supports the Safeguard Mechanism by providing flexibility for safeguard facilities to meet their compliance requirements as on-site decarbonisation technologies are developed and deployed. The funding ensures the ACCU Scheme continues to effectively underpin the Safeguard Mechanism, create regional jobs and economic opportunities, and contribute abatement to meet Australia’s emission reduction targets. This will be achieved through supporting market confidence by delivering more high integrity methods and maintaining scheme integrity, including continuing essential core integrity functions.

## **Environment and water**

### **Establishing a National Environmental Protection Agency**

The Government has provided \$250.0 million over 2 years from 2026–27 to establish the National Environmental Protection Agency (National EPA) from 1 July 2026, with funding from 2028–29 to be announced once bilateral approval agreements are in place with states and territories. The National EPA will result in positive outcomes for business, regional communities, First Nations people, and the environment. The National EPA will undertake environmental assessments and approvals expeditiously, including via the new streamlined assessment pathway and bilateral agreements with states and territories. New and enhanced processes regulated by the National EPA will provide for better engagement with local communities and other stakeholders. The National EPA will have an Australia-wide footprint and remit and will support growth and productivity in regional areas across the country through delivering approvals for new projects and supporting regional planning. The National EPA will directly support priority sectors including renewables, housing, critical minerals, gas and strategic infrastructure. It will also underpin key

Government outcomes such as the transition to net zero, increasing the supply of affordable housing and expanding Australia’s critical minerals sector.

### **Improving offsets for proponents and the environment**

The Government has provided \$13.2 million over two years from 2026–27 to establish the new restoration contribution system under reformed national environment law. When the reforms come into effect, certain proponents may choose to meet their offset obligations through a payment to a statutory Restoration Contribution Holder, with funds used by the Holder to deliver offset-style restoration activities. The restoration contributions system will deliver better outcomes for regional communities. The process will provide more options for environmental offsets, reduce uncertainty and delays for proponents and enable faster approvals for the delivery of essential projects such as housing.

### **Implementing reforms to Regional Forest Agreements**

The Government has provided \$28.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to support the transition of forestry operations under Regional Forest Agreements (RFAs) to new regulatory arrangements under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act). Following reforms to national environment laws, the RFA exemption under the EPBC Act will sunset from 1 July 2027, bringing RFA forestry operations under the same environmental standards and legislative requirements that apply to other industries. The governments of New South Wales, Tasmania and Western Australia have RFAs in place with the Commonwealth. Funding will help these jurisdictions progress landscape-scale approval pathways for RFA forestry. This will provide stronger environmental protections alongside regulatory certainty, supporting a sustainable and prosperous future for the industry, including the timber and forestry workers in regional communities in which they operate.

### **Accelerating offset supply through the Nature Repair Market**

The Government has committed \$36.9 million over two years from 2026–27 to develop and deliver high-integrity environmental offsets through the Nature Repair Market. A well-functioning Nature Repair Market will create opportunities for land managers and First Nations people across regional Australia, as well as private investors and corporates looking to have a positive environmental impact. The market will help fund land managers to pursue nature repair projects that deliver real and measurable biodiversity benefits, supporting economic growth for regional communities.

### **Protecting Australia’s native species**

The Government is providing \$110.8 million over two years from 2026–27 to extend the Saving Native Species (SNS) program and H5 avian influenza (bird flu) preparedness efforts to safeguard many of Australia’s most vulnerable animals and plants and protect and recover our most biodiverse natural landscapes. Guided by the Threatened Species Action Plan 2022–2032, the program has delivered compelling outcomes to date. The SNS program extension will strengthen and expand critical actions to safeguard many of Australia’s most vulnerable native plants and animals, including interventions for species at high risk of extinction with the H5 bird flu preparedness extension consolidating

strategic on-ground threat abatement efforts at high-risk sites, particularly islands. The SNS program will protect and recover many of our most biodiverse natural landscapes by controlling key threats such as gamba grass across our northern savanna, yellow crazy ants in the tropical rainforests of far north Queensland and feral cats on priority islands. The program will continue to deliver significant benefits to regional and remote communities as projects are implemented nationwide. Investments will support local employment, nature-based tourism, sustainable agriculture, and businesses reliant on natural capital. This program will provide further investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through projects that will support employment and First Nations-led biodiversity recovery, strengthening cultural connections, self-determination, and care for Country.

### **Great Barrier Reef restoration and sustainability projects**

The Government is investing \$91.8 million over two years from 2026–27 to build on and accelerate outcomes under the Reef 2050 Long-Term Sustainability Plan and extend the Tourism Reef Protection Initiative. This funding will deliver immediate protections through the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority’s world-leading marine conservation programs, while continuing initiatives that engage communities in protecting and restoring priority Reef biodiversity. This funding will deliver benefits for regional and coastal Queensland by improving the health and resilience of marine ecosystems that underpin Reef-dependent communities and industries. Continuation of locally driven restoration projects that involve citizen scientists and Reef Traditional Owners will create local jobs. Funding to explore options for the transition towards aquaculture-based production of live coral will assist regional operators to plan for new skills, infrastructure and production methods. This investment aligns with the Government’s objective to protect and restore the health of Australia’s natural environment, oceans, iconic and heritage-listed places, unique ecosystems and threatened species.



# Defence

The Defence portfolio includes the Department of Defence, the Australian Signals Directorate, the Australian Submarine Agency, Defence Housing Australia, the Australian Naval Nuclear Power Safety Regulator and the Defence and Veterans' Services Commission. The portfolio is responsible for protecting Australia and its national interests, promoting security and responding in times of crisis.

The 2026 National Defence Strategy reaffirms the importance of delivering a stronger sovereign defence industrial base. This is a long-term undertaking and requires sustained investment and deliberate prioritisation of the areas most critical for national defence. Australia's sovereign defence industrial base depends on Australia's broader industrial capability. This includes robust and resilient domestic supply chains for key components, parts and systems, drawing on defence industry across the country, including in regional areas.

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

The portfolio has a significant footprint across Australia, with extensive bases, Defence housing, and associated employment and community engagement activities. This 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 during official duties and at community activities and events. Defence recognises the economic impact engaging local staff and suppliers has on regional communities, where there is capacity and capability available in the local market.

Defence also maintains strong links with regional and rural Australia through Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel undertaking reserve service. While many reserve units are headquartered in regional centres with staff and ADF personnel based in surrounding districts, there are also options for some reserve service personnel to live in rural or regional locations and work remotely. The ADF has a total of 31,944 reserve service members, with 11,928 (37 per cent) located in regional or rural areas.

The Defence estate consists of 70 major bases, more than 70 training ranges, and over 1,000 owned or leased properties. Defence Housing Australia additionally manages more than 17,500 properties across capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations where the ADF operates, and is undertaking residential development projects in regional Australia. Construction and maintenance of Defence facilities and housing in regional areas delivers significant economic, social and environmental benefits to regional communities.

## New initiatives

### Uncrewed surface vessels

The Australian Government has invested \$176.0 million over the next five years in partnership with Ocius Technology to deliver a fleet of 40 Bluebottle uncrewed surface vessels (Bluebottles). With an expanded operational fleet of 55 Bluebottles, these vessels will provide the Royal Australian Navy with near-persistent long-range surface intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities. The Bluebottle fleet will be manufactured in Sydney with support from an additional facility in the Hunter region, New South Wales. The Hunter facility will create approximately 15 jobs and provide up to \$11.0 million in economic benefits.

### Further investment in the Ghost Bat program

The Government has invested \$754.0 million with Boeing Defence Australia (BDA) over four years until the end of 2028–29 to further the MQ-28A Ghost Bat capability. Under this new contract, BDA will design improvements to the MQ-28A Ghost Bat and will support the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) to transition the MQ-28A Ghost Bat into operational service. The new contract also covers the manufacture of additional operational Block 2 MQ-28A aircraft and the development of an enhanced Block 3 prototype. BDA's new production facility at Wellcamp Airport in Toowoomba, Queensland, will manufacture some of the new Block 2 MQ-28A Ghost Bats. The facility will generate more than 100 new local jobs.

### Future Air Mission Training System

In December 2025, the Government committed more than \$300.0 million over ten years in partnership with CAE Australia to deliver a contemporary, immersive and scalable air mission training system for the RAAF. The investment will upgrade training systems that support initial training for personnel operating the RAAF's advanced air and ground-based capabilities and deliver a new facility for the Air Mission Training School. Delivery of the upgraded training system will commence shortly at RAAF Base East Sale, Victoria. The contract is expected to generate 190 local jobs predominantly located in regional Victoria; 140 to support acquisition and 50 to support ongoing sustainment of the capability. The Future Air Mission Training System will strengthen Australia's sovereign training capability while driving innovation and building critical skills for the future.

### Investing in the ADF's protected vehicles

In April 2026, the Government committed approximately \$750.0 million over seven years from 2026–27 for the production of 268 additional Bushmaster vehicles. The Bushmaster vehicles provide world-class protection, a sizeable payload and mobility for troops, and enable the integration of complex mission systems onto the platform. This investment optimises the ADF's ability to project and sustain deployed forces. The contract will sustain 300 jobs at the Thales facility in Bendigo, Victoria.

## **New enterprise estate and infrastructure projects in regional areas in 2026–27**

Construction and maintenance activities associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provide considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

During 2025–26, approximately 141 subcontractor packages, with a total value of about \$114.6 million, were awarded to First Nations subcontractors, with a further two prime contracts awarded to First Nations prime contractors at approximately \$16.5 million.

Newly approved projects with works at one or more regional locations are outlined below.

### **Facilities to support LAND 8113 Phase 1 Long Range Fires First Regiment**

This project is providing facilities and infrastructure at the Puckapunyal Military Area in Victoria to support the operation and maintenance of long-range fire capability at a value of \$3.0 million. The scope includes new and refurbished training, storage and maintenance facilities.



# Education

Providing opportunities and access to education for all Australians, regardless of their location, is fundamental to building a better and fairer education system. The Australian Government is committed to improving outcomes for students across early childhood education and care, school, and tertiary education to ensure no one is held back and no one is left behind. The Government continues to build on existing initiatives and reforms to support equity cohorts, invest in the capability of Australians, and deliver essential services in regional communities.

The Government is committed to improving the affordability, accessibility and safety of early childhood education and care (ECEC) across Australia.

- From 5 January 2026, the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) activity test was replaced with the 3 Day Guarantee to make ECEC more accessible and affordable. All CCS-eligible families are guaranteed a minimum entitlement of 72 hours of subsidised ECEC per fortnight, per eligible child (equivalent to three full days of care per week), regardless of parents' participation in work, study or training. Families with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children receive a higher entitlement of 100 hours per fortnight, per eligible child.
- The \$1.0 billion Building Early Education Fund (Building Fund) will build new or expand existing ECEC services in areas of need across the country, including regional Australia. Of the 28 projects currently approved for capital investment through the Building Fund, 18 will be located in regional Australia and one in a remote location. This investment will help make quality ECEC more accessible for families in these communities.
- The National Early Childhood Worker Register (the Register) was implemented on 27 February 2026. Enhancements will strengthen the Register through the introduction of identity verification and validation of an individual's qualifications and Working with Children Checks. The Register aims to ensure children's education and services are even safer and more supportive so children can thrive.
- The Professional Development Subsidy program will provide financial support to the ECEC workforce to enable completion of the National Child Safety Training within the legislated timeframes. The program is focused on improving child safety by equipping staff to prevent and respond to harm, and fostering safe, supportive environments for children. The subsidy enables the backfilling of staff to attend the training, or to allow staff to complete the training outside of their usual working hours. The program will prioritise small and medium providers, including in regional locations, where around 25 per cent of ECEC services are located.

In 2026, the Government will provide an estimated \$33.3 billion in recurrent funding to Australian schools, including around \$7.4 billion for regional and remote schools. All Australian public schools are now on a path to full and fair funding. This additional funding has been invested in reforms to ensure equitable access to a quality school

education across Australia, with no child left behind whether they live in metropolitan, regional, remote or very remote areas. This is further strengthened through Commonwealth funding for a range of targeted programs and supports for students.

- The Better and Fairer Schools Agreements (BFSA) established 3 national priority areas of school reform to improve the outcomes of all students: equity and excellence, wellbeing for learning and engagement, and a strong and sustainable workforce. The BFSA ties funding to reforms that support students, particularly those in priority equity cohorts, including students living in regional, rural and remote locations.
- The Government is continuing to support the Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships, providing the fourth year of scholarships in 2026–27. The \$160.0 million Commonwealth Teaching Scholarships Program aims to attract high-quality candidates from diverse backgrounds into teaching by providing up to 5,000 scholarships over five years, valued at up to \$40,000. People from regional, rural and remote areas are one of the target cohorts. Around 30 per cent of Round 1 and 2 recipients are from regional, rural and remote areas. An additional \$2,000 is available for recipients who undertake their final professional experience placement in a remote or very remote setting. In return for the scholarship, recipients are required to teach in a government school or government-run early learning setting after completing their degree.

The Government is continuing to implement the Australian Universities Accord reforms, including significant funding reforms that ensure more students can access, participate in and succeed in higher education.

- The transition to the new Managed Growth Funding system for Commonwealth supported places (CSPs) began on 1 January 2026 with full commencement set for 2027. This implementation increases opportunity for students from under-represented backgrounds, including regional and remote students. In 2035, the new system is expected to deliver an additional 82,000 fully funded CSPs in comparison with current system projections.
- The Needs-based Funding system commenced on 1 January 2026. It provides more support to universities to assist students from low socio-economic status and First Nations backgrounds and students studying at regional and remote campuses to successfully complete university. Dedicated outreach funding continues to support initiatives that engage people from under-represented backgrounds, including those from regional and remote areas, in higher education.
- The Regional University Study Hubs program helps students in regional and remote areas access higher education without having to leave their community. There are 56 hubs located across 84 locations – of these 53 are in regional, 12 in remote and 19 in very remote Australia. Over 20,989 students have been supported by Hubs since the program’s establishment in 2018–19.

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

## New initiatives

### First Nations

The Government will provide \$113.0 million over three years from 2026–27 to support First Nations education outcomes and continue to maintain a genuine commitment to ensuring that First Nations students can thrive academically and culturally. This includes:

- \$55.5 million over three years from 2026–27 to extend funding to the Clontarf Foundation for two calendar years from 2027. This extension provides engagement and wraparound support for up to 12,500 school-age First Nations boys and young men
- \$30.0 million over three years from 2026–27 to extend funding to the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation (AIEF) for a further two calendar years from 2027. The AIEF provides scholarships to high-achieving First Nations students for secondary education
- \$23.8 million over two years from 2026–27 to extend Indigenous Boarding Provider Grants for one calendar year to December 2027, with continued delivery by the National Indigenous Australians Agency. This will support around 2,500 First Nations boarders from remote and very remote areas attending over 50 boarding providers, enabling access to quality secondary education and wrap-around supports
- \$2.2 million in 2026–27 in additional support for the First Nations Languages Education Program over 2026–27, further contributing to the revitalisation of First Nations languages across more than 47 communities, and supporting school partnerships and trainee educators in collaboration with First Languages Australia
- \$1.5 million in 2026–27 to extend the First Nations Education – MultiLit (Making Up Lost Time in Literacy) program for one calendar year, in 42 regional and remote primary schools with a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Through the education portfolio, the Government continues to support regional Australia through a range of other initiatives, including the following:

### **SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children – Early Years Support Program**

The Government will provide \$2.3 million over two years from 2025–26 to continue the SNAICC Early Years Support Program until 31 December 2026. The program provides tailored support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) delivering early years services in New South Wales, Victoria and Western Australia.

ACCO early learning services provide culturally safe, holistic environments that support children’s identity, wellbeing and development, while strengthening families and communities where they live.

## **Good to Great Schools Australia**

As part of its election commitment the Government has allocated \$5.0 million over four years from 2025–26 to help build the capacity of teaching assistants and teachers in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Government committed this funding to Good to Great Schools Australia (GGSA), who will partner with a higher education provider to develop a new accredited undergraduate credential for teacher aides and teachers. Through this funding, GGSA will help support pathways from vocational education and training to higher education and upskill educators in evidence-based teaching practices.

## **Parliament and Civics Education Rebate**

The Government is providing \$5.8 million over two years from 2025–26 to extend higher Parliament and Civics Education Rebate levels for schools in regional and disadvantaged areas. The program supports educational visits to national democratic, historical and cultural institutions in Canberra. All institutions provide educational programs that directly align to the Australian Curriculum.

## **20 Medical Commonwealth Supported Places (CSPs) for the University of Tasmania (UTAS)**

The Government’s emphasis on primary health care is evident through the allocation of 20 additional medical CSPs per year to UTAS, commencing from 2026. These additional CSPs will help address rural and regional health workforce shortages, with evidence showing that these students will be far more likely to stay and work regionally after graduation. The aim is to enhance the accessibility and quality of general practice and primary health care outcomes in north Tasmania. This initiative forms part of the Government’s 2025 election commitments.

# Employment and Workplace Relations

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

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

The 2026–27 Budget builds upon recent progress to ensure support and continuity of services for regional communities. The employment services system continues to address critical workforce needs in regional labour markets, while the vocational education and training (VET) system provides continuity of support for apprenticeships and traineeships in regional areas, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

## New initiatives

### Delivering Mobile TAFE

In the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025–26*, the Government committed \$27.0 million over three years from 2026–27 (and an additional \$3.0 million in 2029–30) to expand the TAFE Technology Fund to support mobile VET delivery in outer regional and remote locations.

Mobile training units will enable VET providers to take skills on the road and train the next generation of workers. The initiative will improve access to skills and training for First Nations people and for learners living in outer regional and remote communities, support local employment pathways, and reduce barriers associated with travel and relocation for study. Mobile TAFE will contribute to building a more sustainable, locally skilled workforce aligned with regional economic opportunities.

The Government is working with state and territory governments, who are partnering with First Nations organisations and communities to identify projects that meet local skills needs. This new funding is expected to deliver up to 12 projects nationally. Courses offered through Mobile TAFE will vary across locations to reflect local labour market demand.

## Employment services

The Government will provide additional funding of \$312.1 million over five years from 2025–26 (and \$35.9 million per year ongoing) to help deliver a strengthened employment services system and support future reform.

The department delivers place-based employment and workforce programs specifically aimed at supporting regional, rural and remote Australia, with 32 per cent of Workforce Australia participants located in regional Australia. The Local Jobs Program operates across 51 employment regions, bringing together local expertise and resources to address local labour market needs and improve the cohesiveness of jobs and skills systems in each region. Elements of the program include a local jobs and skills taskforce in each region. These taskforces coordinate local efforts, including responding to structural adjustment events and workforce shortages by connecting people to training and employment opportunities, and supporting employers to hire inclusively and build sustainable workforces.

The department delivers bespoke employment services designed to respond to the needs of communities in Broome, Yarrabah, and Norfolk Island. In Yarrabah, additional capability funding and supports enable a more coordinated, locally informed service that meets people where they are and helps them progress towards sustainable employment. The Norfolk Island Employment Support Program consolidates mainstream employment services, providing residents with a single, central point of access to address their individual employment and skills needs.

The department also delivers complementary measures such as the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme to provide a productive, reliable workforce to support regional industries facing labour constraints. This includes a regional footprint to deliver on-the-ground support to regional employers participating in the scheme.

## Reforming the Australian Apprenticeships Incentive System

The Government is delivering key reforms to the Australian Apprenticeship system to make it more targeted, more efficient and better aligned to Australia's regional, economic and workforce needs. The reforms are based on findings of the Strategic Review of the Australian Apprenticeship Incentive System and will result in savings of \$266.2 million over four years from 2026–27 and \$106.3 million per year ongoing from 2030–31.

The Government has agreed changes to the methodology underpinning the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List to better target and reflect the Government's economic priorities and social equity objectives. This includes consideration of specific regional shortages – as opposed to consideration of only national shortages – and ensuring occupations relevant to women and First Nations communities continue to be eligible for incentives. These components are due to commence from 1 January 2027.

Building on the review's findings, Government reforms will remove access to employer incentives from large employers (excluding group training organisations (GTOs)), with

incentives instead targeted at small and medium employers in occupations critical to our housing and new energy sectors (via the Key Apprenticeship Program (KAP)). Incentives for apprentices and employers (that is, small and medium-sized enterprises and GTOs, regardless of size) in priority occupations not eligible for the KAP will see current payment settings extended to June 2029 at \$2,500 per apprenticeship.

## **Fairer fuel and workplace relations supports for regional Australia**

The Government's workplace relations system continues to support regional Australia by promoting fair, productive and safe workplaces that underpin regional employment and economic resilience. This includes Fair Work Ombudsman regional outreach and compliance activities; the Employer Advisory Service, providing free tailored workplace relations advice to regional small businesses; and Fair Work Commission regional access arrangements, including circuit hearings and remote dispute resolution. The Government's workplace relations reforms are designed to improve job security and minimum standards across the economy, including in regional industries.

Building on these existing supports, the Government's *Fair Work Amendment (Fairer Fuel) Act 2026* enables the Minister to make an expedited decision to respond to sharp fuel price increases arising from overseas supply pressures that have a significant negative national impact on the road transport industry. It creates an urgent new pathway, with a high threshold, which will allow truckies and transport operators to argue for a fairer share in the Fair Work Commission.

The amendment allows the Fair Work Commission to finalise an emergency application without the usual six month minimum timeframe. This amendment helps protect the viability of transport businesses across the industry, which are essential to those who rely on transport services – including in regional and remote areas, where transport costs are a key driver of prices and service availability and businesses are more exposed to fuel price volatility.

The Government will also provide \$1.3 million in 2026–27 to the Fair Work Commission – Small Business Support measure to continue specialised supports for small businesses navigating the fair work dispute resolution system. The continuation of this measure will benefit all small businesses, including those in regional areas, with the Fair Work Commission able to continue to provide tailored advice and support.



# Foreign Affairs and Trade

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

The purpose of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade is to make Australia stronger, safer and more prosperous, to provide timely and responsive consular and passport services, and to ensure a secure Australian Government presence overseas.

The portfolio works with other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments and businesses to reduce trade barriers for Australian exporters and importers, and leads in coordinating Australia’s interests and representing them to the world. Through trade and investment services, Australian businesses are able to grow and diversify into new markets, further expand into existing markets, and benefit from investment opportunities. In addition, the portfolio supports the growth of Australia’s regional economies at home, including through promoting Australia internationally as a compelling tourism destination and building business capability to meet visitor’s needs.

The portfolio supports the Government’s actions to secure fuel and other strategic materials, including fertiliser, to shield Australia against future supply chain shocks. This includes addressing regional shortages and critical supply gaps, as well as providing support to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is in addition to the commitment to establish a Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve, allowing the Government to secure, sell and stockpile the critical minerals and rare earths vital to Australia’s economy, national security and Future Made in Australia ambitions. Critical mineral projects are predominantly located in remote and regional areas, where communities will benefit from increased investment and job creation.

## New initiatives

### Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement Implementation

On 24 March 2026, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the conclusion of the Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement (A-EU FTA) negotiations. Both sides agreed to a comprehensive, commercially meaningful, and strategically significant agreement that will deliver benefits to businesses, producers, and consumers in regional Australia. The A-EU FTA will provide opportunities to diversify and expand Australia’s trade to a high-income market of 450 million people, including for export industries of significance to regional Australia, such as agriculture, energy, and minerals.

The Government has committed \$38.6 million over four years from 2026–27 and \$7.1 million per year ongoing to enable Australia to implement commitments entered into

under the A-EU FTA. This includes ensuring that Australian exporters are able to fully utilise the new and improved access to the EU market.

The agreement will open doors into the EU for premium, sustainable Australian agricultural products and processed foods – including for commodities such as beef, sheep meat, sugar, grains, nuts, horticulture, dairy, seafood and wine. Where the A-EU FTA provides new commercially meaningful agricultural market access through annual tariff rate quotas, funding will ensure that Australian producers and exporters can effectively utilise these quotas to maximise commercial benefit. Funding will also ensure that Australian authorities have the resources to engage the EU on technical trade matters.

The A-EU FTA will deliver strong outcomes for Australia’s energy and resources sector, another key industry supporting economic growth in regional Australia. This includes elimination of tariffs on our exports and greater certainty for investors. It will help facilitate greater levels of EU investment to develop Australia’s critical minerals sector.

The A-EU FTA will also eliminate Australian tariffs on EU goods, reducing the price of EU inputs and consumer goods, and bringing costs down for regional businesses and consumers.

## **Go Global Toolkit impact expansion**

The Government has committed \$9.2 million over two years from 2026–27 to expand the Go Global Toolkit to support businesses across regional and metropolitan Australia to diversify their goods and services exports and take full advantage of Australia’s free trade agreements. The Go Global Toolkit is an integral part of Austrade’s trade services delivery model and response to global trade disruptions, supporting businesses across all industry sectors including agrifood, critical technology and the green economy. The expansion will focus on delivering enhanced interactive and tailored market information and integrated digital trade services, to assist more Australian businesses to start exporting and diversify into new markets.

## Health, Disability and Ageing

The Department of Health, Disability and Ageing plays a critical role in delivering on the Australian Government’s vision for better health and wellbeing for all Australians, now and for future generations. The department supports the Government to lead and steward the health, disability and aged care systems through high-quality advice. The department does this through development and delivery of evidence-based policy, well-targeted programs, and best practice regulation. The Government is committed to providing support in health care, disability and aged care services for Australians in regional areas, where both cost of living and distance in accessing key services can impact on health and care outcomes.

The 2026–27 Budget will advance the Government’s agenda to better address the needs of Australians in regional, rural and remote communities through investments in key reforms.

Changes to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) will return it to its original intent of supporting Australians with significant and permanent disability. While the NDIS has been lifechanging for many, costs are continuing to rise rapidly, participants do not always get good quality supports, and it has become a target for fraud. This Budget will help ensure quality care and support continues for people with disability, including for those living in regional, rural and remote communities.

Australian Government investment of \$2.0 billion (to be matched with funding from states and territories) in Thriving Kids will ensure children aged eight and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs can access the support they need outside of the NDIS. This will include children in regional, rural and remote Australia. The Government’s Thriving Kids investment will include \$1.4 billion for states and territories to deliver Thriving Kids services. The Government will also contribute up to \$139.7 million to facilitate state-delivered Thriving Kids services for children in early childhood education and care services. In addition, the Government will directly invest \$465.5 million to deliver Thriving Kids initiatives that benefit from a national approach, and will complement state services and supports.

The Government will provide a landmark investment of an additional \$25.0 billion, and up to a record \$220.3 billion over five years to public hospital and health systems, including through the 2026–2031 National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA). The NHRA provides mechanisms to support improved health equity in rural and remote communities and a pathway to embed alternative models of care. It also provides for an uplift in culturally appropriate and safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Ongoing additional investment will see Medicare Urgent Care Clinics become a permanent feature of the health system, including in regional, rural and remote areas. The clinics mean Australians can get bulk billed urgent health care, seven days a week, across extended hours, while also taking pressure off local hospital emergency departments.

The Budget will build upon the transformational reform to the aged care system that the Government cemented through the new *Aged Care Act 2024*, making adjustments to help

ensure older people in the Support at Home program can access the care services they need.

Aged care viability and capability support programs are being extended. This will support aged care providers facing financial pressure and ensure continuity of care for older Australians, particularly in regional, rural and remote areas, thin markets and First Nations communities.

Continued support for innovative programs such as Care Together also delivers Government funding for sustainable solutions to address long term service delivery challenges in thin markets.

The Budget continues the focus on prevention, early intervention and continuation of critical services that improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and regional communities. Several of these commitments directly contribute to ensuring First Nations communities in regional and remote areas receive culturally appropriate care close to home. These will particularly improve the accessibility of urgent and critical health infrastructure, birthing services and mental health supports for First Nations people. These measures contribute to Closing the Gap outcomes, particularly in relation to access to culturally safe and accessible care, maternal care and healthy birthweight.

## **New initiatives**

### **Securing the NDIS for future generations**

The Budget includes changes to the NDIS that will return it to its original intent of providing reasonable and necessary supports to people with significant and permanent disability. Measures will help fight fraud and stop non-compliance, slow rapid cost increases, make eligibility requirements clearer and ensure quality services and support to people with disability. These reforms deliver on the Government's commitments to secure the NDIS for future generations and target annual cost growth to at or below five to six per cent. A sustainable NDIS will ensure that those most in need will be supported now and into the future, including in regional and remote areas.

### **Thriving Kids**

Thriving Kids will enable delivery of equitable and accessible services in regional, rural and remote locations. This commitment is included in the National Agreement on Foundational Supports 2026–2031 and reiterated in Thriving Kids bilateral agreements between the Australian Government and state and territory governments.

Both the Australian Government and state and territory governments will establish new Thriving Kids services, and scale existing services. These services build on existing local mainstream health, early childhood, and community supports. Access to Thriving Kids will be based on a child's level of need and will not require a diagnosis. The Government will introduce a new Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) three-year-old health assessment service, available for all three-year-olds. It will allow GPs to assess the health and development of the child and facilitate connections with appropriate supports, or to

referrals for further assessment where needed. The item will be eligible for MBS bulk billing incentives, which increase in value based on rurality, and the Bulk Billing Practice Incentive Program.

Removing the barrier of a diagnosis will lessen the burden for families living in regional, rural and remote locations and allow earlier access to critical supports. Thriving Kids investment will strengthen the disability ecosystem outside of the NDIS, improve regional access to early intervention, and create coordinated pathways for children aged eight and under with developmental delay and or autism with low to moderate support needs.

Thriving Kids will provide increased access to online and virtual supports in addition to in-person assistance. Better information and phone services will provide families living in regional, rural and remote areas (and the professionals who support them) with better access to information and advice and connect them to the supports they need. Thriving Kids will leverage existing infrastructure and workforce, supporting integrated delivery across regional and remote communities while bolstering equity and service continuity. This will include new service offerings that build on the Government's existing \$219.8 million investment in 1800MEDICARE. Under the Thriving Kids measure, the Government will invest \$85.5 million over five years to establish national services that will provide information and navigation assistance for parents and families of children aged between zero and eight with developmental delay or behavioural concerns, as well as a redesigned Pregnancy, Birth and Baby service.

Implementation plans will articulate how governments will ensure that regional, rural and remote cohorts will benefit from funded services and supports. Governments will report on implementation planning as services and supports are rolled out. Monitoring and evaluation arrangements for Thriving Kids include gathering real-time data where appropriate to inform ongoing implementation decisions and support continuous improvement as the roll out progresses. A planned three-year review will assess implementation progress and evaluate whether Thriving Kids is meeting the stated objectives, outcomes and outputs.

## **National Health Reform Agreement 2026–2031**

As part of the Government's record investment of \$220.3 billion over five years for public hospitals and health systems, up to \$37.7 billion will be provided in 2026–27. This recognises the importance of taking a flexible approach to meeting the needs of regional, rural and remote communities.

The NHRA includes new sector developed commitments to improve First Nations' outcomes and experiences in the health system and a review of the funding model to ensure Australians in rural and remote regions receive the support they need.

The new agreement also commits governments of all levels to collaborate to support tailored solutions in regional areas. Governments have agreed to strengthen regional planning and commissioning with the aim of improving system integration and coordination and achieving better outcomes for communities.

## **Medicare Urgent Care Clinics ongoing funding**

The Government has committed ongoing funding of \$1.8 billion over five years from 2025–26 and \$579.6 million per year ongoing from 2030–31 for Medicare Urgent Care Clinics.

Building on the success of the Program, a total of 137 clinics will be embedded as a permanent fixture of the primary care landscape. Medicare Urgent Care Clinics provide accessible and affordable urgent care services across Australia, helping local hospital emergency departments to focus on more serious and life-threatening conditions.

Once all 137 clinics have been established by 30 June 2026, there will be a total of 47 clinics supporting communities in regional, rural and remote Australia. This measure ensures that Australians in regional, rural and remote areas will continue to have more options to access care closer to home.

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

Jurisdiction	Medicare Urgent Care Clinic name	Modified Monash Model classification
NSW	Albury	MM2
NSW	Batemans Bay	MM4
NSW	Bathurst	MM3
NSW	Bega	MM5
NSW	Cessnock	MM3
NSW	Coffs Harbour	MM3
NSW	Lismore	MM3
NSW	Nowra	MM3
NSW	Tamworth	MM3
VIC	Ballarat	MM2
VIC	Bendigo	MM2
VIC	Shepparton	MM3
VIC	Torquay	MM2
VIC	Warragul	MM4
VIC	Warrnambool	MM3
QLD	Bundaberg	MM2
QLD	Cairns North	MM2
QLD	Cairns South	MM2
QLD	Gladstone	MM3
QLD	Hervey Bay	MM2
QLD	Mackay	MM2
QLD	Rockhampton	MM2
QLD	Toowoomba	MM2
QLD	Townsville	MM2
WA	Broome	MM6
WA	Geraldton	MM3
WA	Greater Bunbury	MM2
SA	Mount Gambier	MM3
SA	Victor Harbor	MM3
SA	Whyalla	MM3
TAS	Bridgewater	MM2
TAS	Burnie	MM3

TAS	Devonport	MM3
TAS	Hobart (Bathurst Street)	MM2
TAS	Hobart (Liverpool Street)	MM2
TAS	Kingston	MM2
TAS	Launceston	MM2
TAS	Sorell	MM2
NT	Ali Curung	MM7
NT	Alyangula	MM7
NT	Darwin*	MM2
NT	Galiwinku	MM7
NT	Lajamanu	MM7
NT	Maningrida	MM7
NT	Mparntwe	MM6
NT	Palmerston	MM2
NT	Wurrumiyanga	MM7

\*Darwin Medicare Urgent Care Clinic will open in 2025–26 FY.

### Targeted interventions to support bulk billing

The Government is investing a further \$25.3 million over three years from 2026–27 to establish up to six new fully bulk billing general practices in the Newcastle and Lower Hunter region and the Central Coast. In an area with historically low bulk billing rates, this investment will increase regional bulk billing rates and support improved access to affordable primary care for residents in these regions.

### Improving cancer outcomes – National Bowel Cancer Screening Program

This measure ensures eligible Australians continue to have access to a free, mail-out bowel cancer screening test. It extends the kit request model for people aged 45–49 by providing \$31.1 million over three years from 2026–27. The test can be completed at home, reducing geographic and service-access barriers and supporting earlier detection of bowel cancer in high-risk populations. Screening improves the likelihood of detecting cancer earlier and at more treatable stages. This also reduces reliance on specialist services in regional areas, contributing to more equitable health outcomes for Australians living in rural and remote areas.

The Government provided an initial investment to lower the starting age of the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program to 45 years as part of the 2024–25 Budget. This measure delivers significant benefits for people aged 45–49 in regional and remote Australia.

## Investing in a modernised My Health Record

The Government has committed \$598.3 million over two years from 2026–27 to continue operating the My Health Record system, which is underpinning new initiatives including 1800MEDICARE and Thriving Kids. This investment will also deliver targeted initiatives to support more reliable and timely access to information for all Australians and their healthcare providers.

This measure builds on the *Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook 2025–26* investment of \$4.4 million to deliver the next stage of a National Medicines Record, including digital enhancements and new legislative requirements to ensure all prescribed and dispensed medicines are available through My Health Record and the 1800MEDICARE app. This will give patients and their care teams access to accurate and up-to-date medicine information, helping to reduce the risk of medication errors, adverse drug reactions, or avoidable harm.

This measure also delivers the next stages of the Share by Default program, under the *Modernising My Health Record (Sharing by Default) Act 2025*, to support the routine sharing of GP chronic condition management plans to My Health Record by default. As Australians increasingly receive care from multiple providers across different settings and locations, shared visibility of a patient’s health status, goals and progress is central to improving continuity, safety and quality of care.

Timely access to shared health information empowers patients and supports safe, connected care for all Australians, including those living in regional areas, who often navigate care across dispersed providers and locations, and increasingly through virtual models of care. For healthcare providers working in settings affected by workforce pressures, shared information helps inform decision-making, reduces reliance on patient recall, limits duplication, and supports continuity of care.

## Delivering better care through Support at Home

More people will be able to live in their own home for longer with Support at Home places being delivered more quickly. These measures also deliver policy refinements to the new Support at Home program, supporting implementation of the Government’s aged care reforms. Personal care services, including showering and continence support, will be reclassified as ‘clinical supports’ so that older people will not be out-of-pocket for these services that are so important for maintaining dignity and hygiene. Changes will ensure continuity of care for End-of-Life Pathway participants who live beyond the initial funding period. Refinements will see older people, including in regional, rural and remote areas, continue to receive quality, accessible care under a reformed in-home aged care system.

## Residential Aged Care Accommodation Pricing Review – increasing supply and protecting equity of access

The Government has committed \$606.5 million over four years from 2026–27, with an additional \$1.1 billion held in the Contingency Reserve for future spending, pending completion of implementation details, as an initial response to the *Independent Review of Aged Care Accommodation Pricing*. Changes to the structure and rate of the accommodation

supplement, new capital incentives and increased flexibility in accommodation pricing structures will address financial gaps, improve investment certainty and confidence, and stimulate both new development and refurbishment activity to ensure sufficient residential aged care beds for older Australians.

### **Aged Care Viability and Capability Programs**

The Government has committed \$51.3 million in 2026–27 to extend Aged Care Viability and Capability Programs, ensuring continuity of care for older Australians by supporting aged care providers facing viability concerns.

This measure will help maintain the availability of beds and in-home care services by reducing the risk of disorderly aged care service closures, particularly in rural and remote areas, thin markets and First Nations communities. Through the Market Adjustment Program, the Rural, Remote and First Nations Service Development Assistance Panel, and the Business and Workforce Advisory Service, providers will receive targeted support to continue and strengthen their provision of care, ensuring older Australians have more equitable access to high quality aged care services in the communities in which they live.

### **Strengthening regional stewardship of aged care**

The Government will provide \$29.9 million over two years from 2026–27 to continue funding the Local Network to deliver regional stewardship of aged care. The Local Network operates at 16 sites across the country in regional and metro areas. It builds sector capability and capacity by understanding and addressing local health and aged care issues and tailoring solutions to meet the needs of older people in each region.

The Local Network works closely with communities, including with cultural and health organisations, local aged care providers – including smaller, remote and First Nations organisations – and service delivery partners. The Local Network supports regional providers to implement aged care reforms, meet the quality standards and ensure continuity of quality care. It also enables appropriate care pathways from hospitals, and supports emergency responses, including responses to disease outbreaks and natural disasters.

### **Remote Accord**

The Government has committed \$0.7 million in 2026–27 for UnitingCare Australia to continue the Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord program. This measure will continue to strengthen connections between remote Australia and the aged care reform process. It will support remote communities and providers to implement reforms through consultation and engagement on and development of resources and solutions that reflect the realities of delivering services in remote areas.

### **Cooperative and Mutual Enterprise Support Program**

The Government is investing \$2.4 million in 2026–27 to continue the Cooperative and Mutual Enterprise Support Program. This program, known as Care Together, is delivered by the Business Council of Cooperatives and Mutuals. This measure will continue to

support the use of locally developed, cooperative and mutual business models in the care economy, in regional, rural and remote locations and other thin markets, where conventional models are not always successful.

### **13 YARN**

The Government is strengthening its commitment to First Nations social and emotional wellbeing by increasing funding for 13YARN, the national culturally safe crisis support service for First Nations people. The Government will provide \$18.9 million over four years from 2026–27 to respond to growing demand and expand access to support.

The investment will enable 13YARN to manage increasing call volumes, maintain its highly responsive 24/7 phone service, and introduce a new, culturally safe text-based crisis support service. The new text service will be particularly impactful for young people and others who face barriers to voice-based support. It responds directly to community feedback and evidence of elevated suicide risk among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, whose suicide rate is three times higher than that of non-Indigenous youth.

### **Extended Supports for Birthing on Country**

The Government is providing an additional \$44.4 million over four years from 2025–26 to extend the Birthing on Country program. Birthing on Country provides culturally safe maternal care to 1,100 mothers and their babies each year.

The measure will positively benefit health outcomes for First Nations babies in rural and regional Australia – directly contributing to Closing the Gap Target 2: Healthy birthweight. Birthing on Country activities also employ local midwives and nurses in rural and regional communities, providing additional workforce opportunities.

### **Closing the Gap health infrastructure**

The Government will provide \$144.1 million over two years from 2026–27 to meet the outstanding urgent infrastructure needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services sector. The funding will deliver new or renovated health clinics and associated housing for health professionals to address seriously deteriorating or non-existent infrastructure, particularly in regional and remote areas.



# Home Affairs

The Home Affairs portfolio comprises the Department of Home Affairs (including the Australian Border Force (ABF)), the Australian Criminal Intelligence Commission, the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the Australian Institute of Criminology, the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation, the Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre, and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). The portfolio has a broad policy, regulatory and operational remit, bringing together key national security, law enforcement, intelligence and emergency management functions.

The portfolio's primary role is to keep Australia prosperous, secure and united. The portfolio safeguards Australia from national security and border threats, enhances our social cohesion and national resilience, coordinates responses to emergencies and crises, and delivers Australia's migration and citizenship programs. The portfolio seeks to ensure every member of the Australian community – wherever they live – can go about their lives feeling safe, welcome and able to fully participate in our society.

Functions directly related to regional communities include emergency management; disaster preparedness, response and recovery; enhancing social cohesion and democratic resilience; managing Australia's migration program; detecting, deterring and disrupting civil maritime threats to the border; and protecting critical infrastructure (including the aviation and maritime transport sectors). The portfolio works in close partnership with government agencies, states and territories, communities and industry to deliver these outcomes for regional communities.

NEMA continues to support Australians to prepare for and recover from disasters, with a commitment to reduce the disproportionate impact on regional communities. During 2025, 76 disaster events impacted 206 local government areas – the majority of them in regional Australia. Through the work of NEMA, the portfolio is committed to reducing the disproportionate effect natural hazards continue to have on regional areas. Support is delivered through a range of initiatives including the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements for disaster-impacted communities, NEMA's network of regional officials, and funding programs that support building resilience in rural and regional Australia, including the Disaster Ready Fund, which provides up to \$200.0 million per year for disaster risk reduction projects.

As Australia's national policing agency, the AFP defends and protects Australia from domestic and global security threats by preventing and disrupting serious crime that endangers lives, livelihoods and our way of life. The AFP plays a critical role in supporting regional Australia by ensuring regional and remote communities are protected from serious criminal activity that seeks to harm Australians and Australian interests.

The Department of Home Affairs (department) delivers a range of grants, programs and community engagement initiatives to strengthen social cohesion and democratic resilience across Australia, including in regional communities.

In partnership with the Australian Library and Information Association, the Office of Social Cohesion (OSC) supports the delivery of the Community Cohesion Hubs program in 125 libraries across urban, regional and remote Australia. This program builds a shared understanding of social cohesion, grow connections and conversations, and protects togetherness and democratic values during times of shocks and stresses. The OSC is also partnering with the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia to develop eight podcasts on the role that sport plays in creating community connection, belonging, pride and unity. Community radio reaches 5.4 million listeners per week through 450 not-for-profit, community-owned radio stations across the country, servicing urban, regional and remote communities.

The department also continues to assist all critical infrastructure owners and operators, including in regional areas, to understand risk and empower owners and operators to improve the resilience of critical infrastructure.

New initiatives in the 2026–27 Budget of particular relevance to supporting a strong, safe and secure regional Australia include the extension of grants programs to support migrant communities, and strengthening civil maritime security arrangements.

## **New initiatives**

### **Civil maritime security – countering illegal foreign fishing**

ABF leads whole-of-government efforts to strengthen Australia’s border security arrangements to advance and protect Australia’s strategic interests, including countering illegal foreign fishing (IFF). Strong border security protects Australia’s sovereignty, supports regional communities, and underpins our economic wellbeing by ensuring Australia can fully realise the benefits of the ocean economy.

The Australian Government has committed \$55.8 million in 2026–27 to continue and expand coordinated, whole-of-government operational efforts to detect, deter and disrupt IFF and protect Australia’s maritime interests in the region. This includes \$48.3 million in 2026–27 for the ABF to sustain existing capabilities to combat IFF through operations Lunar, Leedstrum in north and northwestern Australia, and Operation Broadstaff in far north Queensland. Additionally, the Government has committed \$3.0 million in 2026–27 for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, \$4.2 million in 2026–27 for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions, and \$0.3 million in 2026–27 for the Attorney-General’s Department, for strengthening compliance, enforcement and prosecution outcomes in countering IFF.

### **Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration – extension**

The Government has committed \$7.7 million in 2026–27 to support refugees through early-intervention, targeted settlement services designed to boost economic participation and longer-term integration, which in turn will have a positive impact on social cohesion. Since 2023, the Economic Pathways to Refugee Integration program has delivered employment services for refugees across 20 regional locations.

## **Migrant worker exploitation reforms – extension**

The Government has committed \$27.0 million over two years from 2026–27 to continue information and education activities to improve migrant workers’ awareness of workplace safeguards, protections and compliance measures related to migration laws. This will continue to support information and education capabilities in each state, with the ability to cover metropolitan, regional and remote locations, where temporary migrants work. This will help embed reforms and support visa integrity, lawful businesses, and workers.

The extension of the pilot programs will enable temporary migrants to continue to pursue workplace justice outcomes without fear of visa cancellation or before they depart and will build a stronger evidence base for evaluation of the pilots and future government plans. These pilots will be further bolstered by the continuation of the grant.

## **Provision of border services – Hobart Airport**

The Government has committed \$12.7 million over two years from 2026–27 to enable the department to continue providing border services for international flights currently operating at Hobart International Airport.

New Zealand is Tasmania’s closest international neighbour and is currently the only international market directly connected to Tasmania. This funding will benefit the Hobart community and broader Tasmanian economy by supporting Air New Zealand’s direct international link between Hobart and Auckland. Funding provided under this proposal complements the Government’s investment of \$60.0 million in the Hobart airport runway upgrade project – which was completed on 5 August 2025 – with a view to attracting additional international carriers to Hobart.

## **National cell broadcast messaging system**

The Government has committed funding for the operation and sustainment of the new national cell broadcast messaging system, known as AusAlert. From October 2026, AusAlert will provide Australia’s first responders and communities with a faster, more secure and more reliable public warning system, using modern cell broadcast technology to deliver geographically targeted warning information during emergencies and disasters. This government investment recognises the higher exposure of regional communities to natural hazards and connectivity challenges and will protect lives, property and regional economies across Australia by supporting a coordinated national transition from the ageing Emergency Alert system.



# Industry, Science and Resources

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

The global context is being shaped by increased geostrategic competition, global conflict, supply chain challenges, energy disruptions, unprecedented technological advancements, and climate change. Australia is uniquely positioned to strengthen its sovereign domestic capability, supply chains and economic resilience by investing in industries and businesses.

Regional areas of Australia are home to many of the resources, ideas, skills, industries and businesses needed to achieve the Government's Future Made in Australia agenda, manage the transition to net zero and support improvements to productivity. The strengthening of Australia's manufacturing, industrial and resources base alongside scientific systems is essential to resilient and productive regional economies that provide benefits nationwide. These coordinated efforts will deliver secure jobs, strengthen communities, and maximise the benefits of global shifts in technology, energy and supply chains.

Australia's resources sector significantly adds to the nation's prosperity and standard of living. It accounts for around two thirds of Australia's total merchandise exports and is the largest industry for foreign direct investment. Australia's resources and mining sector is also significant to the local economies, businesses and communities across regional Australia, creating jobs and investment opportunities. Australia's regional and remote areas are the location of some of the world's largest recoverable resources of critical minerals, which are essential to modern technology and the transition to net zero. They help to keep Australia moving and ensure that we are not always the last link in global supply chains.

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

## New initiatives

### Industry

The Government's industry policy priorities and investments will add value to Australia's resources sector, retain national industrial capability, build supply chain resilience, support regional employment, and accelerate decarbonisation. This is helping Australia's metals industry to remain competitive, sustainable and a source of well-paid jobs for decades to come. Regional communities where much of Australia's metal processing and manufacturing occurs include Mount Isa, Port Pirie, Hobart, Whyalla, Port Kembla, Gladstone, Portland, Bell Bay, the Hunter and the Pilbara.

## **National Reconstruction Fund sub-funds**

The \$15.0 billion National Reconstruction Fund Corporation (NRFC) invests in domestic industrial capability and across critical sovereign supply chains.

The Government has opened three new sub-funds to be delivered by the NRFC, which can provide higher rates of concessional finance to Australian businesses.

- The \$5.0 billion Net Zero Fund will support large industrial facilities to invest in new equipment, technologies and processes to decarbonise, helping businesses capitalise on the global transition to net zero. It will also support the scaling up of domestic manufacturing of renewables and low emission technologies.
- The \$1.0 billion Economic Resilience Program’s zero-interest loans are available to businesses in critical supply chains affected by global market disruptions, including those producing and transporting the fuels, plastics, fertilisers and agricultural protection chemicals that Australian farmers and manufacturers rely on every day.
- The \$150.0 million Forestry Growth Fund concessional finance will support the re-tooling of mills and processing facilities as they increase output and move up the value chain, with a focus on boosting timber for housing construction.

The Net Zero Fund and Forestry Growth Fund have a lower benchmark rate of return to enable the NRFC to invest in earlier-stage proposals, first-of-a-kind projects, or those with large upfront capital requirements and longer repayment periods compared to investments made under the NRFC’s General Fund.

## **Whyalla Steelworks**

The Australian Government, alongside the South Australian Government, is providing support to finalise the Whyalla Steelworks administration process and to support its transition to a sustainable future. This will help to preserve Australia’s sovereign steelmaking capability and advance our transition to green iron and steel. It will provide benefits to the region as well as to the state and national economies. The administration funding is being used to maintain safe operations, pay wages and suppliers, and undertake critical works and maintenance while an independent sale process is underway. To support the sale process, the Commonwealth and South Australian governments have committed up to \$1.9 billion to invest in the transformation of the Steelworks alongside a new long-term owner.

## **Mount Isa copper smelter and Townsville copper refinery**

The Commonwealth and Queensland governments are investing up to \$600.0 million in a support package for the Mount Isa copper smelter and Townsville copper refinery. This investment will alleviate immediate pressures, and deliver a transformation study to examine the long-term future for the facilities, industry and workers of Mount Isa and northwest Queensland, positioning the region for a more diverse and resilient future.

### **Boyne aluminium smelter**

The Government has committed \$1.0 billion over 11 years from 2029–30 to decarbonise aluminium production at the Boyne Island Aluminium Smelter in Gladstone. This commitment is in partnership with the Queensland Government and supported by the renewable energy generation, storage and transmission investments being made by Rio Tinto. This will secure the long-term future of Australia’s second largest aluminium smelter and ensure that the region has a major ongoing role in Australia’s sovereign industrial capability and supply chain resilience. This commitment is part of the Government’s commitment to green metals under the Future Made in Australia agenda.

### **Bell Bay manganese smelter**

The Government is supporting the retention of a skilled workforce at the Bell Bay manganese smelter while it transitions through an administration process, giving the best chance for a sale that ensures continued national capability to produce manganese alloy. The facility has the potential to play a key role in domestic steelmaking, the wider metals sector and industrial capability across the Australian economy. It is also an important employer for regional Tasmania.

### **Australian Space Agency**

The Government is funding the Australian Space Agency to maintain its regulatory function, continue developing international partnerships, and lead whole-of-government civil space-related policy. Many space industry facilities and private sector industry participants are located in regional Australia, providing job opportunities and demand for goods and services in regional cities and towns, as well as in remote areas of the country.

### **National AI Plan**

On 2 December 2025, the Government released the National Artificial Intelligence (AI) Plan which sets out the Government’s ambition to capture the opportunities of AI, spread its benefits and keep Australians safe. Actions under the National AI Plan aim to ensure that all Australians benefit from opportunities of AI, across all regions, industries and communities. The plan includes commitments to support regional communities by promoting digital inclusion, expanding connectivity, supporting and training regional Australians, and promoting AI adoption in regional areas.

In March 2026, the Government released the *Expectations of data centres and AI infrastructure developers* (the Expectations). The Expectations set out how data centres should support good jobs and skills, align with the national interest, bring additional renewable energy capacity, use water efficiently and contribute to local innovation. The Expectations are an important part of ensuring that data centre development works for regional communities and benefits them.

## Science

### Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness

The Australian Centre for Disease Preparedness (ACDP) is located in the Geelong region of Victoria. It is operated by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and is a critical part of Australia's sovereign biosecurity system. It safeguards nearly \$46.0 billion of export industry income from livestock, fisheries and aquaculture against emerging diseases and outbreaks. The majority of these export industries are in regional Australia.

The Government is supporting a capital works program, the ACDP Part Life Refit, to upgrade the facility, with funding for Stage 2 commencing from 2026–27.

### Square Kilometre Array host country infrastructure

The Government has committed to deliver Australia's host country infrastructure obligations for the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) observatory project. Construction of the telescope is well underway in remote Western Australia. Investment in Australia's host country infrastructure, including in regional and remote Western Australia, will help create jobs and generate business supplier activity. The Government's investment in the SKA project is already realising economic benefits, with over 1,000 people employed on the project and over \$700.0 million contracted to Australian companies, many working in regional and remote areas on the construction of the telescope.

### Ensuring value for money to assist with the cost of living – regional Australia aspects

The Government is investing in the National Measurement Institute (NMI), Australia's national measurement authority to provide trusted measurement for a fair, safe and productive Australia. These measures support the NMI to sustain essential measurement capability and secure its specialist information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure and unique facilities. The NMI ensures Australians can trust the measurements that affect everyday life, and supports fair trading, safer products and a stronger economy across regional areas. Continued investment in NMI capabilities will ensure that quality services are accessibly delivered and that regional industries and economies are positioned for sustainable growth.

### Access to STEM discovery in Western Australia

The Government is investing \$2.8 million over four years from 2026–27 in Questacon to help take its Travelling Exhibits Program into regional and remote Western Australia - bringing interactive science, technology and mathematics programs into more regional venues. The Government will also contribute \$100.0 million over four years from 2026–27 in funding to build a new, upgraded Scitech Discovery Centre in Perth, conditional on co-investment by the Western Australian Government.

## **Resources**

### **Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve**

The Government has committed \$1.2 billion to establish the Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve (the Reserve), to help secure the supply of select critical minerals vital for Australia’s economy and national security. This includes an additional \$1.0 billion through the Critical Minerals Facility to support projects, and \$150.0 million over four years from 2026–27 for selective stockpiling of minerals, where required. The Reserve is expected to indirectly support regional Australia by reinforcing investment in critical minerals mining and processing activities located primarily in regional areas. The investment has potential to contribute to regional economies, through flow-on effects such as supporting local employment and boosting economic participation across regional and remote communities.

### **Resourcing Australia’s Prosperity**

Geoscience Australia will continue to implement Resourcing Australia’s Prosperity. This is a 35-year initiative under the Government’s Future Made in Australia agenda that is mapping Australia’s geological potential for critical minerals and strategic materials, hydrogen and carbon dioxide storage and groundwater, as well as for offshore renewable energy infrastructure.



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

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts delivers programs, projects, services and policies which connect and enrich Australian communities across cities, regions and territories. This includes planning for global digital economy, transport and telecommunications outcomes for the future, and building thriving and inclusive sport and arts sectors, all of which intersect with and benefit regional Australian communities.

The department also works to protect and celebrate the culture, heritage and languages of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly helping to implement a whole-of-government approach towards the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The department continues to engage across portfolios and all levels of government to implement the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework, which guides locally informed, responsive Australian Government investment across regional communities. This includes through various regional and community infrastructure programs and projects – such as the additional \$750.0 million over four years for further rounds of the Growing Regions and Thriving Suburbs programs – which are based on the Regional Investment Framework pillars and support liveability and resilience in the regions.

The Government is also delivering community infrastructure election commitments through the Major and Local Community Infrastructure Program, with \$570.5 million committed over four years from 2025–26 to deliver over 220 projects. The program is delivering important investment to local communities across the country with the aim of building resilience and improving amenity and accessibility through the provision of social and community facilities and driving economic growth in communities and the broader region.

Under the Roads to Recovery Program, funding of \$845.9 million is allocated nationally in 2026–27, with \$730.7 million being directed to regional areas. In addition, the Government is providing \$157.4 million nationally in 2026–27 under the Black Spot Program, with 50 per cent of this directed to regional areas on average. Under the Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program, the Government has committed more than \$330.0 million towards 124 projects under the first four tranches, with nearly 80 per cent of this being directed to projects in regional and remote areas. Additionally, the regional Precincts and Partnerships Program is supporting the design, development and delivery of precincts in regional, rural and remote Australia. To date, 48 projects have been funded at a value of \$253.1 million.

The Government is committed to making it easier for people and goods to move by sea, including in regional Australia, with \$47.1 million being invested to continue development of a Maritime Single Window and establish a digital portal. This project will improve

productivity at Australian ports by reducing compliance costs and disruptions because of inefficient administrative processes. The Government is also investing \$4.0 million in maritime fuel resilience and decarbonisation through delivering a strategy to prepare Australian ports to diversify the maritime fuel mix, supported by targeted industry trials and studies. It will help guide the development of ports into green maritime refuelling hubs, as well as supporting business opportunities for regional ports and the maritime industry. The measure will contribute to securing long-term resilience for the industry, which carries more than 99 per cent of Australia’s trade by volume.

Further investment in infrastructure and transport also directly benefits regional liveability, growth and connectivity. The Government remains committed to a 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline of over \$120 billion that delivers a sustainable program of nationally significant transport infrastructure projects across Australia. In the 2026–27 Budget, the Government is providing \$7.6 billion over 11 years from 2025–26 towards major road and rail projects and the Active Transport Fund under the Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP). Over \$9 billion of IIP funding over 10 years supports the delivery of IIP major projects that benefit both regional and urban communities. This includes investing \$1.8 billion in the existing Australian Rail Track Corporation’s (ARTC) network, bringing the total investment to improve network resilience, reliability and productivity to \$2.8 billion. Work will continue on the delivery of Inland Rail between Beveridge in Victoria and Parkes in New South Wales by the end of 2027. This will enable double stacked freight trains to travel between Melbourne and Perth, via Parkes. North of Parkes activity will focus on preservation of the rail corridor, as well as protecting sites for future Inland Rail intermodal terminals in Queensland. Momentum continues towards delivering high speed rail between Newcastle and Sydney, with a three-year package of funding provided for the High Speed Rail Authority to undertake the development phase for the project.

Ongoing investment in communications infrastructure also continues to provide vital support to regional Australia. The Government continues to deliver on its commitment to upgrade the NBN Fibre to the Node (FTTN) network to provide faster and more reliable broadband connectivity for consumers across Australia. In December 2025, the upgrade program for 1.5 million premises, including 660,000 in regional areas, was completed with the Government’s \$2.4 billion investment. This achievement provides over 10 million premises, around 90 per cent of the fixed-line footprint, with access to more resilient internet services capable of delivering gigabit broadband speeds. The Government is now progressing the final upgrade program for over 600,000 premises, of which around 340,000 are located in regional Australia. The Government is funding the upgrades through an equity injection of up to \$3.0 billion announced in January 2025. At the end of these final upgrades in 2030, around 94 per cent of the NBN fixed-line footprint will be able to access gigabit broadband speeds. This includes around 1 million premises located in regional communities.

The Government also continues to commit to delivering connectivity and digital inclusion of First Nations communities, building on the success of the existing NBN Community Wi-Fi Program, with the funded rollout and delivery of additional free Wi-Fi services in 53 remote communities expected to be completed by 30 June 2027.

The Government is ensuring regional Australians continue to have access to critical aviation services through providing a range of support measures during the voluntary administration and subsequent sale of Rex Airlines. Grant funding continues to be provided to support the safety of regional and remote airports through the Regional Airports Program and the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program.

For Northern Australia, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF) continues to support economic development through its financing of 34 infrastructure projects forecast to generate \$33.4 billion in public benefit and create over 18,600 jobs. The recent NAIF Act Review heard overwhelming support for the NAIF and the role it plays for Northern Australia. In response, the Government has developed legislation to continue the NAIF for 10 years, to 30 June 2036, which is currently being considered by the Parliament.

On 6 November 2025, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport accepted the Government's referral of an inquiry into local government funding and fiscal sustainability. Building on the recent 2024 inquiry into local government sustainability, which produced an interim report in February 2025, the inquiry is examining the financial relationship between local government and other levels of government in Australia, with a particular emphasis on funding mechanisms and fiscal sustainability. The committee is currently considering the latest round of submissions which will provide vital insights from stakeholders on local government pressures and the crucial infrastructure, services and support local communities depend on. The Government looks forward to the final recommendations from the Committee.

The Government continues to support a fair and equitable transition to a net zero economy, releasing the Net Zero Plan and six supporting sectoral plans in September 2025. These plans include a focus on supporting regions most affected by the transition to ensure they benefit. The department led the transport sector plan, including the development of the Transport and Infrastructure Net Zero Roadmap and Action Plan and is supporting the Australian Renewable Energy Agency in implementing the Government's \$1.1 billion Cleaner Fuels Program for the production of low carbon liquid fuels, like sustainable aviation fuel and renewable diesel, from readily available crops grown in regional Australia and waste products from regional industries such as forestry and sugarcane farming.

## **New initiatives**

### **Infrastructure Investment Program**

The Government is continuing to invest in road and rail projects that builds connections between Australia's regions, communities and major gateways for agriculture, tourism, resources, retail and manufacturing. Through the 2026–27 Budget, the Government is making an investment towards new projects in the Infrastructure Investment Program (IIP)

which will improve productivity and resilience, liveability and sustainability in regional Australia, including:

- \$24.0 million towards Bagot Road Safety and Capacity Upgrades in the Northern Territory
- \$4.0 million towards the Great Northern Highway Improvements – Broome to Kununurra in Western Australia
- \$1.8 billion towards the Australian Rail Track Corporation’s (ARTC) Network Investment Program to deliver resilience, reliability and productivity projects on the existing ARTC national network that connects regional Australia with major cities.

The Government is also providing additional funding of around \$830.0 million to 12 existing projects in regional areas, including:

- \$372.5 million towards the Western Highway – Ballarat to Stawell Duplication in Victoria
- \$251.2 million towards the Bruce Highway – Tiaro Bypass in Queensland.

### **Active Transport Fund**

This Budget builds on the initial success of the Active Transport Fund by providing ongoing funding for the program, with \$500.0 million over ten years from 2026–27 in new funding – making \$50.0 million available every year. This investment will improve road safety outcomes for vulnerable road users such as cyclists and pedestrians, delivering better road safety and health outcomes and giving people more options for how they choose to move around their cities and towns.

### **High speed rail – Newcastle to Sydney development phase**

On 24 February 2026, the Government announced the next major milestone for Australia’s high speed rail with the beginning of the development phase for high speed rail between Newcastle and Sydney.

The Government has provided \$659.6 million over three years for the High Speed Rail Authority to commence a development phase for a high speed rail service between Newcastle and Sydney. The development phase will further develop the design, cost and schedule for the project. This funding maintains the Government’s momentum towards delivery of high speed rail for Australia.

High speed rail between Newcastle and Sydney will cut travel times to around one hour from Newcastle to Central Sydney, with travel from the Central Coast to either Sydney or Newcastle reduced to 30 minutes. By enhancing connectivity between Newcastle and Sydney, the proposal will support regional liveability, workforce participation and regional growth.

## Freight on rail

The Government is committed to a productive, resilient and efficient supply chain, where rail plays a key role in moving goods around Australia. Decades of underinvestment in key sections of the network have reduced rail's competitiveness as a transport mode in transit time, cost and reliability.

The Government is committing \$1.8 billion in additional funding towards the ARTC's Network Investment Program, representing a total combined investment of \$2.8 billion in the program. This investment will improve the productivity, reliability and resilience of the existing rail network and prioritise the improvements that can be made to the rail network used today.

This funding will deliver targeted investments that reduce network disruptions, improve transit times, support longer trains and increase network capacity, and improve the resilience of the network to extreme weather events.

On the east coast north-south corridor, this will include investments improving productivity and competitiveness, while on the east-west corridor, investments will build the resilience and reliability of the network. The east-west corridor underpins national supply chain resilience and connectivity. Ensuring the reliable and resilient movement of goods is fundamental to national productivity.

The Government is also investing \$55.0 million in the Transport Resilience and Capacity Kickstart (TRACK) pilot program, which will provide incentives for more freight to move via trains and cargo ships. As part of this program, the ARTC will also undertake a national coordination role to identify and implement improvements to rail operations, working with states, territories, other rail infrastructure managers, rail and terminal operators and freight customers.

In parallel, the Government is continuing to invest in productivity enhancing open access intermodal terminals, with the National Intermodal Corporation commencing construction on the new \$1.6 billion intermodal precinct at Beveridge in Victoria, which is expected to commence operations in mid-2028. National Intermodal also continues to plan for potential future terminals at other key locations, including progressing land preservation activities at Parkes with the New South Wales Government and detailed planning for a future intermodal precinct at Ebenezer in Queensland with the Queensland Government.

## Supporting and securing regional aviation

On 18 December 2025, Air T, Inc. (Air T) completed its acquisition of Regional Express Airlines (Rex). To support the sale of Rex to Air T and ensure continuity of regional air services, the Government made available a new commercial loan of up to \$60.0 million, and approximately \$107.8 million of existing secured debt was restructured and carried forward.

In exchange for Government support, Air T contributed \$50.0 million to recapitalise Rex and agreed to a range of commitments aimed at preserving essential regional aviation

connectivity and strengthening governance, including returning additional aircraft to service and increasing the frequency of profitable flights across the Rex network.

On 4 February 2026, the Government announced the opening of the Regional and Remote Airport Support Program to provide up to \$5.0 million in relief payments to operators of regional and remote airports who were owed money by the Rex regional business when it entered voluntary administration.

The relief will support critical aviation services to connect remote and regional communities across Australia and support local governments in regional and remote areas to maintain essential services.

The Government has also provided an additional \$1.7 million in 2026–27 for the Remote Air Services Subsidy Scheme, which subsidises the carriage of passengers and essential goods to communities in remote and isolated areas of Australia.

### **Delivering aviation consumer protections**

The Government has committed \$38.1 million over four years from 2026–27 (and \$7.3 million per year ongoing) to implement the Aviation Consumer Protection Framework, which was announced in the Aviation White Paper, to progress the Australian Government’s vision for a fairer aviation sector and a better passenger experience. The Aviation Consumer Protection Bill 2026 was introduced on 1 April 2026 by the Hon Catherine King MP, Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government.

These reforms will deliver an improved consumer experience for all travellers in Australia, addressing the situation where travellers disproportionately bear the costs when flights are cancelled, delayed or disrupted. Aviation plays a critical role in supporting connectivity. Ensuring that there are consistent minimum standards will enable regional Australians to book flights with confidence knowing that they will be supported in the event of a disruption.

The Government has also provided \$4.5 million over four years to extend the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission’s domestic airline monitoring program through to 2029. Continued transparency will help keep pressure on prices and service standards, and ensure Australians see the benefits of a competitive airline sector.

### **Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation**

The Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation (UOMO) will require Optus, Telstra and TPG to provide reasonable and equitable access to outdoor SMS and calling across Australia. On 27 November 2025, the Government introduced framework legislation to establish the UOMO, with the obligation to commence subject to market developments. The UOMO is technology neutral, with mobile operators expected to leverage their current mobile networks and, in areas currently without mobile coverage, direct-to-device technology enabled through low Earth orbit satellites. The UOMO will substantially expand scope for people to seek help if they are lost, injured or facing natural disasters in areas without terrestrial mobile coverage, predominantly in regional and remote Australia. The

Government is working with mobile operators and monitoring market developments closely.

### **First Nations digital inclusion**

The Government is committed to Closing the Gap Target 17, which aims for equal levels of digital inclusion for First Nations Australians. In 2025 it was announced that 53 remote communities will receive free Wi-Fi services as part of the contestable First Nations Community Wi-Fi Program. The program has targeted communities with poor levels of connectivity and will provide sustainable and affordable place-based solutions. The rollout and delivery of funded projects has commenced and is expected to be completed by 30 June 2027, with an ongoing operational period of five years from when services go live. The remote communities are located in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory and Tasmania. This builds on the success of the existing NBN Community Wi-Fi Program, which has already delivered free community Wi-Fi to 23 remote communities.

### **Financial Assistance Grant – bring-forward**

The Government is supporting local councils across Australia to continue delivery of essential services and manage the impacts of fuel supply disruption by bringing forward an 80 per cent payment of the 2026–27 Financial Assistance Grant (FA Grant) entitlement (\$2.9 billion). Of the early payment of \$2.9 billion, it is anticipated that almost \$2.0 billion will be provided to councils in regional areas. Councils in regional areas have been determined in accordance with the Australian Bureau of Statistics remoteness classifications at the 2021 Census. FA Grants are a source of untied funding paid to councils to support the delivery of essential local infrastructure and services. The FA Grant distribution methodology applies adjustments for council classification, population and geography, which has the effect of directing higher per capita funding to regional councils in recognition of the greater per capita infrastructure and service delivery costs they face.

Bringing forward these payments improves councils' cash flow and provides greater flexibility to manage rising costs and maintain service delivery, particularly in smaller and more remote local government areas with limited revenue bases. The measure supports councils to plan and deliver priority works earlier, including road maintenance, community facilities and local services that underpin regional liveability and economic participation.

This funding supports councils nationwide and benefits communities across regional Australia by strengthening the financial sustainability of local government and supporting continued investment in local priorities.

### **Supplementary funding for South Australian roads**

The Government is providing an additional \$20.6 million per annum, indexed and ongoing, to South Australia to support the delivery of priority local road projects, improving safety, freight efficiency and connectivity for regional communities. The additional investment supports the timely delivery of road upgrades that are critical to regional productivity and access to markets, services and employment.

Supplementary funding for local roads in South Australia was first introduced in the 2004–05 Budget, to address an historical error in calculating the share of the national local road network managed by South Australian councils. The Government has applied indexation to this sum for the first time since 2017–18 to ensure its real value is maintained.

Improved road infrastructure in regional South Australia enhances freight movements for key industries, including agriculture and resources, and supports safer travel for local communities. The funding will assist in addressing cost pressures on major road projects and ensure construction activities can continue as planned.

This investment contributes to stronger, more connected regional communities in South Australia by supporting reliable transport links that underpin economic growth, resilience and liveability.

### **Community infrastructure**

The Government has committed \$750.0 million over three years from 2027–28 for additional rounds of the Growing Regions and Thriving Suburbs programs. The commitment expands the program’s proven success in delivering an open, competitive grants process funding capital works for community infrastructure across our regional, rural and remote communities.

Growing Regions and Thriving Suburbs will provide funding of between \$250,000 and \$15.0 million to projects that enable place-based benefits. The funding will be invested in broad-use community-focused infrastructure that creates and enhances amenity, jobs, and venues where programs and activities can be held that encourage connection and a sense of belonging and identity, contributing to improved social cohesion and productivity throughout regional Australia.

This targeted investment in community infrastructure across regional Australia supports local governing bodies to plan, build and deliver community infrastructure aligned to strategic local, regional and national priorities.

### **Stronger Communities Programme**

The Government has committed \$22.5 million of funding over two years from 2026–27 for a tenth round of the Stronger Communities Programme. The program will continue to support small-scale capital projects that enable and encourage community participation and help build vibrant, connected and resilient communities throughout Australia’s regions.

Round 10 will provide funding between \$2,500 to \$20,000 to small-scale projects that deliver direct benefits to communities and support local government-community partnership.

Across recent rounds, Stronger Communities Programme funded projects have effectively supported communities across regional Australia to deal with COVID19 recovery; natural disasters, and economic pressures; improved digital connectivity; enhanced local economic activity; and reduced financial pressures on community organisations.

## Northern Territory Regional Logistics Hubs

The Government is progressing the 2022–23 October Budget commitment of \$440.0 million planned equity to support development of Regional Logistics Hubs in the Northern Territory by releasing \$10.0 million of this funding commitment to National Intermodal in 2026–27. This investment will support the next stage of planning for the development and upgrade of Regional Logistics Hubs and infrastructure along the Northern Territory rail network. Delivery will be undertaken in partnership with the Northern Territory Government and will focus on strategic, place-based investment that enhances productivity and liveability.

## Local Sporting Champions and Local Para Champions

The Local Sporting Champions and Local Para Champions programs will be extended (\$8.0 million in 2026–27). Over 40 per cent of program recipients are from rural and regional areas (where costs are higher to attend competition).<sup>1</sup>

The Local Sporting Champions program provides financial assistance for coaches, officials and competitors aged 12–18 participating in state, national or international championships. If successful, applicants will receive \$500–\$750 towards the cost of attending their championships.

The Local Para Champions program provides financial assistance for coaches, officials and competitors aged 12–24 participating in state, national or international championships for athletes with disability. If successful, applicants will receive \$750–\$1,000 towards the cost of attending their championships.

## Sporting Schools Program

The Sporting Schools initiative will also benefit from an extension (\$36.3 million in 2026–27), 41 per cent of schools supported are in regional areas and 6 per cent are in remote areas.

The Australian Sports Commission delivers Sporting Schools in partnership with more than 40 national sporting organisations, including national sporting organisations for people with disability. All programs are free of charge for students. They help school-aged children build the confidence and capability to be active for life.

Most Sporting Schools programs support primary schools, and access extends to high school students for programs that are delivered in remote areas. There are also targeted programs that focus on Year 7/8 high school students.

## Water and Snow Safety Program

The Government is continuing to invest in the Water and Snow Safety Program (\$14.4 million in 2026–27). This investment includes vital safety equipment and training for

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<sup>1</sup> The Australian Electoral Commission website provides classifications of electoral divisions, including definitions for rural and provincial.

316 surf lifesaving clubs nationally, delivered through Surf Life Saving Australia. This includes 136 clubs in regional areas and seven in remote areas.

The program provides funding to specified leading water and snow safety organisations to undertake activities that:

- reduce the incidence of water and snow related injuries and deaths in Australia
- enhance the safety of Australian water and snow environments
- improve the behaviour of people in, on and around water and snow in Australia
- address priority areas, guiding principles and goals for water safety outlined in the Australian Water Safety Strategy 2030.

## Highlights for Northern Australia

For a strong national economy, northern Australia must thrive.

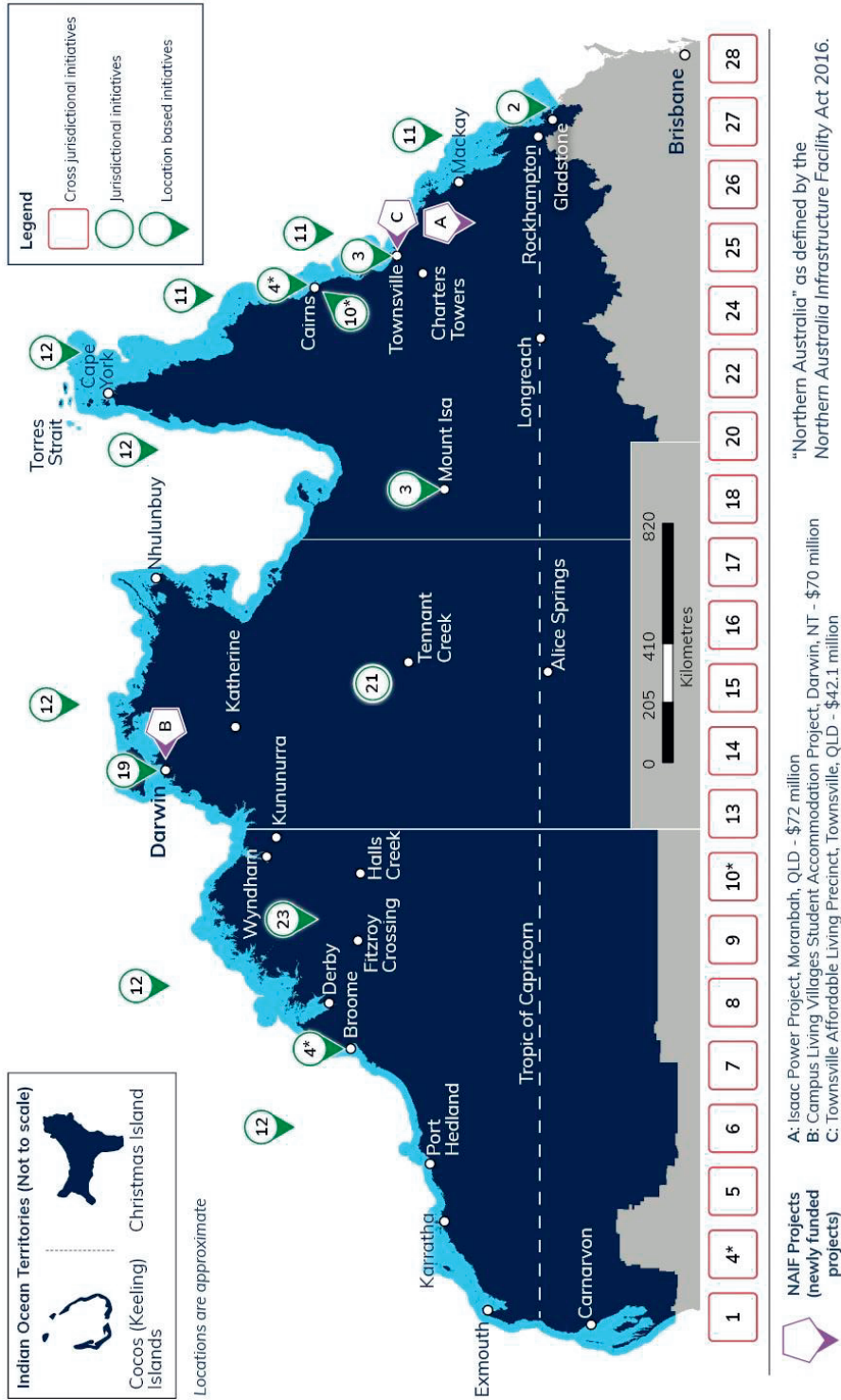
In August 2024, the Government released the Northern Australia Action Plan 2024–2029, reaffirming its long-term commitment to the north and setting the strategic direction for investment and growth across the region. The Action Plan supports economic opportunity and development, including for First Nations people, and reflects contemporary challenges and the views of northern stakeholders.

In 2025, the Government published the first Annual Progress Report on delivery of the Northern Australia Action Plan, demonstrating early momentum and accountability against the plan’s priorities.

This year, the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility reached a landmark investment milestone, with \$3.0 billion of loans drawn down by project proponents. The 2026–27 Budget builds on this progress, with targeted investments that continue to advance the Action Plan and deliver tangible benefits for communities, industry and workers across Northern Australia. Key measures are outlined below.

	Initiative	Investment	Portfolio
1	Critical Minerals Strategic Reserve	\$1.2 billion	Industry, Science and Resources
2	Boyne Island Aluminium Smelter	\$1.0 billion	Industry, Science and Resources
3	Mount Isa copper smelter and Townsville copper refinery	\$600.0 million	Industry, Science and Resources
4	Strengthening Employment Services Systems (*Broome and Yarrabah among initial focus locations)	\$312.1 million	Employment and Workplace Relations
5	Expanding the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program	\$299.0 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
6	Implementing Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices	\$218.3 million	Social Services
7	Improving Outcomes for Children	\$171.7 million	Social Services
8	Closing the Gap Health Infrastructure	\$144.1 million	Health, Disability and Ageing
9	First Nations Education Outcomes	\$113.0 million	Education
10	Protecting Australia’s Native Species (*Cairns region among initial focus locations)	\$110.8 million	Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
11	Great Barrier Reef Restoration and Sustainability Projects	\$91.8 million	Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

12	Civil Maritime Security – Countering Illegal Foreign Fishing	\$55.8 million	Home Affairs
13	Supporting Aboriginal Hostels Ltd to Continue Delivering Critical Short-Term Accommodation Services	\$48.3 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
14	Extending Supports for Birthing on Country	\$44.4 million	Health, Disability and Ageing
15	Australia-European Union Free Trade Agreement Implementation	\$38.6 million	Foreign Affairs and Trade
16	Expanding the Stores Efficiency and Resilience Package	\$32.7 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
17	Expanding the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme	\$27.4 million	Prime Minister and Cabinet
18	Closing the Gap – further investments	\$27.0 million	Employment and Workplace Relations
19	Bagot Road Safety and Capacity Upgrades	\$24.0 million	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
20	13 YARN	\$13.9 million	Health, Disability and Ageing
21	Northern Territory Regional Logistic Hubs	\$10.0 million	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
22	Good to Great Schools Australia	\$5.0 million	Education
23	Great Northern Highway Improvements – Broome to Kununurra	\$4.0 million	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
24	Fairer Fuel and Workplace Relations Supports for Regional Australia	\$1.3 million	Employment and Workplace Relations
25	Aged Care Workforce Remote Accord program	\$0.7 million	Health, Disability and Ageing
26	Medicare Urgent Care Clinics Ongoing Funding	Funded within existing resources	Health, Disability and Ageing
27	Universal Outdoor Mobile Obligation	Funded within existing resources	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts
28	First Nations Digital Inclusion	Funded within existing resources	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts





## Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio supports the Australian Government's priorities for regional Australia through the National Indigenous Australians Agency. The Government is partnering with First Nations people, communities and organisations to deliver on Closing the Gap and achieving better outcomes for First Nations Australians. The Government is delivering real jobs, strengthening local economies and enhancing service delivery in regional and remote areas through record investments in remote housing, employment pathways and economic development and in critical social services to support First Nations families.

On 12 February 2026, the Government released the Commonwealth's 2025 Closing the Gap Annual Report and 2026 Implementation Plan. The 2026–27 Budget delivers the commitments made in the Government's Closing the Gap Plan. By strengthening participation, supporting job creation and improving the enabling conditions for economic activity, the Government is contributing to more productive and resilient regional economies.

On 12 March 2024, the Australian and Northern Territory governments announced the joint \$4.0 billion investment to deliver up to 2,700 houses over 10 years from 2024–25 to halve overcrowding and improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities. This investment recognises the importance of safe and accessible housing as essential to meeting socio-economic targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It is supported by a Partnership Agreement between the governments, four Northern Territory Land Councils and Aboriginal Housing NT which formalises shared decision-making arrangements, consistent with Closing the Gap commitments. In 2024 the Government outlined a two-stage process to fulfil its commitment to replace the Community Development Program. The Remote Australia Employment Service, with its \$1.9 billion investment over five years from 2024–25, is improving job readiness and connecting participants to sustainable employment aligned with local demand. This is complemented by the Remote Jobs and Economic Development (RJED) program, which provided \$724.7 million over five years from 2023–24 to create 3,000 real jobs in remote communities, with fair wages and conditions including annual leave. This Budget expands RJED from 3,000 to 6,000 jobs by 2030 to increase job creation and participation, directly supporting local economic activity and income generation.

Targeted programs are also supporting productive activity in regional economies. Round Two of the Indigenous Rangers Program (IRP) expansion has been announced with 82 ranger projects being funded, including 58 new organisations joining the IRP. This has improved Indigenous-led land and water management services in regional, rural and remote communities. Round Two invests over \$190.0 million over three years (2025–2028). This is supporting over 900 new employment opportunities across the country to achieve the Government's commitment to double the number of Indigenous rangers by 2030 and increase women ranger numbers towards gender parity by the end of the decade.

The portfolio is progressing reforms to enable greater economic utilisation of land and native title assets. This includes funding of \$75.0 million over three years from 2025–26, which was announced at the 2025 Garma Festival, to strengthen the prescribed bodies corporate sector. This investment will improve governance capability and enable Traditional Owners to participate more effectively in economic development opportunities across regional Australia.

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

The Government is also addressing cost-of-living pressures that constrain household participation and wellbeing. Building on the National Strategy for Food Security, the Government is expanding its investment in the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme and the Food Security Resilience package. These investments are strengthening access to affordable and nutritious food in remote communities by lowering the cost of 30 essential items, empowering stronger governance in remote stores, and building resilient supply chains. The Budget expands these measures to improve affordability and reduce cost pressures in 225 remote communities.

The portfolio, through the Office for Women, drives whole-of-government implementation of *Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality (Working for Women)*. Intersectionality is a key principle of *Working for Women*, acknowledging that for many people in Australia, their experience of gender inequality can be shaped by different characteristics and circumstances such as age, income, First Nations identity or geographic location. Women in regional, rural and remote areas can face additional barriers to accessing resources and services, including medical care, education, training and employment opportunities, while also contributing significantly to the strength and sustainability of their local communities.

The Office for Women also stewards gender-responsive budgeting across government to put gender equality at the centre of public policy and budget decision-making. Agencies lead efforts to conduct intersectional gender analysis and complete gender impact assessments when developing proposals. *Including Gender: An APS Guide to Gender Analysis and Gender Impact Assessment* was revised in December 2025 to provide the Australian Public Service (APS) with guidance on taking an intersectional approach to policy development. This encourages policymakers to examine the complexity and diversity of people's experiences and develop policy solutions that are culturally appropriate, accessible, equitable, evidence-based and targeted to need.

Key partnerships established under the *Working for Women* program, including the National Women's Alliances, are strengthening the evidence base and ensuring women's voices are embedded in policy design. The National Women's Alliances have continued to

provide the Government with evidence-based, intersectional advice on gender equality, informed by the diverse lived experiences and perspectives of women across Australia, including First Nations women through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women’s Alliance (NATSIWA), and women living in regional, rural and remote locations as represented by the National Rural Women’s Coalition (NRWC).

NATSIWA and the NRWC have engaged directly with government through a number of submissions across a range of critical policy areas such as *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*, strengthening the implementation of paid family and domestic violence leave; strengthening income security, employment stability and workplace safety; and increasing access to contraception information.

## **New initiatives**

### **Expanding the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program**

On 12 February 2026, the Government committed \$299.0 million over five years from 2025–26 to double the scale of the RJED program from 3,000 to 6,000 jobs by 2030.

This builds on the Government’s previous investment of \$724.7 million from the 2024–25 Budget to replace the Community Development Program with a new program that offers real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions.

The investment supports sustainable long-term employment by increasing workforce participation and strengthening skills development and capability building – contributing to improved social and economic outcomes for individuals, families and communities across remote Australia.

### **Expanding the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme**

On 12 February 2026, the Government committed \$27.4 million over four years from 2025–26 for the expansion of the Low-Cost Essentials Subsidy Scheme.

Building on the demonstrated success of the existing \$50.0 million initiative from the 2025–26 Budget, the investment improves equity and enhances delivery of outcomes by expanding to all the approximately 225 eligible remote stores. The Government will deliver cost-of-living relief to remote Australians by reducing prices of 30 essential product lines across a greater number of remote community stores.

By addressing the higher cost of essential goods in remote areas, the initiative supports improved food security and contributes to better health and wellbeing for individuals and families. It alleviates cost-of-living pressures and promotes equitable access to subsidised essentials for First Nations communities living in remote locations.

### **Expanding the Stores Efficiency and Resilience Package**

On 12 February 2026, the Government committed \$32.7 million over three years from 2026–27 to expand the Stores Efficiency and Resilience Package.

This builds on the successful \$11.8 million initiative from the 2023–24 Budget which supported 25 remote stores. Under this expansion, up to an additional 75 remote stores will be able to maintain adequate stock levels and improve food security during periods of transport disruption or natural disaster, such as seasonal power outages, and adverse weather events. The investment strengthens community resilience, while enhancing everyday purchasing power through supporting the availability of more essential items in remote communities.

### **Supporting Aboriginal Hostels Ltd to continue delivering critical short-term accommodation services**

The Government is providing \$48.3 million over three years from 2025–26 to support the ongoing delivery of critical, culturally safe short-term accommodation services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through Aboriginal Hostels Limited (AHL).

AHL has delivered culturally appropriate accommodation for over 50 years, supporting First Nations people in regional, remote and very remote communities who face barriers to accessing healthcare and maternal services, and safe accommodation for women and children escaping family and domestic violence. This funding ensures that First Nations people can travel and stay in places where they can better access healthcare, education, employment and other essential services.

### **National Australia Day Grants**

The National Australia Day Grants program will continue to provide \$10.0 million in 2026–27 to support activities and events for Australia Day celebrations. This funding includes a \$4.5 million community events stream to support community-level organisations (primarily local councils and not-for-profit organisations) to deliver community activities and events on Australia Day. Organisations in regional and remote Australia are the target recipients for the Community Events Grants, as these communities often cannot access Australia Day events held in capital cities, to enable them to recognise the day in a way that is meaningful to their local identity.

## Social Services

Through the Department of Social Services (DSS) the Australian Government delivers essential payments and services to improve the economic and social wellbeing of individuals and families in Australian communities.

Australians are facing economic and social pressures in an increasingly challenging global context. In this Budget, the Government is providing an additional \$11.8 billion for the social security system to account for these pressures, including to ensure that indexation of payments to those who rely on them keeps up with the pace of inflation.

This Budget includes new investments to support the most vulnerable in our community, particularly in remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Measures include investing in child and family supports to prevent family separation and family violence, funding community led First Nations responses, expanding financial counselling and gambling harm prevention, and the establishment of the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People as a permanent, independent body from 1 July 2026 to protect the rights and interests of First Nations children and young people nationwide.

### New initiatives

#### Improving outcomes for children

The Government is providing \$171.7 million over five years from 2025–26 and \$42.9 million per year ongoing to drive better outcomes for children and families. This includes \$166.0 million over five years (and \$41.1 million per year ongoing) to establish a single national Children and Family Support program from 1 July 2026. Five existing programs for children and families will be replaced by the new program, and funding will be increased by around 12 per cent per annum. This will provide greater resources to the community sector to support frontline work and simplify grant administration.

This investment is intended to support families across Australia, including those in regional and remote areas, where 40 per cent of current clients accessing the in-scope services live. The Children and Family Support program will target support to areas where there are high levels of disadvantage. This will have a positive impact on regional and remote areas, which often face greater risk of disadvantage and higher rates of developmental vulnerability.

#### Implementing *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices*

The Government is providing \$218.3 million over five years from 2025–26 to support implementation of *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036 (Our Ways)*.

An investment of \$167.6 million over four years from 2026–27 is allocated to up to 40 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) to

support families, in partnership with state and territory governments and First Nations peoples. ACCOs will support up to 12,000 families to reduce family, domestic and sexual violence experienced by First Nations women and children, while helping to prevent the removal of children from their families.

The initiatives will provide culturally safe frontline services tailored to local needs for women and children, healing supports for children and young people, and early intervention services. In parallel they will build the capability and sustainability of the ACCO sector, supporting workforce development, coordination and data informed practice to ensure a lasting impact across communities.

Funding also includes \$32.5 million in 2026–27 to extend the Leaving Violence Program Regional Trials for one year across four regional locations (Cairns, Dubbo, Darwin and Broome), maintaining support for victim survivors; and \$15.5 million over five years from 2025–26 to fund *Our Ways Strong Together*, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence Peak Body, and establish shared governance to guide implementation of *Our Ways*.

### **Expansion of the Financial Counselling for Gambling Program**

The Government is providing \$39.0 million over four years and \$10.0 million ongoing to strengthen online gambling harm minimisation by expanding access to specialised support and increasing prevention through education. This additional funding will enable earlier intervention and better outcomes for individuals and families experiencing gambling related harm, particularly young people, First Nations Australians and lower income households.

This investment will boost the capacity of existing services, including through outreach, and expand the program to more regional areas, increasing service availability in regional and remote locations. It will double the number of people who can access specialist financial counselling for gambling, supporting an additional 5,000 people each year on top of the 5,000 clients already assisted including those in regional areas.

### **Permanent arrangements for the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People**

Commencing on 13 January 2025, the National Commission protects the rights and interests of First Nations children and young people in all states and territories and in urban, regional and remote areas, including reducing over-representation in out-of-home care and detention. New legislation, passed in March 2026, establishes the National Commission as a statutory agency and the Commissioner as a statutory officer from 1 July 2026. The National Commission will operate with specific functions and powers to drive accountability and influence systemic issues that disproportionately impact First Nations children and young people.

The Government is investing a total of \$42.8 million over five years from 2025–26 and \$9.3 million ongoing to support the National Commission.

# Treasury

The Treasury portfolio takes a whole-of-economy view to support the Australian Government in delivering a more resilient and modern economy and achieving strong and sustainable economic and fiscal outcomes. Treasury also works to support effective Government policies, programs and regulation, and to improve the supply and affordability of housing. Current priorities for the portfolio include easing cost-of-living pressures on the community, addressing housing cost and availability pressures, supporting productivity growth, and furthering budget repair.

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

The Treasury advises on small business policy issues and assists the Government in developing a competitive and productive environment for small business, including nearly 800,000 regional small businesses, across our nation.

The Treasury also supports the Government to improve housing outcomes for all Australians, including to boost housing supply and make it easier to rent and buy a first home. The Government has prioritised regional Australians across major housing initiatives under the Homes for Australia plan, funding critical infrastructure to unlock regional housing and delivering more social and affordable homes in the regions through the Housing Australia Future Fund. On 1 October 2025, the Government expanded the 5% Deposit Scheme to help more Australians buy their first home sooner, with all regional first home buyers now having access to the scheme with no caps on places or incomes.

## New initiatives

### Housing Support Program – Local Infrastructure Fund

The Government is providing \$2.0 billion in this Budget for the Local Infrastructure Fund under the Housing Support Program, to help local governments and state-owned utilities build the critical 'last mile' infrastructure needed to support new housing developments. This targeted funding will help unlock development-ready land by fast-tracking enabling infrastructure such as water, sewer and electricity connections, with a focus on regional Australia. As part of this funding, \$500.0 million will be dedicated to local infrastructure in the regions.

This funding for enabling infrastructure could support up to 65,000 homes nationwide over the next decade.

The Local Infrastructure Fund will be available in states and territories that commit to further reform to drive productivity in the housing sector. This includes faster and simpler

approvals, making more land available and ready for new homes, and delivering a genuinely national construction code. The first funding round will open later this year, with a second round expected to follow in 2027.

### **Housing for Australians at risk of homelessness**

The Government will provide \$59.4 million over four years from 2026–27 to provide states and territories with funding for community housing providers to supplement rental income for social housing for over 4,000 eligible young people, aged 16–24, who are in receipt of the Away from Home rate of Youth Allowance or ABSTUDY and who are at risk of, or experiencing, homelessness. This will benefit eligible young people in regional and remote Australia, who made up almost half of 16–24 year olds presenting alone to specialist homelessness services in 2024–25.

### **Cash distribution regulatory framework**

The Government is introducing a regulatory framework for the cash distribution system to ensure cash remains available to regional and remote Australia on fair and efficient price and service terms. Cash functions as an inclusive and reliable payment method for those living in regional and remote communities. However, declining cash usage across the country has placed pressure on the cash distribution system and led to market consolidation. Funding included in the 2026–27 Budget will empower the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) to implement safeguards to support the fair and efficient provision of cash distribution services, alongside new powers for the Reserve Bank of Australia to support the continuity of critical cash distribution services in the event of a crisis.

### **Taking pressure off Australians – temporary reduction in fuel excise and heavy vehicle road user charge**

The Government has delivered a \$2.9 billion package to more than halve fuel excise and excise equivalent customs duties and reduce the heavy vehicle road user charge to zero for three months from 1 April 2026. Excise on petrol and diesel has fallen from 52.6 cents to 20.6 cents per litre. States and territories will provide the Commonwealth up to \$400.0 million to support the fuel excise reduction.

The Government has directed the ACCC to intensify fuel price monitoring, with weekly public reporting including coverage of more than 190 regional locations. The Government has also strengthened competition and consumer protections by doubling maximum penalties for serious breaches of competition law and the Australian Consumer Law to \$100.0 million. The Government is also progressing legislative amendments to provide additional powers for the ACCC to permit businesses to take coordinated action that supports the response to the fuel crisis. The ACCC continues to closely monitor fuel prices and supply conditions so that fuel retailers and suppliers do not exploit international conflict to engage in illegal practices.

## Veterans' Affairs

The Australian Government remains committed to delivering a quality support system for Australian veterans and families of veterans, and to ensuring that services are accessible, trusted and responsive regardless of where veterans choose to live.

In 2026–27, the Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) will continue to deliver the Government's response to the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, with a strong focus on strengthening wellbeing, simplifying systems and improving the way veterans and families experience support – including those living in regional, rural and remote Australia.

A significant priority during the year will be the continued implementation of Royal Commission recommendations, including reforms to improve mental health supports, suicide prevention, transition from service, and coordination across the Defence and veteran support system. This work will continue in partnership with Defence, state and territory governments, ex service organisations and community providers, recognising the importance of locally accessible services and community-based support in regional areas.

From 1 July 2026, the *Veterans' Entitlements, Treatment and Support (Simplification and Harmonisation) Act 2025* commences. This reform simplifies veteran compensation and rehabilitation arrangements with all new claims from this date to be lodged under an improved *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*. Claims lodged before 1 July 2026 will continue to be determined under the current framework. Over time, the streamlined framework is expected to reduce complexity and support more consistent and timely outcomes for veterans and families, including those in regional communities where navigating multiple systems can be more challenging.

The 2026–27 year will also mark the commencement of the Veteran and Family Wellbeing Agency, a key recommendation of the Royal Commission. The agency will focus on wellbeing, prevention and early intervention, complementing DVA's ongoing responsibilities for compensation, rehabilitation and commemoration. It will work closely with existing services, including regional Veterans' and Families' Hubs and the Veterans' Access Network, to strengthen community connections and improve outcomes for veterans and families outside metropolitan centres.

Maintaining the integrity of the veteran support system will remain a key focus for the Government and DVA in 2026–27. This includes stronger safeguards to ensure veterans receive safe and high-quality services, public resources are used appropriately, and providers and advocates operate in line with clear standards. These measures are central to maintaining trust in the system and supporting fair, timely access to entitlements, including for veterans and families living in regional Australia.

Through these reforms, the Government is continuing to modernise the veteran support system so that it is simpler, fairer and more responsive – supporting veterans and families to live well, stay connected to family and community, and continue to live with purpose beyond the uniform, wherever they live.

