



Budget 2024–25

REGIONAL MINISTERIAL BUDGET STATEMENT 2024–25 DELIVERING A RESILIENT AND PROSPEROUS FUTURE FOR REGIONAL AUSTRALIA

A Statement by

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For the information of honourable members
on the occasion of the Budget 2024–25

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Government pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In supporting strong and sustainable regions, we recognise the importance of listening to the voices and perspectives of local First Nations people and responding to the uniqueness of places and communities across Australia.

We are committed to working in genuine long-term partnership with First Nations people – harnessing opportunities and responding to challenges, including through smart and responsible regional investment.

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

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Foreword

The Albanese Government's vision for regional Australia is of strong, connected communities that help shape our economic growth and wellbeing. Regions that are resilient and responsive to economic and global shifts – engaged and empowered towards a future made in Australia. Regions that are inclusive, vibrant and diverse – providing opportunities for all people to participate and have their voices heard. And regions where people, businesses and investments thrive – driving regional development and diversifying Australia's economy. The 2024-25 Budget helps deliver on this vision, building on our strategic, coordinated, whole-of-government approach to uplifting Australia's regions.

The Government is delivering outcomes for regional Australians. With so much of the nation's prosperity generated in our regions, we understand how important strong regions are in building a stronger Australia. We also understand how important it is for people and families across regional Australia to have the support they need, like access to quality services, including through strengthening Medicare, and relieving cost-of-living pressures.

Across the three Budgets we have delivered – and guided by our Regional Investment Framework – our focus has remained on making things better for regional people, the places they live, the services they need, and the industries and local economies that provide jobs and underpin prosperity. We have also ensured investments are targeted, responsible and affordable – cementing our Government's commitment to budget repair and restoring transparency and integrity to regional investment.

The 2024-25 Budget continues the important work of preparing Australia, our regional communities and our industries for a future made in Australia – while also responding to immediate challenges impacting people, communities and businesses. Building on the around 350 regional initiatives introduced through our first two Budgets, 134 new packages and initiatives in this Budget include:

- **Positioning regional Australia to power our future prosperity and economic security.** The Future Made in Australia agenda addresses the structural and strategic challenges facing the Australian economy, harnessing national advantages like abundant natural assets and resource endowments to encourage investment in priority industries that will contribute to decarbonisation and ensure Australia's security and prosperity. The \$1.7 billion Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund will boost investment and research and development, and unlock economic opportunity across critical new industries like green metals, low carbon fuels and clean energy manufacturing. Investment of over \$8.0 billion will continue to support Australia to be a global player in hydrogen, and targeted investment will build the skilled workforces required for the jobs of the future, including in driving the transition to clean energy. A commitment of over \$7.0 billion will strengthen Australia's critical minerals sector, \$835.6 million will grow Australian solar manufacturing, and \$549.1 million will transform Australia's battery industry.

- **A range of measures to help relieve cost-of-living pressures.** The Government's priority in this Budget is helping Australians through responsible cost-of-living relief, with measures that directly reduce inflation. These measures include a tax cut for every Australian taxpayer (taxpayers will receive an average tax cut of \$1,888 in 2024–25), action to keep the cost of medicines down through the Eighth Community Pharmacy Agreement, and support for renters by increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 10 per cent. Households and businesses will benefit from additional energy bill relief, and the New Vehicle Efficiency Standard will ensure motorists across Australia benefit from lower fuel costs that come with more efficient vehicles. Extending the freeze on social security deeming rates for a further year will also ease cost-of-living pressures on pensioners and other income support recipients, and a review of the Food and Grocery Code of Conduct will help ensure the right regulatory settings are in place to support a competitive and sustainable food and grocery industry across Australia.
- **Delivery of better services for people in regional Australia.** In Medicare's 40th anniversary year, the Government continues to build on its historic investments to support and strengthen this vital service, providing on the ground health support in areas of need. Additionally, a range of new measures support the mental health and wellbeing of people living in regional, rural and remote areas, including through innovative approaches to service delivery. A number of investments are also targeted to improve health outcomes for women in regional locations, and continued investment will help grow and develop the aged care workforce, particularly in rural and remote areas. A free Wi-Fi service will deliver enhanced connectivity and digital inclusion outcomes in remote communities, and Services Australia will receive additional funding to ensure delivery of high-quality services and payments to vulnerable Australians.
- **Initiatives that support equality, inclusivity and safety.** The Government is investing in women's safety and economic equality, including through the vital Leaving Violence Program, paying superannuation on the Government's Paid Parental Leave scheme, and tax cuts which will see 90 per cent of women taxpayers receive bigger tax cuts compared with previous settings. Significant investment will improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities, including to reduce overcrowding, and a range of initiatives target improved enrolment, engagement and learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. Implementation of the National Firearms Register will enhance community safety by providing a national picture of firearms and more consistent and efficient administration of firearm licences.

The 2024–25 Budget is about delivering on our commitments to regional Australia, securing better outcomes for individuals and families, supporting access to opportunities and services, and creating the environments for businesses and industries to innovate and grow. It is about responding to pressures felt today, and ensuring we are on the right track to achieve the potential of tomorrow.

In a time of change – and for many, a time with challenges – the Albanese Government knows regional people want to see delivery of what matters most for their families and communities. Through the 2024–25 Budget, and building on the practical approach to strengthening regions we have applied across our first two years in Government, we are delivering on what regional Australians need now, while working with communities and industries to ensure our regions are well-positioned for the decades ahead.

The Hon Catherine King MP

Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Local Government

The Hon Kristy McBain MP

Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories

14 May 2024

Guiding our Investments: Regional Investment Framework in action

The Regional Investment Framework is making investment work better for regions. Guiding the Australian Government's investments in regional areas, the Framework ensures 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 is firmly embedded in decision making across government, guiding a joined-up approach to regional investment across people, places, services, and industries and local economies – recognising action across the breadth of Government portfolios is essential to meeting the needs and opportunities of Australia's diverse regions. As the Government aims to boost productivity, improve competition and secure the nation's prosperity through a future made in Australia, the Framework will help guide investment that ensures regional communities and local economies are engaged and empowered – building on existing local strengths to seize the opportunities of the future.

In-line with the Framework, the Government's approach to regional investment is informed by, and responds 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, including through regular Ministerial briefings, and updating the RDA Charter to better align it with the Framework and reinforce the network's role in driving regional development. The Government has also forged strong partnerships with local councils, re-establishing the Australia Council of Local Government, and working together on sustainable national funding to deliver the services and infrastructure that communities need most.

The Framework also supports regional investment that meets high standards of merit and integrity – underpinned by an evidence-based approach. The Government is making transparent investments that respond to knowledge, data, trends and opportunities – with developments like the recently released 2024 State of Australia's Regions report and commencement of the 2024 Regional Telecommunications Review contributing to informed decision making.

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.

Since the 2022–23 October Budget, 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 becoming a renewable energy superpower. This includes through initiatives like the \$15.0 billion National Reconstruction Fund and \$1.9 billion Powering the Regions Fund; initiatives to accelerate the development of renewable energy industries; supporting the growth of emerging sectors like critical minerals; and work to establish a new Net Zero Economy Authority to ensure workers, industries and communities can seize the opportunities of Australia's net zero transformation. It also includes driving growth and productivity across traditional regional sectors like agriculture, such as through the \$1.0 billion investment towards a strong and sustainably funded biosecurity system.

The 2024–25 Budget continues to position regional communities for a future made in Australia, with investment to support regional Australia harness the potential of emerging industry opportunities, and ensure traditional regional industries are fit for the future.

- In a changing global environment, with many nations investing in their manufacturing capability and economic sovereignty, the Government's Future Made in Australia agenda is taking the steps necessary to build new clean energy industries, and in turn, ensure national security and prosperity. This includes a focus on leveraging the competitive advantages of regional Australia – like abundant renewable energy resources, natural assets and resource endowments. \$1.7 billion over ten years from 2024–25 will establish the Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund, supporting innovation and pre-commercial activities in Future Made in Australia eligible priority sectors, many of which are based in regional Australia.
- Regional Australia will benefit from new opportunities in the hydrogen sector, with a commitment of \$8.0 billion over the decade to introduce a new Hydrogen Production Tax Incentive, extend the Hydrogen Headstart program, and provide an additional round of the First Nations Renewable Hydrogen Engagement Fund. Additionally, \$17.1 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$2.5 million in 2028–29), will support implementation of the National Hydrogen Strategy, putting Australia on the path to being a global player in hydrogen.
- \$7.0 billion over the decade will support critical minerals processing in Australia through the new Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive. Additionally, a commitment of \$10.2 million in 2024–25 will establish the Critical Minerals National Productivity Initiative, extracting further value from Australia's resources by growing the nation's onshore processing of critical minerals.
- \$835.6 million over ten years from 2024–25 and \$66.8 million per year from 2034–25 to 2036–27 for the Solar Sunshot program will grow Australian solar manufacturing and open new opportunities across the solar value chain, driving economic and jobs growth across regional Australia.

- \$566.1 million over ten years from 2024–25 and \$111.8 million per year on average from 2034–35 to 2058–59 for the Resourcing Australia’s Prosperity Program will fund Geoscience Australia to progressively map the whole of onshore Australia by 2060, delivering high quality data and information of regional and remote areas’ resource potential – advancing understanding of Australia’s potential for critical minerals, alternative energy sources, groundwater, and other resources necessary for the transition to net zero.
- \$549.1 million over seven years from 2024–25 will support delivery of the National Battery Strategy and help drive the creation of a diverse and competitive domestic battery manufacturing industry.
- Investment of up to \$7.1 billion over four years in Snowy Hydro Ltd will support delivery of Snowy 2.0, a key project in Australia’s renewable energy transition. This investment will ensure the continuation of economic opportunities within the Snowy Mountains region, securing jobs for the large regional workforce currently delivering the project.
- \$63.8 million over ten years from 2024–25 will deliver more sustainable and climate-smart agriculture, supporting regional economies’ and the national economy’s transition to net zero emissions. \$3.4 million over four years from 2024–25 will deliver the Government’s plan for forestry, contributing to achieving a long-term outlook for the forestry industry. Additionally, \$1.9 million over three years from 2024–25 will provide targeted grants to industry-led projects with benefits across the entire agriculture sector.

Investing in Services

Quality services are essential to 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.

The Government is investing in the services regional Australians rely on, including making health and aged care more accessible and affordable, such as through establishment of Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, with 58 clinics already operating across the country, and the historic \$3.5 billion investment to triple the bulk billing incentive – which in the first two months following introduction saw the bulk billing rate rise by 2.1 percentage points across Australia, with an estimated additional 202,000 free visits to the GP across rural and regional Australia; investing in Early Childhood Education and Care, including through new rural and remote community child care services that will support more people to return to work in locations and occupations where they are needed most; \$2.2 billion to strengthen regional digital connectivity, including the ambitious Better Connectivity Plan for Regional and Rural Australia; and investment to rebuild the Australian Public Service, which is helping to ensure delivery of the services Australians expect, right around the country.

The 2024–25 Budget leverages these strong foundations, continuing to invest in the services that will make a difference for regional people, families and businesses.

- The Government is investing \$2.8 billion in Services Australia from 2023–24 to 2027–28 to deliver safe, effective and efficient government services for every Australian. This includes delivery of quality services and customer payments to vulnerable Australians experiencing cost-of-living pressures, bolstering security for staff and customers, and the continued operation and enhancement of myGov. Funding also continues to support Services Australia’s emergency response capability, which is important for regional communities given the prevalence of disaster events in regional areas.
- An additional investment of \$227.6 million over five years from 2023–24 will deliver a new specialised disability employment program, which will include tailored supports and services that reflect individual’s diverse pathways to find and retain employment. \$23.3 million over four years from 2024–25 will establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, and \$20.0 million over two years from 2024–25 will design navigation supports to help better connect people with disability to services that meet their needs.
- \$227.0 million over three years from 2023–24 will boost funding for Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, including for a further 29 clinics across Australia and additional funding for clinics located in regional, rural and remote Australia.
- \$116.2 million over five years from 2023–24 will strengthen and support the health workforce across Australia. This includes \$17.4 million in 2024–25 to boost the support of healthcare in areas of shortage, \$4.7 million over five years from 2023–24 to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical practitioners and address recruitment and retention in the Northern Territory, and \$4.0 million over four years from 2024–25 for the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association to continue to support First Nations doctors to become medical specialists.
- In aged care, \$88.4 million over four years from 2024–25 will help meet demand from an ageing population across Australia and support the successful implementation of key Government commitments, including the 24/7 registered nurse and care minutes responsibilities. \$37.0 million over two years will respond to increased demand and ensure quality services for those seeking aged care system supports through the My Aged Care contact centre.
- \$73.8 million over three years from 2024–25 will support continued delivery of the Royal Flying Doctor Service’s essential primary health services. \$45.9 million over four years from 2024–25 will extend funding for a number of mental health and suicide prevention measures, including a range of initiatives that will support the mental health and wellbeing of people living in regional, rural and remote areas. Additionally, \$42.2 million over four years from 2024–25 will support women’s health across regional Australia.
- \$48.4 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Veterans’ Home Care and Community Nursing programs will ensure the sustainability of veterans’ in-home care and support services, facilitating access to these services for the veteran community, particularly in rural and regional areas.

- Providing water security for regional and remote communities, responsible investment in water infrastructure includes \$119.6 million over six years from 2024–25 to construction projects for productive and community use. Additionally, \$20.7 million over three years from 2024–25 will be invested in ten new water infrastructure projects in regional and remote First Nations communities, with \$34.3 million over four years from 2024–25 to be invested in 22 research projects and business cases to better understand Australia’s water resources and the technologies used to manage them – supporting more informed investment decisions.
- Keeping regional, rural and remote Australia connected through air services, an additional \$50.0 million over three years from 2024–25 in competitive grant funding will improve safety of remote airstrips through the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program, an additional \$40.0 million over three years from 2024–25 in competitive grant funding will extend and expand the Regional Airports Program, and funding of \$0.5 million per year (indexed) from 2024–25 will extend the Remote Aerodrome Inspection Program, with these initiatives being outcomes of the Aviation White Paper.
- As part of the Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2024, the Government, in partnership with NBN Co, will deliver community Wi-Fi services in around 20 remote communities, enhancing connectivity and digital inclusion outcomes. Together with new initiatives in the 2024–25 Budget, \$68.0 million will deliver a second round of community Wi-Fi in remote communities through a contestable program for the provision of broadband connectivity solutions, the establishment of a First Nations Digital Support Hub and network of digital inclusion mentors, and funding to improve the collection of data on First Nations digital inclusion.

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 urban hubs. A broad range of investments, tailored to the unique circumstances of each place, are required to untap potential and underpin strong, sustainable communities.

The Government has recognised and responded to the importance of place, including releasing its Infrastructure Policy Statement and investing in regional infrastructure including through the new Safer Local Roads and Community Infrastructure program; doubling Roads to Recovery funding, which is progressively increasing from \$500.0 million per year to \$1.0 billion per year, and increasing road Black Spot funding; establishing new, transparent regional community infrastructure programs including the \$600.0 million Growing Regions Program and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships Program, and delivering funding for small capital projects for local communities through the Stronger Communities Programme; supporting housing availability and affordability, including through the Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee, which has helped more than 18,000 people buy a home, and the Housing Support Program; and investing to prepare for, respond to, and recover from climate related natural hazards like bushfires, heatwaves, storms and floods.

The 2024–25 Budget continues the Government’s targeted approach to making regions better places to live, work and invest.

- Through the over \$120.0 billion Infrastructure Investment Program pipeline, the Government is making substantial investments in priority transport projects across regional Australia, including \$605.7 million to new projects that will deliver critical road upgrades in northern Australia, \$137.5 million to the Nelson Bay Road – Williamstown to Bobs Farm project in New South Wales, and \$80.0 million to the Lyell Highway – Granton to New Norfolk project in Tasmania. In addition, the Government is committing \$177.0 million to two new projects along the Warrego Highway, outside of Brisbane in Queensland.
- \$2.1 billion over ten years from 2024–25 will improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities, of which \$2.0 billion for remote housing is being matched by the Northern Territory Government. This investment will reduce overcrowding and improve housing quality by delivering up to 2,700 houses over ten years and a comprehensive repairs and maintenance program. The Government has also committed \$120.0 million over three years from 2024–25 to extend funding for repairs and maintenance on housing and essential infrastructure on Northern Territory Homelands.
- \$1.9 billion in concessional loan financing for community housing providers and other charities delivering new social and affordable dwellings under the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Accord will support delivery of the Government’s commitment to build 40,000 social and affordable dwellings, including across regional Australia. Helping to enable Housing Australia to provide more low-cost finance to community housing providers, the Government is also expanding the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator program by increasing Housing Australia’s liability cap by \$2.5 billion to \$10.0 billion, and will also finance an additional \$3.0 billion to Housing Australia to support ongoing delivery of the program.
- \$90.6 million over three years from 2024–25 will boost housing supply by growing Australia’s construction workforce. As part of this commitment, the Australian Government will work with state and territory governments to support 5,000 people to access pre-apprenticeship programs designed to give students an experience of working in construction-related trades. The Government will also update policy settings to streamline skills assessment requirements for migrants seeking to work in the construction industry.
- Investment of a record \$519.1 million in Future Drought Fund (FDF) programs will help Australian farmers and regional communities become more resilient to drought and better manage and adapt to climate change. The FDF now acknowledges climate change as a driver of longer and more severe droughts.
- \$73.3 million over four years from 2024–25 will sustainably fund the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to continue supporting communities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. This investment also supports NEMA to maintain an ongoing presence in regional areas, with direct impacts for local communities.

- \$371.1 million over nine years from 2024–25 will maintain a year-round Australian Government presence on Macquarie Island, supporting Tasmania as an Antarctic gateway and generating economic activity in the region through the Port of Hobart.
- \$35.0 million will upgrade Australian Defence Force bases in North Queensland. Major investments in Townsville’s Lavarack Barracks and RAAF Base are expected to create at least 600 jobs during construction. Northern Australia will also experience benefits associated with the \$286.9 million investment under the Defence Fuel Resilience Program. Over the next decade, northern Australia will benefit under the rebuilt 2024 Integrated Investment Program, which includes investments of \$14.0 billion – \$18.0 billion to ensure Defence has a logistically connected and resilient set of bases, ports and barracks across Australia’s north.
- \$22.5 million over four years from 2024–25 will maintain and repair essential assets in Australia’s non-self-governing territories (Indian Ocean Territories, Jervis Bay Territory and Norfolk Island), supporting these communities to have uninterrupted access to essential goods and services, such as food and medicines, fresh water, and electricity.

Investing in People

The Government remains focused on cost-of-living pressure, with the 2024–25 Budget continuing to invest in the people of regional Australia through initiatives that respond to cost-of-living pressures, support equality, inclusion, safety and participation, and position regional Australians for good jobs, including across the industries of the future.

Investing in people is an investment in the future of regional communities and in 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. That is why the Government is supporting local people in their local communities with the expansion of Paid Parental Leave and the inclusion of super on Paid Parental Leave; implementing the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032, including through \$2.3 billion in investment across an extensive range of initiatives in the October 2022–23 and 2023–24 Budgets; working in partnership with First Nations people and communities and advancing the Closing the Gap agenda; investing in education and skills development through initiatives like Regional University Study Hubs; releasing the Employment White Paper, Working Future, which provides a vision for a dynamic and inclusive labour market in which everyone has the opportunity for secure and fairly paid work; and delivering increased investment in arts and culture right across Australia through the landmark National Cultural Policy, Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place.

- The Government is helping Australians through responsible cost-of-living relief, with measures that directly reduce inflation. These measures include a tax cut for every taxpayer (average of \$1,888 per taxpayer), action to keep the cost of medicines down through the Eighth Community Pharmacy Agreement, and support for renters by increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance by 10 per cent. Households and businesses will benefit from additional energy bill relief.

- Responding to the epidemic of intimate partner violence across Australia, investment of \$925.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to establish a permanent Leaving Violence Program, which supports victim-survivors of intimate partner violence to make choices about leaving violent relationships through the provision of financial support packages, safety assessments, and referrals to support pathways.
- \$55.6 million over four years from 2024–25 will drive structural and cultural change in workplaces, training, and across industry sectors through the Building Women’s Careers program. The program will have a particular focus on the construction and clean energy sectors, where significantly increasing women’s participation is required to overcome skills shortages.
- \$161.3 million over four years from 2024–25 will fund implementation of the National Firearms Register. The register will improve the ability of police and other law enforcement agencies to respond to firearms’ safety risks and keep communities safe, especially in regional, rural and remote communities where there is typically greater proportional access to firearms.
- \$14.2 million over two years from 2024–25 will deliver additional policing and other community support measures in Alice Springs, supporting the Northern Territory Government to tackle crime and improve community safety in Alice Springs and central Australia.
- \$777.4 million over five years from 2023–24 for the new Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program will help close the gap in employment outcomes, including funding targeted to create 3,000 jobs in remote Australia, supported by the establishment of a Community Jobs and Business Fund.
- \$350.3 million over four years from 2024–25 will expand the availability of FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses, which will help build the skills pipeline and assist more students who aspire to university to qualify for entry. In 2025, the majority of regionally headquartered universities are estimated to receive an increase in funding per-place for Uni Ready courses, which will enhance connectivity, accessibility and equity of services for regional students. The Government will also wipe around \$3.0 billion from the Higher Education Loan Program debt of Australians, including people across regional Australia, by changing the way debt is indexed. An indexation credit will ensure the measure has retrospective effect from 1 June 2023.
- \$134.2 million over four years from 2024–25 will support workers through energy system changes, with comprehensive employment and skills services supporting access to new regional employment opportunities. \$91.0 million over five years from 2023–24 will increase vocational education and training and apprenticeships in clean energy occupations, while also helping employers in regional areas to take on apprentices and develop technology and facilities in regional, rural and remote communities. \$44.4 million over four years from 2024–25 will deliver the Energy Industry Jobs Plan, which will assist workers in closing coal and gas-fired generators access new skills and employment. Additionally, \$38.2 million over eight years from 2023–24 and \$1.3 million per year ongoing will attract Australians from diverse backgrounds to STEM education and careers, including across agriculture, net zero and clean energy, mining, and manufacturing.

- \$74.8 million over four years from 2024–25 will support First Nations education partnerships, policy development and program delivery, including \$32.8 million to extend Australian Government support at existing levels for services offered by the Clontarf Foundation for the 2025 school year, supporting First Nations boys and young men to improve their school engagement. Additionally, \$18.0 million over two years from 2024–25 will establish a Central Australia Boarding Response Fund, with capital works improving existing facilities and enabling facilities to take on more students.
- \$30.2 million over five years from 2023–24 will co-design and establish a network of Remote Training Hubs in partnership with central Australian communities and the Northern Territory Government, supporting people in remote communities to access on-Country training that meets community needs and leads to local, sustainable jobs.
- \$5.9 million over two years from 2024–25 will support the establishment of an interim National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, as a first step towards a legislated, independent and empowered National Commissioner, which when established will be dedicated to protecting and promoting the rights, interests and wellbeing of First Nations children and young people.
- The Revive Live program will provide \$8.6 million in 2024–25 to support Australian live music venues and festivals. Grant recipients will include venues and festivals in regional and remote Australia, with benefits including increased employment, tourism, and access to live music for local communities.

Regional Investment Framework

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

2024–25 Budget: Portfolio investments in regional Australia

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

Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry

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

The Australian Government recognises the important role agriculture, fisheries and forestry play in the prosperity of regional Australia. In 2022–23 the total agriculture, fisheries and forestry production topped \$98.0 billion. With the nominal gross value of agricultural production forecast to reach \$80.0 billion in 2023–24, and \$85.0 billion in 2024–25, the Australian agriculture sector continues to prove resilient to changes in international markets, seasonal conditions and input costs.

Agriculture, fishery and forestry industries are at the forefront of managing and adapting to climate change, with droughts and natural disasters presenting ongoing challenges to the sector. Helping Australian farmers and regional communities to become more resilient to drought and adapt to climate change is a key objective of the Government's investment in Future Drought Fund programs. The portfolio works in partnership with farmers, businesses, and state and territory governments to tackle these challenges. Additionally, the commencement of programs under the Agriculture and Land Sector Plan will deliver more sustainable and climate-smart agriculture, supporting regional economies', and the national economy's, transition to net zero emissions. This work complements the Government's previous \$302.1 million investment in the Natural Heritage Trust, along with rebuilding the portfolio's capabilities to support the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors to manage and adapt to climate change.

Australia's biosecurity system is essential to the long-term profitability of our agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries, and the sustainability of agricultural production, tourism and Australia's unique environment. Last year, the Government invested \$1.0 billion over four years in Australia's first ever sustainable biosecurity funding model. The new model ensures funding for biosecurity is as broadly based as possible and protects, and grows our agriculture, fisheries and forestry industries by safeguarding the sector against biosecurity incursions that would impact jobs, production and the environment. Ensuring Australia's protection from pests and diseases secures Australia's position as an exporter of choice in an increasingly competitive international trade environment, and is necessary to maintain the security and resilience of regional industries and local economies.

New initiatives

Agriculture and Land Sector Decarbonisation Plan

The Government will provide \$63.8 million over ten years from 2024–25 (and \$0.9 million per year ongoing), to support initial emission reduction efforts in the agriculture and land sectors as part of Australia’s transition to net zero by 2050.

Delivering the Government’s commitments on forestry strategy development

The Government is investing \$3.4 million over four years from 2024–25 to implement and complete its plan for forestry, A Future Grown in Australia: A Better Plan for Forestry and Forestry Products. This allows delivery of the Government’s election commitments to support the Strategic Forest and Renewables Materials Partnership and develop a national strategy for the wood fibre and forestry sector, and the Australian Government’s commitment to review the 1992 National Forestry Policy Statements in collaboration with state and territory governments. These initiatives will contribute to achieving and realising a long-term outlook for the forestry industry, which features prominently in regional communities around the country.

Ensuring accurate and clear plant-based and alternative protein labelling

The Government is delivering on its election commitment by providing \$1.5 million over two years from 2023–24, to work with industry and regulatory agencies to improve existing arrangements for the labelling of plant-based and alternative protein products. It is important that appropriate regulatory settings are in place to enable consumers to make informed choices when purchasing products. These arrangements should be evidence based, proportionate to the risk and complement the current regulatory system.

Foundations for the agricultural workforce

The Government is investing \$1.9 million over three years from 2024–25 to provide targeted grants to industry-led projects with benefits across the entire agriculture sector. The funding supports the extension of existing activities for National Farm Safety Week and work experience opportunities for young people interested in agriculture through the AgCAREERSTART pilot. It also includes funding for a new, skilled agricultural work liaison program, in urban and regional universities, aimed at increasing the number of highly-skilled graduates entering the agriculture, fisheries and forestry sectors.

Future Drought Fund

The Government is investing a record \$519.1 million in Future Drought Fund (FDF) programs to help Australian farmers and regional communities to become more resilient to drought, and better manage and adapt to climate change. The FDF now acknowledges climate change as a driver of longer and more severe droughts. Australian farmers are on the front line of climate change, and the FDF will now provide:

- better tools for farmers to mitigate the impact of climate change, including drought, on their farms
- strategies for local communities to prepare for and manage the risks of drought and climate change
- increased investment in the existing network of drought hubs.

Funding from the FDF special account will be allocated across five key areas:

- \$235.0 million over eight years from 2024–25 for programs that focus on partnering with regions and communities to help them manage their own drought and climate risks. This will continue funding for the Drought Resilience Adoption and Innovation Hub model, support the implementation of the Regional Drought Resilience Plan and a revised FDF Communities program. These programs help build resilience through collaborative and locally-led action.
- \$15.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to establish a pilot program to facilitate place-based, First Nations-led activities, and dedicated funding to support activities that seek to improve opportunities for First Nations people to participate in FDF drought and climate resilience activities. The Government will also establish a First Nations Advisory Group to advise on issues relating to drought and climate resilience.
- \$137.4 million over five years from 2024–25 to extend, improve and align a range of learning and development opportunities including the Farm Business Resilience program, Climate Services for Agriculture program, Drought Resilience Scholarships and the new Scaling Success program. These programs will capitalise on previous successes and build the knowledge and skills of farmers, farm advisers, farm workers, First Nations people and regional communities to make informed decisions and better manage drought and other climate risks.
- \$120.3 million over six years from 2024–25 to continue funding for an expanded Long Term Trials program, a new Resilient Landscapes program and a new Innovation Challenges Pilot. These programs will test and demonstrate innovative solutions with the potential to build the agriculture sector, landscapes and communities' long-term resilience to drought and climate risks, through transformational change.
- \$11.4 million over four years from 2024–25 to support monitoring, evaluation and learning to measure outcomes and share knowledge generated by FDF programs about how to address drought and climate risks.

The Government is providing a further \$42.2 million over four years from 2024–25 to support the portfolio's administration and delivery of the FDF.

Phase out of live sheep exports by sea – transition support package

The Government is delivering on its election commitment to phase out live sheep exports by sea. The Government is investing \$107.0 million over five years in transition support to assist impacted sheep producers, the supply chain and communities to be well positioned, resilient and ready when the trade ends on 1 May 2028.

Transition support measures will focus on:

- enabling businesses and communities impacted by the phase out, particularly in Western Australia, to plan and adjust, including expanding domestic processing capacity
- enhancing demand here in Australia and overseas for Australian sheep products to maintain and develop markets
- continuing to improve sheep welfare to meet Australian community expectations.

Prepare for the next drought

The Government is providing \$13.9 million over four years from 2024–25 and \$3.4 million per year ongoing from 2028–29 to ensure Australian farmers and communities are better prepared for and responsive to future droughts.

This funding will enable implementation of a range of drought initiatives, such as the Government's Drought Plan, the National Drought Agreement, the Drought Response Framework, the Monitoring Evaluation and Learning Framework and stakeholder engagement via the National Drought Network and National Drought Forum. Farmers and regional communities will benefit from ongoing work to promote Australia's drought policy agenda, and maintaining the Government's capability to respond quickly and effectively to drought events.

Attorney-General's

The Attorney-General's portfolio improves law and justice outcomes across the nation, ensuring all Australians have access to services supporting their safety and security, regardless of where they live. Recognising the different needs, opportunities and challenges faced by diverse communities across regional, rural and remote Australia, the portfolio conducts regular public consultations to ensure local communities are heard and inform programs as they are delivered across the country.

The portfolio's work spans a range of significant areas such as keeping the justice system accessible for vulnerable Australians, strengthening security and integrity, and an ongoing commitment to the Justice Policy Partnership and Justice Reinvestment, improving outcomes for native title holders through the resolution of native title claims, and supporting key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities such as through the Better, Safer Future for Central Australia Plan and Closing the Gap.

The portfolio serves people in regional, rural and remote areas through the \$2.4 billion National Legal Assistance Partnership 2020–25 (NLAP). The NLAP provides funding to Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) to provide vital legal assistance services. The NLAP provides baseline funding for these organisations, as well as specific funding for the specialist Domestic Violence Units and Health Justice Partnerships and Family Advocacy and Support Services that some LACs and CLCs operate. People residing in rural or remote areas are a national priority client group under the NLAP.

The portfolio works with other Australian Government departments, law enforcement agencies and state and territory governments to uplift public safety protection capabilities. The portfolio has been leading the National Firearms Register reforms to deliver a firearms management system and practices. Australians in regional, rural and remote areas are more likely to have a firearms license or own firearm-related articles for various purposes. The Register will provide law enforcement agencies near real-time data on firearm-related community risks, enhancing the safety of regional communities, police and businesses.

The portfolio also continues to support vulnerable Australians by safeguarding families and women's safety, including through delivering a range of family relationship service programs and progressing family law reform under the National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–32.

New initiatives

One-off funding to support the National Legal Assistance Partnership (2024–25 uplift)

The Government has committed \$44.1 million in 2024–25 in a one-off funding uplift for the final year of the NLAP. The package will address the immediate resource and workforce issues impacting legal assistance providers who are funded under the NLAP (LACs, CLCs

and ATSIILS) and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services, designed to stabilise service delivery and ensure access to justice frameworks are preserved for vulnerable Australians, with a focus on restoring services in regional, rural and remote locations.

Regional, rural and remote communities are often critically underserved by legal assistance providers. This trend has been exacerbated both by cost increases service providers have faced as a result of inflation, and the recruitment and retention challenges associated with the geographic isolation of some communities. As a result, legal assistance providers have reported substantial curtailing of their service delivery footprints through reductions, freezes and closures.

National Firearms Register – outcomes of negotiations

The Government will provide \$161.3 million over four years from 2024–25 to fund the implementation of the National Firearms Register. The Register will enhance community and police safety by allowing law enforcement to know, in near real-time, where firearms are, who owns them and what other risks to the community may exist. It will reduce information gaps and facilitate more consistent and efficient administration of firearm licences.

Australians living in regional, rural and remote communities typically have proportionally greater access to firearms, for pastoral and recreational purposes. The Register will improve the ability of police and other law enforcement agencies to respond to firearms' safety risks and keep police and communities safe. The Register will facilitate a national picture of firearms and, through this, an improved understanding and analysis of firearms ownership and risks.

Improving outcomes for native title holders and solving the claim backlog

The Government has committed \$20.8 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$3.6 million per year ongoing from 2028–29) for a range of measures to improve operation of the native title system. Native title has been determined to exist over approximately 45 per cent of Australia's landmass, including a significant proportion of regional Australia. Improving the system's operation will benefit both First Nations and non-Indigenous regional communities, including by increasing certainty for project proponents about the native title parties that they are required to engage with in regional areas. Key measures include:

- \$0.5 million over two years from 2024–25 to enable an Australian Law Reform Commission review of the *Native Title Act 1993* 'future acts' regime. The regime applies to development on native title land, much of which is in regional areas.
- \$12.4 million over four years from 2024–25 (\$2.4 million per year from 2028–29) for the Federal Court of Australia to accelerate the resolution of hundreds of unresolved native title claims.

- \$3.3 million over four years from 2024–25 (\$0.1 million per year from 2028–29) for the Federal Court and National Native Title Tribunal to preserve culturally and historically significant records that are critical to future native title claims and negotiations about the use of native title land.
- \$4.5 million over four years from 2024–25 (\$1.1 million per year from 2028–29) for the National Native Title Tribunal to deliver dispute resolution services.

Enhancing First Nations justice policy outcomes

The Government will provide \$10.7 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue the Justice Policy Partnership (JPP). In addition to supporting the JPP to continue to bring together representatives from all governments and non-government First Nations members to address overincarceration of First Nations peoples throughout Australia, the funding includes \$0.3 million over two years from 2024–25 for a data scoping study pilot to support the JPP to explore specific justice related datasets between jurisdictions. This funding will enable the JPP to identify areas for systems improvement and innovation in line with Priority Reform Four of the Closing the Gap agenda (shared access to data and information at a regional level). Better understanding of data, including policing and court outcomes by location, will drive meaningful collaboration and accountability across and between state justice systems.

Administrative Review Tribunal – enhanced services and support for regional applicants

The Government will provide \$9.6 million over four years from 2024–25 and \$1.0 million per year ongoing from 2028–29 for increased support for parties to access merits review of Government decisions in the Administrative Review Tribunal (ART), including dedicated support for regional, rural, and First Nations applicants and a dedicated First Nations Liaison Officer pilot program in every ART registry.

As a result of this measure, regional applicants will have greater access to in-person hearings and support in the ART, improving the accessibility of merits review for current, future and prospective applicants outside of capital cities. The piloting of First Nations Liaison Officers will provide culturally appropriate, tailored and user-centric support for First Nations applicants to navigate administrative review pathways.

These services are included to ensure the ART meets its legislative requirement and public expectations on accessibility – they are services designed to improve engagement with merits review, including through participation in proceedings, and improve users’ understanding of legal rights through community outreach and direct support for applicants.

First Nations Family Dispute Resolution pilot 2-year extension

The Government will provide \$11.7 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend the First Nations Family Dispute Resolution pilot program. The pilot is delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to assist First Nations families to resolve post-separation parenting and property disputes through a culturally safe and appropriate approach to family dispute resolution. Through this pilot, ACCOs support kinship mediation to help reduce family conflicts and the need for these conflicts to be settled through family law courts.

Strengthening Community Safety in Central Australia

The Government will provide \$14.2 million over two years from 2024–25 to deliver additional policing and other community safety support measures in Alice Springs. This funding will be delivered through an 18-month extension of the national partnership agreement between the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government for the Strengthening Community Safety in Central Australia program.

Funding will support the Northern Territory Government to tackle crime, and improve safety in communities across Alice Springs and central Australia. This funding is in addition to the \$250.0 million A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia plan.

Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

The Climate Change, Energy, Environment and Water portfolio drives Australian climate action; transforms Australia's energy system to increase affordability, security and reliability while supporting net zero emissions; conserves, protects and sustainably manages Australia's environment and water resources through a nature positive approach; and protects the nation's cultural heritage. The work of the portfolio is crucial for supporting sustainable and liveable regions. The portfolio is partnering with communities to address the nation's diverse needs and meet community expectations for regional investment.

Regional Australia is uniquely placed to harness the opportunities from the net zero transformation given its abundant renewable energy resources. Through the 2024–25 Budget, the Australian Government is supporting a Future Made in Australia, including through work across the portfolio to build new clean energy industries that will make Australia a renewable energy superpower. By capitalising on its advantages, Australia can seize the opportunities of a net zero economy for regional areas while reducing emissions here and around the world. Many of these new industries will be based in regional Australia, creating local jobs and long-term economic benefits, allowing the regions that have powered Australia for generations to continue to power Australia for generations to come.

The Budget also commits additional funding to engage and empower communities affected by the energy transformation, focusing on regional Australia. These initiatives build on the Government's existing commitments to transformational energy infrastructure projects in the regions, supporting strengthened engagement to ensure projects proceed in a way that incorporates community feedback and shares the bill savings delivered by renewable energy. The Capacity Investment Scheme will support investment in new renewable energy generation and storage projects, to achieve a secure, reliable and lower cost electricity system. The Rewiring the Nation program is continuing to deliver investment to modernise Australia's electricity grids. The Powering the Regions Fund has delivered grants to industry and manufacturing throughout regional Australia, to support clean energy and emissions reduction projects at heavy industrial sites nationwide. The additional resources committed in the Budget will help drive genuine benefits for Australia's regions, ensuring their needs are being heard and considered earlier, to support more jobs, cheaper energy and more business opportunities for regional communities.

Through the Budget, the Government is continuing to provide water infrastructure investment in the regions. This includes supporting improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional and remote areas through investments in water security. The Budget also delivers critical components of the Nature Positive Plan, increasing private investment in nature, supporting First Nations cultural heritage reforms, and continuing to meet the Government's circular economy and Basin Plan commitments.

This work supports the sustainable management of Australia’s environment and water resources through a nature positive approach, protecting regional communities and businesses that depend on these natural resources.

These measures build upon recent key achievements in the portfolio, which have benefitted the regions. This includes future-proofing the Murray-Darling Basin for generations to come with the *Water Amendment (Restoring Our Rivers) Act 2023* providing more time, more options, more accountability, and more transparency to deliver the Basin Plan in full. The portfolio has supported First Nations groups to protect precious land and sea through the Indigenous Protected Areas program. The passage of the *Nature Repair Market Act 2023* establishes a framework for the Nature Repair Market, which will mobilise private finance to repair and protect Australia’s unique natural environments, many of which are in the regions.

New initiatives

Future Made in Australia – Making Australia a renewable energy superpower

Regional Australia will benefit from the Government’s investment in a Future Made in Australia, which will catalyse clean energy industries and support the Government’s ambition for Australia to become a renewable energy superpower.

As part of the Future Made in Australia agenda, the Government has committed \$8.0 billion over the decade to introduce a new Hydrogen Production Tax Incentive, extend the Hydrogen Headstart program, and provide an additional round of the First Nations Renewable Hydrogen Engagement Fund. This funding reaffirms the Government’s commitment to longer-term support for large-scale renewable hydrogen producers, to secure Australia’s hydrogen opportunity, and will improve hydrogen access to support early decarbonisation of hard-to-abate sectors. In addition, the Government has committed \$17.1 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$2.5 million in 2028–29) to support implementation of the 2024 National Hydrogen Strategy, putting Australia on the path to be a global leader. These initiatives will enable Australia to accelerate and realise the benefits of a hydrogen industry by providing hydrogen producers, investors and downstream users greater confidence to invest in Australian projects, many of which will likely be located in regional areas. They will improve economic outcomes, promote the long-term viability of hard-to-abate sectors, and support regional workers to stay in their jobs.

The Government has also committed \$835.6 million over ten years from 2024–25 (and \$66.8 million per year from 2034–35 to 2036–37) for the Solar Sunshot program, to grow Australian solar manufacturing, and open new opportunities across the solar value chain. Australian solar manufacturing will build on Australia’s position as a world leader in solar photovoltaic innovation and help commercialise and retain Australia’s innovations onshore, helping to diversify the economy and increase Australia’s economic complexity. Reliable access to low cost solar is critical to Australia’s decarbonisation commitments.

The Solar Sunshot program will support domestic solar manufacturing and thereby help secure a heavily concentrated and critical supply chain, boosting Australia's sovereign capabilities and resilience. The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water is working with the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) to finalise design of the Solar Sunshot program.

Additionally, the Government has committed \$1.5 billion over seven years from 2027–28 (and an average of \$125.0 million per year from 2034–35 to 2036–37) to supercharge ARENA's core investments in renewable energy and related technologies, including for the development, demonstration, commercialisation, manufacture and deployment of renewable energy technologies. This funding will support investment in renewable energy industries, many of which will be in regional Australia, and help make Australia a renewable energy superpower.

Future Made in Australia – Attracting investment in strategic industries

The Government has committed \$1.7 billion over ten years from 2024–25 to establish the Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund. The Fund will be administered by ARENA, to support innovation and pre-commercial activities in Future Made in Australia eligible priority sectors. This will support important opportunities, including accelerating the development of Australia's hydrogen industry, and the commercialisation of clean energy technology manufacturing and low-carbon fuels. Many of these priority sectors will likely be based in regional Australia, supporting the creation of new industries and economic opportunities in the regions.

Future Made in Australia – Workforce and trade partnerships for renewable energy superpower industries

Low and zero emission green metals and low-carbon liquid fuels, such as sustainable aviation fuel and renewable diesel, could provide some of the most significant economic opportunities for regional Australia over coming decades. The Guarantee of Origin Scheme is a critical enabler that will help pave the way to seizing this potential. To underpin the development of a new green metals industry, including iron, steel, alumina and aluminium, the Government has committed \$11.4 million over four years from 2024–25, (and \$1.1 million per year ongoing) to accelerate the development of carbon accounting methodologies for green hydrogen and green metals, supporting the industry to verify emissions intensity of their products. The Government has further committed \$18.5 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$1.2 million per year ongoing) to expand the scheme to low-carbon liquid fuels. Expanding the Guarantee of Origin Scheme to include these products will set the groundwork for future policies to drive investment, and ensure Australia is able to help shape the rapidly developing global market.

Future Made in Australia – Strengthening approvals processes

The Government has committed \$134.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to deliver immediate action on environmental and cultural heritage approvals and improve environmental outcomes through better science and continuous improvement in the availability and accuracy of environmental data. This will provide timely and robust assessments for identified priority renewable energy projects and support Australia’s energy transformation and investment in the regions, where many of the projects will be located.

In addition, the Government has committed \$20.7 million over seven years from 2024–25 (and \$0.4 million per year ongoing) to engage and empower communities affected by the energy transition. Regional Australia is home to some of the best renewable energy resources available, which require large scale transmission, generation and storage infrastructure, and can unlock employment opportunities and new revenue streams for regional communities. Community engagement is essential to ensure projects proceed in a way that incorporates community feedback and shares the bill savings renewable energy is delivering, so proactive engagement by government builds and maintains community support for these nation building projects. In partnership with state and territory governments through the Energy and Climate Change Ministerial Council, the department will begin implementing the recommendations of the Australian Energy Infrastructure Commissioner’s (AEIC) Community Engagement Review (the Dyer Review), and strengthen the capability of the AEIC to support and empower landholders and communities.

Improving the Australian Carbon Credit Unit Scheme

The Government has committed \$48.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue reforms to the Australian Carbon Credit Unit (ACCU) Scheme following the Independent Review of ACCUs led by Professor Ian Chubb in 2022 (Chubb Review). The ACCU Scheme delivers emission reductions and land-based sequestration, and supports cost-effective abatement from a range of agriculture, waste, industrial and transport activities. The next stage of reforms will further improve integrity, boost transparency and drive stronger participation in the ACCU Scheme. The resources committed in the Budget will help support the engagement of First Nations people, including consent processes for ACCU projects on native title land, and implement the new proponent-led method development process, so industry expertise can be the driving force for new methods moving forward. The reforms will positively benefit regional and First Nations communities, providing new sources of income by broadening opportunities to participate in the ACCU Scheme through new ACCU methods, particularly in the land sector.

Snowy Hydro

The Government is investing up to \$7.1 billion over four years in Snowy Hydro Ltd (Snowy Hydro) to support the delivery of Snowy 2.0. This investment will reinforce the financial strength of Snowy Hydro during the peak construction period of Snowy 2.0, a key project in Australia’s renewable energy transition. This investment will ensure the continuation of economic opportunities within the Snowy Mountains region, securing jobs for the large regional workforce currently delivering the project.

Australian Antarctic Program – additional funding

The Government has committed \$371.1 million over nine years from 2024–25 to maintain a year-round Australian Government presence on Macquarie Island, which is part of Australia and located south of Tasmania in the Southern Ocean. The funding will be used to stabilise and then replace the ageing Macquarie Island Research Station within ten years. The Government has also committed \$67.2 million over two years from 2024–25 toward Antarctic shipping to support delivery of science and Australian leadership in Antarctica. The funding will be used to support the world-class icebreaker, RSV Nuyina, to undertake an additional 120 days of dedicated marine science. These measures will ensure the continued delivery of Australia’s international obligations, the safety of people and the environment on Macquarie island, and the continuation of Australia’s important Antarctic science program. Maintaining a presence on Macquarie Island and investing in Antarctic science will generate increased economic activity in the region through the Port of Hobart.

Nature Positive Plan and Nature Repair Market

The Government has committed \$40.9 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue to expedite the comprehensive Nature Positive reforms to the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* and deliver the Nature Repair Market, a critical component of the Government’s Nature Positive Plan, to facilitate increased private investment in nature. Implementation of the Nature Repair Market will positively impact land holders, private investors, land managers and First Nations people. This will support the creation of job opportunities in regional Australia. Market impacts will be linked to the location of projects, many of which are expected to be in regional and remote areas including Indigenous Protected Areas. The Government is also working on embedding nature into financial decision making, including through the work of the Nature Finance Council. Mobilising private finance for nature will benefit the regional areas in which much of Australia’s natural capital is located.

Jabiru remediation – continuing delivery

The Government has committed \$11.4 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue momentum in delivering the Government’s remediation obligations in the Jabiru township in Kakadu National Park. This initiative will benefit the Mirarr people, the Traditional Owners of the lands on which Jabiru and the Ranger Uranium mine are located, by improving and maintaining a positive working relationship on this jointly managed park.

Responsible investment in water infrastructure for the regions

In the Budget, the Government has delivered responsible investment in water infrastructure for the regions. This includes \$119.6 million over six years from 2024–25 towards construction projects for productive and community use. The Government is also providing \$20.7 million over three years from 2024–25 for ten new water infrastructure projects in regional and remote First Nations communities. In addition, the Government is providing \$34.3 million over four years from 2024–25 for 22 research projects and business cases to better understand Australia’s water resources, and the technologies used to manage them, to support more informed investment decisions.

Continuing water security in the Great Artesian Basin

The Government has committed \$32.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue investment in the Great Artesian Basin (GAB), implementing the GAB water security program. This program will deliver on-ground water security projects to support the economy, protect the environment and First Nations values. This funding extends 25 years of Australian Government leadership and co-funding with state and territory governments in the GAB, which has delivered 275 GL/year of water savings. The Great Artesian Basin is Australia’s largest groundwater system – agriculture, tourism and industry rely on this water to contribute more than \$33.0 billion per year to Australia’s economy. It will also support the regional communities and their industries across the GAB through improved water security.

Murray-Darling Basin Plan – continuing delivery

The Government continues its priority to implement the Murray-Darling Basin Plan in full by committing \$27.0 million in 2024–25 to expand the Resilient Rivers Water Infrastructure Program to allow more water savings projects to be developed. The Government is also providing an additional \$7.2 million over five years from 2023–24 for the Murray-Darling Basin Authority to deliver the Constraints Relaxation Implementation Roadmap by end-2024 and increase involvement of First Nations people in Basin water management. This initiative will benefit regional communities across the Basin by driving a broader range of water infrastructure opportunities and increasing First Nations participation.

Defence

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

The 2024 National Defence Strategy identified a sovereign defence industrial base is vital for developing higher levels of military preparedness and self-reliance. It also accelerates innovation and capability delivery, drawing on defence industry across the country including in regional areas. A sovereign defence industrial base is not one characterised by complete self-reliance, but is rather underpinned by industrial capability resident in Australia that, if necessary, can effectively leverage international defence industry to deliver defence capabilities in the timeframes required.

Defence delivers regional employment opportunities, supports local businesses and suppliers, and invests in new technologies and industry capabilities. Defence support provided to regional, rural and remote Australians includes economic activity from Defence exercises and major training activities; Defence industry development; support for significant public events and, when requested and appropriate, assistance in responding to natural disasters; 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, which fosters strong ties with local regions and contributes to building strong and sustainable communities. Defence members and their families are an integral part of regional communities, interacting on official duties and at community activities and events. Defence recognises the economic impact engaging local staff and suppliers, where there is the capacity and capability available in the local market, has on regional economies.

Defence maintains strong links with regional and rural Australia through 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 31,105 reserve service members with 6,500 (20.9 per cent) located in regional or rural areas.

The Defence estate consists of 362 owned properties and approximately 450 domestic leases. Facilities include 70 major bases, training areas and ranges, research facilities and office accommodation including Defence Force recruitment centres. In addition, Defence Housing Australia manages almost 17,000 properties in capital cities, major regional centres and remote locations of Australia where the ADF has a presence, and has residential development projects in progress in regional Australia. Construction and maintenance activity associated with Defence facilities and housing in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities.

New initiatives

Australian Target Systems

In February 2024, a new \$33.0 million contract was awarded to North Albury company, Australian Target Systems. The 5-year contract will see it provide live fire target technology and equipment for use on Army deployments and ranges across the country. The agreement to support the integrated land target systems has resulted in 11 extra jobs, taking the firm's workforce to 54.

DEF6014 – MQ-28A Ghost Bat

On 9 February 2024, the Government announced a further \$399.0 million investment in Australia's MQ-28A Ghost Bat un-crewed aircraft system. The investment will see Boeing Defence Australia produce three new Block 2 aircrafts and deliver them to the Royal Australian Air Force from 2025. The ongoing design, development, and production of the MQ-28A supports over 350 jobs across 200 Australian companies throughout Australia. This investment by the Australian Government has spurred further direct investment from Boeing Defence Australia and the Queensland Government in a new, state of the art production facility at Wellcamp Airport, Toowoomba, Queensland, to support future production of the MQ-28 Ghost Bat in Australia.

Australian industry support to Army aviation

In February 2024, the Government announced a 7-year \$306.0 million Initial Support Contract with Boeing Defence Australia for the AH-64E Apache helicopter fleet. The contract is set to provide more than 150 jobs in Townsville, with a further 50 in Brisbane and 30 in Oakey, Queensland. The Government also announced a 5-year \$340.0 million Integrated Support Contract with Lockheed Martin Australia for the UH-60M Black Hawk helicopter fleet. The contract will generate hundreds of jobs in Queensland and New South Wales, including through the establishment of a central warehouse in Western Sydney. The CH-47F Chinook Integrated Support Services Contract with Boeing Defence Australia was extended by 12 months to August 2028, with direct employment opportunities for more than 70 personnel in Townsville, Oakey and Brisbane.

HydroScheme Industry Partnership Program 2024–34

HydroScheme Industry Partnership Program (HIPP) operates from the Australian Hydrographic Office in Wollongong, New South Wales and provides for the legislated National Survey Function under the *Navigation Act 2012*. At the end of June 2024, HIPP-1 ceases and HIPP-2 commences. HIPP is sustained out to 2034 under DEF2400 project and every year the value of activities increases, providing growth in the hydrographic industry, supporting local and remote supply chains, First Nations people's sustainment of sea Country and economic benefit through the Australian Industry Capability plan.

HIPP will invest approximately \$56.7 million in foundation bathymetric and marine data collection via HydroScheme during 2024–25. This will translate into improved nautical charts for safety of navigation, increased value in the blue Economy, better marine park management and ocean sustainability research.

New enterprise estate and infrastructure projects in regional areas in 2024–25

Defence estate and infrastructure investment is funded through the Defence Integrated Investment Program. Construction and maintenance activities associated with Defence facilities in regional areas provides considerable economic, social and environmental support to regional communities. During 2023–24, a total of 76 subcontractor packages, with an approximate total value of \$168.7 million, were awarded to First Nations subcontractors, with a further \$41.0 million expended under First Nations prime contractors. New approved projects with works at one or more regional locations are outlined below.

DEF 8191 – Defence Fuel Resilience Program (formerly Defence Fuel Transformation Program)

The Defence Fuel Resilience Program, with funding of \$286.9 million over five years from 2023–24, will provide new, upgraded and/or remediated fuel facilities across Australia to facilitate reform and changes within the Defence fuel network and Defence fuel supply chain. The program will provide support to regional economies particularly in the construction and professional services sector, and through support to regional and First Nations businesses. Construction is expected to commence in late 2024 and be completed in mid-2027. The program will also deliver indirect benefit to regional Australia by acquiring fuel storage in regional locations across Australia's north. This will be achieved by leveraging existing fuel infrastructure, including in regional locations to increase Defence's fuel stock holdings. Increased investment in trucking will also create new employment opportunities in regional areas across northern Australia.

Upgrade to Defence Force bases in North Queensland

The Government will invest \$35.0 million to upgrade Australian Defence Force bases in North Queensland to boost air and land capabilities. The major investments in Lavarack Barracks, the nation's largest army base, as well as the RAAF Base Townsville projects expect to create at least 600 jobs during construction.

Investment in an Integrated Air and Missile Defence System

The Government is investing in a layered Integrated Air and Missile Defence capability that can efficiently and effectively sense and respond to air and missile threats. A crucial part of this capability is the development of an advanced Joint Air Battle Management System, which will provide the underpinning architecture for Defence to effectively track and engage air and missile targets. The Government announced a \$500.0 million contract with Lockheed Martin Australia to deliver the next phase of AIR6500, which will deliver the Joint Air Battle Management System. Over 500 jobs will be created in areas such as software development, systems engineering, project management and logistics.

Boxer Heavy Weapon Carrier Vehicle export arrangement

The Government has entered into a significant export agreement, to supply Australian-made armoured vehicles to Germany. Under the agreement, more than 100 Boxer Heavy Weapon Carrier vehicles will be built by Rheinmetall at its Military Vehicle Centre of Excellence in Redbank, Queensland and exported for use by the German Army. This is a significant milestone for Australia's defence industry and is worth over \$1.0 billion to the Australian economy, boosting Australia's sovereign defence industry and securing more than 600 direct jobs in Queensland alone, with even more through the supply chain.

Education

Building a better and fairer education system for regional Australia is fundamental to expanding opportunity across the country and securing a future made in Australia.

In the decades ahead, more jobs will require people to finish school and go on to TAFE or university. That means Australia needs more people going to early childhood education and care (ECEC), finishing high school and getting an opportunity to go to tertiary education.

The Australian Government's reforms to education are about ensuring all Australians, in the cities and in the regions, have this opportunity.

The Australian Universities Accord Final Report, released in February 2024, recommended an ambitious target of 80 per cent of Australia's workforce having a tertiary qualification by 2050. The Department of Education estimates that if the Accord targets are achieved, in total around \$240.0 billion (in today's dollars) in additional income would be added to the economy over the period to 2050, across the whole workforce.

The Government's response in the 2024–25 Budget is the first stage of a multi-year reform agenda to achieve this target. The response focuses on cost-of-living relief, creating more opportunity for people in the regions and skills reform to boost productivity. This follows on from the Government's response to the Accord Interim Report, which identified five priority actions, which the Government has already taken, including the expansion of the Regional University Study Hubs program. Twelve Regional University Study Hubs have already been announced, with the next round for Regional and Suburban University Study Hubs to open later this year.

The Australian Government is committed to working with state and territory governments to get all public schools on a path to 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard. The Government is offering states and territories the largest investment in Australia's public education system ever delivered.

The Government has signed Statements of Intent worth an estimated \$785.4 million over the next five years from 2025 to 2029 for Western Australia, to fully fund all public schools in the state by 2026, and an estimated \$736.7 million over the next five years from 2025 to 2029 for the Northern Territory, to fully fund all public schools in the territory by 2029. This additional funding would see public schools in Western Australia and the Northern Territory reach 100 per cent of the Schooling Resource Standard, with the most disadvantaged schools fully funded first. This additional funding will be tied to reforms that identify students who have fallen behind and help them to catch-up with their peers.

In 2024, the Government will provide an estimated \$29.2 billion in recurrent funding to Australian schools, of which \$6.5 billion is benefitting students in regional and remote schools. Additionally, the Choice and Affordability Fund will provide \$121.0 million in 2024–25 in support for non-government schools, including an estimated \$21.8 million in regional and remote locations.

The Government also continues to deliver on its commitment to make ECEC more affordable and accessible for around 265,000 families in regional and remote Australia. The Government has committed to contribute to funding towards a wage increase for ECEC workers. Before finalising the details of the Government's contribution to the wage increase, it will consider the Fair Work Commission's decision on the Annual Wage Review, which is anticipated in June 2024.

Inclusive of its Cheaper Child Care investment, the Government will provide \$62.6 billion in Child Care Subsidy payments over four years from 2024–25, as well as funding support for state and territory governments to ensure all children have access to 600 hours of preschool in the year before full time school. The Government also tasked the Productivity Commission with undertaking a comprehensive inquiry into Australia's ECEC system to help chart a course for universal, affordable ECEC – with a final report due to the Government by 30 June 2024.

The Government continues to provide funding to support ECEC services in regional and remote Australia. The Community Child Care Fund, including Connected Beginnings, is delivering \$614.7 million over four years from 2024–25, to improve access in regional and remote, disadvantaged, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Around 70 per cent of the allocated funding in 2024–25 will support services in regional and remote locations, and currently the Fund and Connected Beginnings programs support around 900 services nationally.

The ECEC Workforce Measures – Professional Development and Paid Practicum Subsidies were established as part of the 2023–24 Budget in response to ongoing workforce pressures in the ECEC sector, investing \$72.4 million from 2023–24 to 2026–27. While being targeted to regional and remote areas in 2023–24, these programs have also prioritised First Nations educators and services.

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

New initiatives

Making the HELP system fairer

The Government has committed retrospectively from 1 June 2023 to cut the Higher Education Loan Program (HELP) debt of Australians, including those in regional Australia. Indexation will be capped at the lower of either the Consumer Price Index or the Wage Price Index, and the Government will provide an indexation credit to ensure the measure has retrospective effect from 1 June 2023.

Commonwealth Prac Payment

Degrees in teaching, nursing and midwifery, and social work currently require prac placements, which disadvantages students living in regional Australia the most. To help with the additional costs and travel of these placements, the Government is investing \$369.2 million over four years from 2024–25 to provide financial support to around 68,000 higher education students per year, of whom up to 17,000 will come from regional areas. This will provide \$319.50 per week (benchmarked to the single Austudy rate) to eligible students while completing the placement component of their degrees.

FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses

The Government has committed \$350.3 million over four years from 2024–25 to expand the availability of FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses, to help build the skills pipeline and assist more students who aspire to university to qualify for entry. This program will boost aspiration including readiness for higher education through more visible post-school pathways. It will increase the number of students accessing FEE-FREE Uni Ready courses by around 40 per cent by 2030. In 2025, the majority of regionally headquartered universities are estimated to receive an increase in funding per-place for Uni Ready courses and an increase in Uni Ready course places.

Building a strong and self-sufficient medical workforce

The Government will provide \$24.6 million over four years from 2024–25 (and an additional \$72.7 million from 2028–29 to 2034–35) for Charles Darwin University to establish a new medical school for the Northern Territory, with 40 new commencing medical students per year from 1 January 2026, and with funding placed in the Contingency Reserve subject to the completion of exploratory work. The investment will support capital, establishment and recurrent costs. A new medical school at Charles Darwin University will help address the unique health challenges facing the Northern Territory.

Managed growth and needs-based funding systems for universities

The Government will introduce demand driven funding for equity students as part of a new Managed Growth Funding System for Commonwealth Supported Places, intended to commence from 1 January 2026. This will help to increase the number of students from regional and remote areas eligible to receive a higher education and support them to a university and course for their needs. Needs-based funding will also be introduced as a core part of this new funding system, to provide academic support for students from under-represented backgrounds, including students studying in the regions. The Government will consult further with the sector to finalise implementation of managed growth and needs-based funding.

Closing the Gap – Education

The Government will invest \$74.8 million over four years from 2024–25 to accelerate action and deliver against the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, by supporting First Nations education partnership, policy development and program delivery. This measure includes an ongoing partnership funding of \$12.5 million to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation and \$16.6 million to SNAICC – National Voice for our Children – the peak body for First Nations children. The Government will develop a First Nations Education Policy in partnership with First Nations organisations, which will articulate the national priorities and objectives to systemically transform the education sector into an environment where First Nations students thrive and reach their full potential in school and beyond.

This investment will also support continued funding for successful education programs, including the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation Scholarships Program and the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Indigenous Cultural Responsiveness Initiative. It also includes an expansion of the English Language Learning for Indigenous Children program.

The Government will provide \$2.4 million to work in close partnership with First Nations stakeholders to develop the First Nations Teacher Strategy and enable immediate investment in implementation. This funding directly supports the delivery of the National Teacher Workforce Action Plan. The First Nations Teacher Strategy will attract and support First Nations people into teaching roles.

The Government will invest \$32.8 million to extend Australian Government support at existing levels for services offered by the Clontarf Foundation for the 2025 school year. The Clontarf Foundation supports up to 12,500 First Nations boys and young men to improve their school engagement. More First Nations boys and young men will benefit through school support to improve wellbeing, discipline, life skills, self-esteem, further education and employment prospects, with 148 academies across the country. Support for the Clontarf Foundation program contributes to the Government's efforts to close the gap in Year 12 attainment (Closing the Gap Target 5).

Good to Great Schools Australia

The Government will invest \$5.3 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend the Good to Great Schools Australia Pilot Program, to increase access for more remote school students. Extension of the program will benefit some of the most disadvantaged schools in outer regional, remote and very remote regions and support them to lift their outcomes in literacy, science and numeracy.

Boarding school capacity for First Nations students

The Government has committed \$18.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to establish a Central Australia Boarding Response Fund, which will be delivered through the National Indigenous Australians Agency. This capital works fund will improve existing facilities and enable them to take on more students. This investment in boarding facilities in central Australia will support school students in remote Northern Territory communities and contributes to building a better and fairer education system.

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, industry and the community.

The 2024–25 Budget includes measures that support regional employers and employees and address skills and workforce needs. The Government will make changes to the employment services system to address the additional barriers to workforce participation in regional areas, including better supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Government is also growing the skilled workforce needed to deliver a Future Made in Australia, through investments supporting workers and apprentices to access secure work in critical industries, including clean energy and construction.

New initiatives

Reforming employment services

Workforce Australia is the Government's largest employment service and operates across all non-remote areas in Australia. A quality employment services system needs to respond to the unique opportunities and challenges of regional labour markets, supporting people to find employment, and employers to meet their recruitment needs.

Consistent with the Government's commitment to strengthen employment services under Working Future: The Australian Government's White Paper on Jobs and Opportunities, the Budget includes initial changes to Workforce Australia employment services. These include strengthening the integrity of employment services, better recognising individual's circumstances, and supporting job seekers through paid employment pathways. These initiatives are an initial response to the immediate issues identified through the House of Representatives Select Committee on Workforce Australia Employment Services.

The Government recognises further reform will be necessary to achieve its vision and is committed to working closely with stakeholders and the broader community to improve employment services in the longer term.

Supporting jobseekers through paid employment pathways package – Real Jobs, Real Wages

The Government is committing \$54.0 million over five years from 2023–24 to trial two new paid work placement programs in partnership with employers across Australia, focusing on people with barriers to work who are seeking to connect to job opportunities and achieve sustained employment.

The Real Jobs, Real Wages pilot will support people who are at risk of long-term unemployment by placing them in jobs with employers who receive tapered wage reimbursements for up to six months. The support will be tapered (to provide a greater amount of support early in their engagement), with a retention bonus payable to the employer after 12 months if the individual is employed in a secure job with paid leave entitlements. WorkFoundations will assist people with complex vocational and/or non-vocational barriers to build their work readiness in a supportive work environment, with funding available for social enterprises and other suitable businesses for paid employment placements of up to six months, with tailored, wrap-around supports. All placements in this package will be real jobs, paid at the relevant Award or enterprise agreement rate, with legal entitlements including superannuation.

These programs support the Government's ambition to create an inclusive labour market with job opportunities and secure work that are attainable for all Australians, including those in regional and remote areas where labour markets can be less diverse.

Supporting workers through energy system changes

The Government will invest \$134.2 million over four years from 2024–25 to support regions through energy system changes, with comprehensive employment and skills services for workers, their families and communities, supporting access to new regional employment. Services may include career advice, job search assistance, case management, training and other supports.

Some regional and rural communities are highly dependent upon the coal and gas industries for employment, with little diversity in local labour markets. In recognition of the impact on affected communities, the Government will also seek to develop Regional Workforce Transition Plans, developed with communities, state, territory and local governments, employers, workers and unions, to support people to take up new employment opportunities through the delivery of place-based supports and services in affected regions.

First Nations Prison to Employment Program

The Government will invest \$76.2 million over five years from 2023–24 into a new program, building on the Time to Work Employment Service, to improve the transition from prison to work for First Nations people. The program will be progressively rolled out from 1 July 2025 and support people in prisons, detention centres, and juvenile justice facilities across Australia, with service providers offering pre-release and post-release supports to help people reintegrate into their communities and engage with employment and education and training. The program responds to extensive consultation with First Nations organisations, communities and evidence on how to improve support in the transition from prison to work and reduce recidivism.

This program contributes to several socioeconomic targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including targets 7, 8, 10 and 11, as well as the Government's Regional Investment Framework, by investing in First Nations people participating in regional and remote economies.

Extending Broome Employment Services

The Government will provide \$3.7 million from 2025–26 to extend Broome Employment Services until June 2027, to allow time to fully embed and evaluate the service delivery model. Broome Employment Services recognises the unique local context of the Broome labour market and tailors a place-based employment service, where the First Nations service provider works in partnership with Australian Public Service personnel. This model builds on Broome's strengths and responds to its needs, while supporting its people and businesses to thrive.

Australian Apprenticeships Incentives System

The Government will provide an additional \$265.1 million over four years from 2024–25 to the Australian Apprenticeships Incentives System (AAIS), which supports apprentices and employers across Australia to access secure, well-paid jobs. The AAIS will continue to provide targeted support to encourage people to commence and complete apprenticeships in priority occupations, via continued direct financial support to apprentices to provide cost-of-living relief, and through adjusted hiring incentives for employers to assist in offsetting the cost associated with training an apprentice. This means apprentices in priority occupations will receive an additional \$2,000, and their employers will receive an additional \$1,000 for planned settings. The barriers to completing an apprenticeship are higher in regional and remote Australia, resulting in lower retention rates in these areas. This initiative is designed to provide stability to the sector while the Government undertakes a strategic review into the AAIS and how the apprenticeships system can best support high quality apprenticeships and traineeships.

Australian Skills Guarantee

The Government will invest an additional \$10.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to support implementation of the Australian Skills Guarantee. From 1 July 2024, the Government is introducing new national targets for apprentices, trainees and paid cadets (including specific targets for women that increase annually) to work on Government funded major projects. Businesses in regional Australia face additional challenges such as thinner markets for apprentices, and the Guarantee contains flexibility for these businesses to engage with the contracting entity to assist with compliance. This initiative will enable the introduction of a robust and reliable reporting system to monitor progress against the targets, and support suppliers (including suppliers in regional Australia) to comply with their new obligations.

Skilling the clean energy workforce

The Government will support more apprentices who meaningfully engage with clean energy during their apprenticeships, with eligible apprentices in the New Energy Apprenticeship Program receiving up to \$10,000 in financial support. The Government will also invest \$91.0 million over five years from 2023–24 in increasing vocational education and training, and apprenticeships in priority clean energy occupations. It will also support the development of the training system required to build the necessary workforce to deliver on Australia's emissions reduction and net zero targets. As most of the clean energy infrastructure, including generation and transmission infrastructure and maintenance, is likely to occur in regional Australia, this measure is designed to work in partnership with other programs to upskill locally in these regional and rural communities. This initiative will also help employers in regional areas take on apprentices and will work to develop technology and facilities in regional, rural and remote communities experiencing workforce transition.

Skilling the construction workforce to support housing supply

The Government will provide \$90.6 million over three years from 2024–25 to grow Australia's construction workforce and boost housing supply. The Government is building on Fee-Free TAFE, which is available in all states and territories, and supporting them to deliver 20,000 additional Fee-Free places that may be offered in TAFE and industry Registered Training Organisations in courses relevant to the construction sector. This funding offers cost-of-living relief for students, enabling them to access high quality training and develop the skills to work in a high priority industry.

As part of the 20,000 Fee-Free places commitment, the Government will work with jurisdictions to support up to 5,000 people to access pre-apprenticeship programs designed to give students an experience of working in construction-related trades. This will inform their decisions around which apprenticeship to pursue, improve their employability, and support their transition into these industries. The Government will also update policy settings to streamline skills assessment requirements for migrants seeking to work in the construction industry. This will increase the supply of qualified and experienced tradespeople migrating from countries with comparable training frameworks to Australia.

WHS Accreditation Scheme Assistance for the Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Accord Facility

The Government will provide \$13.2 million over three years from 2023–24, to provide targeted assistance to increase the number of builders accredited under the Work Health and Safety Accreditation Scheme available to work on Housing Australia Future Fund and National Housing Accord Facility projects, including in regional Australia. The funding will facilitate fast tracked accreditation applications and establish a grant program to enable building industry employer associations to support builders to obtain accreditation. This will help ensure construction of Government funded housing is delivered safely in line with delivery targets.

Supporting women to achieve higher paying careers through VET pathways

The Government will invest \$55.6 million over four years from 2024–25, to the Building Women’s Careers program, which will drive structural and cultural change in workplaces, training and across industry sectors. This program will have a particular focus on the construction and clean energy sectors, where significantly increasing women’s participation is required to overcome skills shortages. It will work to provide women with flexible, safe and inclusive work and training opportunities, with the appropriate structures in place for success in traditionally male-dominated industries. Through the creation of local and place-based partnerships that deliver VET related training and employment, this program will positively support women in regional communities to attain secure, well-paid employment. The encouragement of flexible and innovative training delivery will reduce the barriers created by distance and promote the development of local employment opportunities.

Remote Training Hubs Network

The Australian Government is providing \$30.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to co-design and establish a network of Remote Training Hubs in partnership with central Australian communities and the Northern Territory Government. This place-based initiative, which is part of the A Better, Safer Future for Central Australia plan, supports people in remote communities to access on-Country training that meets community needs and leads to local, sustainable jobs. This delivers on the Government’s commitments to Closing the Gap socioeconomic targets 6, 7 and 8 by supporting First Nations people in central Australia to connect with further education pathways and economic opportunities. It also advances the Government’s commitment to investing in regional people, places, and local economies by upskilling local workforces.

Jobs and Skills Australia

The Government will provide an additional \$9.5 million in 2024–25 to Jobs and Skills Australia (JSA) to continue to provide independent advice on current, emerging, and future workforce skills and training needs. Established in 2022, JSA provides evidence to the Government to inform its economic, skills and education priorities. The legislative functions of JSA include analysis of skills and workforce needs in regional, rural and remote Australia. JSA engages with the interests of the regions through consultation with tripartite partners and through its broad engagement and outreach program. JSA plays an important role in providing the labour market and education and training system information required to ensure regional Australians are prepared for the future, including identifying skills shortages and how technology impacts the nature of work.

Harvest Trails Services and Harvest Trail Information Service

The Government will cease the Harvest Trail Services program and the Harvest Trail Information Service on 30 June 2024. The program has seen a steady decline in usage since its commencement in 2020, which reflects post-COVID-19 trends where employers are more heavily recruiting through other methods. A range of other workforce supports are available to the agricultural sector, including through Workforce Australia and the Pacific Australia Labour Mobility scheme.

Foreign Affairs and Trade

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

The portfolio works across the Australian Public Service, and with Australian organisations and businesses, and international partners and institutions to build the conditions for a peaceful, open, stable, and prosperous regional and global environment in which sovereignty is respected. The portfolio has a critical role in providing timely and responsive consular and passport services to Australians overseas, as well as supporting the growth of Australia's regional economies back home, including through promoting Australia internationally as a compelling tourism destination for leisure, business events travel and building business capability to meet visitor needs.

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

Through the new initiatives announced in the 2024-25 Budget, the portfolio will continue to work on national strategies for long-term, sustainable growth of Australia's trade and visitor economy. This includes supporting a safe and secure region and assisting Australian businesses to expand by increasing access to trade information and fostering increased awareness of trade opportunities, no matter where a business is located, through the Go Global Toolkit expansion. The Government is also continuing administration of the Approved Destination Scheme to support Chinese visitor numbers, including in regional Australia where tourism plays a significant role in local economies and drives additional spending on Australian products.

This builds on the success of the THRIVE 2030 strategy, which aims to achieve total visitor expenditure of \$166.0 billion by 2024 and \$230.0 billion by 2030 – with a visitor expenditure target in regional Australia of \$70.0 billion by 2024 and \$100.0 billion by 2030. As of the year ending June 2023, THRIVE 2030's visitor expenditure target for 2024 had already been exceeded – reaching \$191.4 billion, including \$79.9 billion spent in regional Australia.

New initiatives

Approved Destination Status Scheme

With the reopening of China's borders following the COVID-19 pandemic and the re-inclusion of Australia as an approved destination by China, the Government will provide \$8.1 million over four years from 2024–25 and \$2.5 million per year ongoing to continue administration of the Approved Destination Status (ADS) Scheme. The scheme is critical in supporting Chinese visitors to travel to Australia in guided tour groups. Many first-time Chinese visitors to Australia are on group tours. Ensuring they have positive experiences in Australia leads to repeat visitation, in effect building a pipeline of future travellers who will travel independently to Australia in the future.

Chinese travellers who visit Australia through ADS tour packages regularly get a taste of regional Australia on day tours and are more likely to visit regional destinations when they subsequently return as independent travellers, generating direct positive economic impact for those regional communities and businesses. Research also shows that after travelling to Australia on group tours, Chinese visitors' economic engagement increases significantly through greater average spend on Australian products and services, generating further benefits for regional economies.

Simplified Trade System

Business has been, and will continue to be, at the centre of Simplified Trade System reforms. The Government will invest \$29.9 million to establish a Simplified Trade System Unit, while delivering a new Digital Trade Accelerator Program (DTAP) from 2024–25 to drive cross-border trade reforms, delivering benefits to Australian businesses including in regional Australia.

More than 90 per cent of trade transactions are conducted by businesses through software that directly connects to government trade systems. The DTAP will provide industry with new, secure and direct connections to government trade-related systems, improving visibility of critical trade related data, and allowing businesses to make more effective operational decisions.

By creating these new data connections, the DTAP will drive innovation and empower Australian businesses to develop innovative, productivity enhancing digital trade solutions.

Go Global Toolkit expansion

The Government will provide \$10.9 million over two years from 2024–25 to expand the Go Global Toolkit. The Go Global Toolkit is a single, simple and trusted source of practical online export support for all Australian businesses – particularly small and medium enterprises – no matter their location around Australia. The toolkit has had more than 320,000 users, with an average of over 11,000 monthly users in 2023.

The Go Global Toolkit provides key market information and support to potential exporters and businesses currently exporting goods and services across metropolitan, regional, and remote Australia.

Helping Australian businesses engage with our region

The Government will establish a dedicated ASEAN-Australia Centre as a focal point for driving greater Southeast Asia literacy within Australia and promoting greater investment, collaboration and cooperation, including in regional Australia. The Government will also expand the successful Australia-India Business Exchange, helping even more businesses across Australia, including those in regional areas, benefit from new trade and investment opportunities with India and across South Asia.

Health and Aged Care

A strong Medicare supports people across regional Australia to get the care they need close to home, while taking the pressure off emergency departments and easing cost-of-living pressures. In Medicare's 40th anniversary year, new investments in the 2024-25 Budget build upon the Australian Government's previous landmark investments to ensure Medicare remains a fundamental pillar of the Australian healthcare system well into the future, such as \$3.5 billion to triple the bulk billing incentive.

The Government's Strengthening Medicare agenda will add further Medicare Urgent Care Clinics in regional and remote areas, and provide additional funding to support Medicare Urgent Care Clinics in regional, rural and remote Australia. This complements the Government's previous commitments to improve primary care outcomes in rural and regional Australia. The Government will continue to fund essential aeromedical evacuations and primary healthcare for people living in rural and remote areas that are beyond existing medical infrastructure. Further, Medicare rebates for nuclear medicine services will rise, helping Australians get the care they need, close to home. Communities where in-person services are limited will benefit from telephone and digital supports through Healthdirect and My Aged Care.

The Budget is building on the Government's previous investments to address critical gaps in mental health and suicide prevention, grow the care workforce and improve digital services. Through the Budget, the Government is expanding the range of free mental health services, so Australians get the right level of care for their level of distress, including for those in regional, rural and remote areas.

There is also a focus on prevention, early intervention and management of communicable diseases that will improve the health and wellbeing of people in rural and regional communities. A range of public health protection measures will improve the uptake of respiratory and sexually transmitted infection point of care testing in rural and remote areas. Additionally, tailored healthcare and information will support women in regional and remote communities to make informed choices concerning their health.

New initiatives

Strengthening Medicare

The Government has committed \$227.0 million over three years from 2023-24 to boost funding for Medicare Urgent Care Clinics, including for a further 29 Medicare Urgent Care Clinics across Australia. This will include further Medicare Urgent Care Clinics in regional and remote areas, and additional funding to support Medicare Urgent Care Clinics in regional, rural and remote Australia.

There are 58 clinics already operating around the country, including ten in regional, rural and remote areas. Medicare Urgent Care Clinics are ensuring people get the urgent care they need while reducing the load on busy emergency departments.

Medicare Urgent Care Clinics are open seven days a week and have extended hours, giving Australian families more options to access care, particularly outside standard hours.

The Government is investing \$92.8 million over four years from 2024–25 on a one-off fee increase for non-PET services and a phased reintroduction of annual indexation to all nuclear medicine imaging services, to address discrepancies between the fees and costs of providing the services:

- From 1 November 2024, the subgroup for non-PET imaging services will receive a one-off fee increase of 3.5 per cent, followed by annual indexation from 1 July 2025 onwards.
- From 1 July 2027, the remaining subgroups (PET services and adjunctive services) will be indexed annually.

This will support practices, particularly in regional and remote areas, to remain viable and will improve patient affordability for nuclear medicine imaging services while further work is done on longer-term funding arrangements for radiopharmaceuticals.

The Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) delivers essential aeromedical evacuations and primary healthcare services to people living in rural and remote areas of market failure or beyond ‘normal’ medical infrastructure. The Government will provide \$73.8 million over three years from 2024–25 to ensure the delivery of RFDS essential primary health services, address some cost pressures to ensure the RFDS can sustain services such as dental services, and provide a stronger focus on primary healthcare in areas of market failure, particularly in regional Australia.

The Government will provide \$116.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to strengthen and support Australia’s health workforce. Funding includes:

- \$90.0 million over three years from 2023–24 to fund implementation of the health-related recommendations of the Independent Review of Australia’s Regulatory Settings Relating to Overseas Health Practitioners (the Kruk Review) to grow and support the health workforce. Further detail on this funding is provided below.
- \$17.4 million in 2024–25 to boost the support of healthcare in areas of shortage. Further detail on this funding is provided below.
- \$4.7 million over five years from 2023–24 for the Northern Territory Medical Program to increase the number of First Nations medical practitioners and to address recruitment and retention challenges in the Northern Territory.
- \$4.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to the Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association to continue to support First Nations doctors to become medical specialists.

The Government will also extend existing Single Employer Model trials until 31 December 2028, to continue trials of new employment models that will help attract and retain GPs in areas of workforce need.

The Working Better for Medicare Review is examining the effectiveness of current health workforce distribution levers, including policies and geographic classifications used to distribute health workers across areas of need. This review is considering how current policies and programs can be strengthened to improve access to healthcare across Australia, including in regional, rural and remote areas.

The Government has committed \$90.0 million over three years from 2023–24 to fund the implementation of all the health related recommendations of the Kruk Review, growing and supporting the health workforce. Australia is facing a shortage of key healthcare practitioners, putting the health system and existing workforce under pressure. In the short to medium term, Australia needs more skilled health practitioners. The Kruk Review considered Australia's regulatory settings relating to health practitioner registration and skills and qualification recognition for overseas trained health professionals and international students who have studied in Australia. The Kruk Review final report recommends reforms to streamline regulatory settings to drive productivity dividends for migrants, employers and communities, while maintaining healthcare quality and safety.

The Government has committed \$17.4 million in 2024–25 to support the provision of, and access to, primary health and support services in thin markets, through extending the General Practice Incentive Fund, funding an average of eight urgent thin market interventions. Thin markets are mostly identified in rural and remote areas. This measure will improve access to health services in environments where the market for health services is thin or failing. Funds will be utilised to respond to situations where community access to health, care and support services is at risk due to market failure. Investment will promote improved integration of service in communities, and support health services at risk of closing.

Healthdirect Australia provides virtual health information and advice services delivered through telephony and digital channels. Healthdirect services support Australians when in-person options may be limited or not available, such as in some regional and remote areas. The Government has committed \$84.5 million over four years from 2024–25 for Healthdirect Australia to provide essential services, including:

- \$47.5 million over four years for essential nurse triage and critical care services, including an After-Hours GP helpline, maintaining the National Health Services Directory, and supporting Victoria's continued participation in the Health Information and Advice Service – assisting consumers to find the most appropriate care, particularly during the after-hours period.
- \$37.0 million over two years in supplementary operational funding for the My Aged Care contact centre to respond to increased demand and ensure quality services for older Australians and their families seeking aged care systems support.

This funding will maintain continuity of Healthdirect services that support Australians, including in regional and remote communities, to access primary and aged care services appropriate to their needs.

Mental Health

The Government has committed \$588.5 million over eight years from 2024–25 and \$113.4 million per year ongoing to establish a national digital mental health service for Australians at risk of, or experiencing, mental ill-health symptoms or transient distress. The service will be a free and accessible alternative treatment pathway for people requiring lower intensity care than that offered in a clinical setting. This will increase access to a range of services for people unable to access face-to-face care, particularly those in regional, rural and remote Australia, and ensure they are able to receive care and support at the earliest opportunity.

The Government has committed \$71.7 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$24.4 million per year ongoing) to deliver mental health multidisciplinary services for people with severe and/or complex mental health needs in primary care settings. This will benefit regional communities by ensuring people in regional, rural and remote Australia, including other priority population groups, are able to access wrap around multidisciplinary mental health support within primary care settings.

The Government has committed \$29.8 million over four years from 2024–25 to improve access to free clinical mental health treatment through the national network of Head to Health services. This will strengthen the Head to Health service offering to deliver on the Government's vision to provide accessible, free, high quality care for people with moderate to severe mental health needs.

A centralised tele-psychology and psychiatry service will be established to provide access to virtual treatment services for all Head to Health sites, particularly those in regional, rural and remote areas impacted by workforce shortages.

The National GP Psychiatry Support Line will also be expanded to mental health professionals working in Head to Health sites, providing advice for mental health professionals from psychiatrists.

These initiatives will strengthen the clinical capacity and geographical reach of services and position Head to Health sites to better serve all regions.

The Government has provided \$29.7 million over three years from 2024–25 to address the rapidly declining mental health of young Australians. This includes \$27.1 million over three years from 2024–25 to continue the Headspace Early Career Program (ECP), which supports headspace to attract and build their workforce across Australia.

Additional funding for the ECP will allow a third tranche of allied health students and graduates to start the program, which provides early career practitioners the opportunity to build their expertise in the mental health sector while accessing training and support.

ECP prioritises regional, rural and remote locations in recognition of the mental health workforce shortages in these areas, to ensure young people are supported to access the mental health services they need, regardless of where they live.

The Government has provided \$45.9 million over four years from 2024–25 to redesign the Mental Health Program to ensure funding is targeted to parts of the system with the greatest need and encourage innovation in the delivery of mental health services. As part of this, \$42.1 million over two years from 2024–25 will be provided to extend critical terminating mental health and suicide prevention measures, including several that support Australians living in regional, rural and remote areas:

- \$21.0 million in 2024–25 for Primary Health Networks (PHNs) to continue the Targeted Regional Initiative for Suicide Prevention, which funds a Regional Coordinator in each PHN and community-based suicide prevention interventions based on emerging priorities.
- \$10.0 million in 2024–25 to maintain funding to deliver targeted and culturally appropriate mental health and suicide prevention supports across Australia for First Nations people.
- \$3.0 million in 2024–25 to build peer support capacity, raise mental health awareness, reduce stigma and encourage help seeking for fly-in-fly-out/ drive-in-drive-out workers.

Keeping Australians fit and well

The Government continues to invest in measures to support sport participation and high-performance programs through grants to community organisations, national sporting organisations and other stakeholders, and to reduce water and snow-related injuries and deaths.

The Local Sporting Champions and Local Para Champions programs will be extended (\$17.0 million over two years from 2024–25), with 29 per cent of program recipients from rural areas and 16 per cent from provincial areas (where costs are higher to attend competition). The Sporting Schools program will also benefit from an extension (\$62.9 million over two years from 2024–25), with 42 per cent of schools supported from regional areas and 5 per cent from remote areas.

The Government is supporting the continuation and expansion of the Water and Snow Safety program (\$34.2 million over two years from 2024–25). This investment includes vital safety equipment and training for surf lifesaving clubs nationally, delivered through Surf Life Saving Australia.

The Government is investing \$22.1 million over two years from 2024–25 for the extension of 24 activities to support preventive health research, and patient and clinician services for Australians with chronic conditions. This includes health professional education and training modules made available online and delivered virtually for several chronic conditions (for example migraine and macular disease), enabling access for health practitioners in rural and remote areas. Training on best-practice asthma and linked chronic respiratory conditions management for health professionals, including Aboriginal Health Workers, will be delivered in remote locations.

Australians living with chronic conditions in rural and remote locations will have access to support services, for example via the Lung Foundation 1800 Helpline, and resources for people living with inflammatory bowel disease.

The Government will provide \$5.8 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Preventing Preterm Birth measure, which will include outreach and education on strategies to prevent preterm and early-term birth in rural and remote maternity services.

In addition, \$6.1 million over two years from 2024–25 will be provided for the Support for Men's Sheds program. This funding will assist the Australian Men's Shed Association (AMSA) in providing information, advice and support to around 1,300 Men's Sheds across the country. The AMSA will also continue to administer small grants to Men's Sheds as part of the National Shed Development Programme.

The Government is investing \$60.8 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue essential cancer programs that aim to improve cancer outcomes for all Australians, including those in rural and regional areas. This includes \$38.8 million over four years from 2024–25 to continue the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program's participant follow-up function, ensuring people in regional and rural Australia are connected with relevant health services, \$15.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue the national skin cancer prevention campaign, and an additional \$6.9 million over four years from 2024–25 for Canteen to continue the Youth Cancer Services Program.

Regional Australians are more likely to die from melanoma than their city counterparts. While early detection is key to reducing incidence and mortality of skin cancer, those in regional, rural and remote areas can often experience additional barriers to accessing skin checks. The Government is investing \$10.3 million over four years from 2024–25 for targeted research into risk-based, cost-effective skin cancer screening and development of a roadmap for a national targeted skin cancer screening program, in line with priorities of the Australian Cancer Plan. Equity in access to screening for groups with poorer skin cancer outcomes will be a key focus of this investment.

The Government is investing \$41.6 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue implementation of activities at the national level to support the prevention, treatment and reduction of alcohol and other drugs (AOD)-related harms in Australia through the extension of 20 AOD grant funding agreements that are due to expire on 30 June 2024.

AOD-related harms impact all Australian communities, families and individuals, and result in significant health, social and economic costs. This funding will assist people in rural and regional areas to access services and treatment for AOD-related health concerns closer to where they live.

The Government is investing \$5.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend the National Awareness Campaign for Pregnancy and Breastfeeding Women – Every Moment Matters. The campaign, which was developed by the Foundation for Alcohol Research and Education, seeks to reduce the incidence of Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) in Australia by raising awareness of the risks associated with alcohol consumption during pregnancy and while breastfeeding.

This investment will have a positive impact on people in rural and regional areas and people from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, both of whom are disproportionately impacted by alcohol and other drugs-related harms. It will also support a greater number of women to achieve alcohol-free pregnancies, and a reduction in the number of babies being born with FASD, leading to better health, economic and social outcomes.

The Government has committed \$126.5 million over two years from 2024–25 to implement the new National Strategies for Blood Borne Viruses (BBV) and Sexually Transmitted Infections (STI), and continue funding for respiratory and STI point of care testing and vaccination uptake support for First Nations, regional, and remote communities.

This investment will deliver a positive regional impact by increasing equitable access to healthcare in regional, remote and First Nations communities through numerous initiatives. For example:

- The National BBV and STI Strategies acknowledge geographical remoteness can impact health outcomes and contain numerous actions that will benefit regional and remote communities. Campaigns and policies will be targeted, far-reaching and non-discriminatory.
- Investment of \$16.5 million over two years will support delivery of respiratory and STI point of care testing in up to 120 regional and remote sites, ensuring First Nations people and people living in regional and remote communities have access to culturally appropriate care, and rapid diagnosis and treatment.
- Investment of \$28.6 million over two years for the BBV and STI package overall aims to service the needs of all Australians regardless of where they live. Syphilis is of rising concern in Australia. The Enhanced Syphilis Response is delivered in up to 105 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in designated outbreak areas. The program provides testing, treatment and strategies to reduce the incidence of congenital syphilis.
- Investment of \$32.3 million over two years to continue support and promote vaccination uptake in First Nations communities.
- Investment of \$17.5 million over two years to support continued delivery of National Strategies' initiatives, including to implement culturally safe sexual health services for First Nations people.
- Investment of \$9.9 million over two years to continue the hepatitis C point of care testing program.
- Investment of \$7.9 million over two years to continue support for peak organisations' capability and capacity to deliver the National Strategies' initiatives.
- Investment of \$7.8 million over two years to pilot hepatitis B projects public awareness campaign, information services and workforce training.
- Investment of \$6.0 million over two years to continue hepatitis C projects.

The Government is investing \$43.9 million over three years from 2024–25 to begin funding the implementation of the HIV Taskforce recommendations and work towards the virtual elimination of HIV transmission in Australia by 2030. Key priorities that impact regional areas include:

- The expansion of the national HIV self-test mail out program, which will provide free HIV self-test kits to high risk populations.
- Funding for Pre-Exposure Prophylaxis (PrEP) for people living in Australia, including in regional areas, who are not eligible for Medicare through a Federation Funding Agreement.
- Continuation of funding for the Emen8 website, which is a national information website providing tailored and targeted digital promotion to sub-groups of gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men who are at high risk of contracting HIV. The content focuses on prevention, testing, treatment, and reducing stigma.
- Continuation of funding for the HIV Online Learning Australia program, a HIV peer workforce program that supports a range of activities such as training sessions, educational workshops and communities of practice.
- Funding a HIV Prevention Workforce Development pilot to improve the knowledge and confidence of the health workforce to discuss, prescribe and manage PrEP, through materials and education.

The Australian Government is committed to continued investment in longstanding programs delivered by the Queensland Government, including:

- Management of Torres Strait/Papua New Guinea (PNG) cross-border health issues to provide health services to PNG nationals who present at Queensland health facilities, and continue to facilitate effective information sharing with the PNG Government on communicable diseases and other health issues which may arise from the cross-border Torres Strait Protected Zone (TSPZ) movements.
- Mosquito control in the TSPZ to support the surveillance, control and, where possible, elimination of *Aedes albopictus* mosquitoes at the main population and transport hubs of the Torres Strait, as well as increasing awareness in communities about dengue fever, Zika virus and other mosquito borne diseases.
- Addressing blood borne viruses, sexually transmissible infections and other communicable diseases in the Torres Strait to continue support for healthcare workers to reduce the communicable disease risk and prevalence in the entire Torres Strait region through increased vaccination, testing, treatment, surveillance and community health education.

Women and Families

The Government has committed \$56.1 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$0.4 million per year ongoing) to support women's health. This includes \$42.2 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$0.4 million per year ongoing) that will benefit women in regional Australia, including:

- \$12.5 million over four years to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to facilitate community-led, fit for purpose distribution of free menstrual hygiene products in rural and remote First Nations communities.
- \$5.2 million over three years will support health professionals, including in regional and rural areas, to undertake training to increase access to Long Acting Reversible Contraception.
- \$1.1 million over four years will enable development of an interactive contraception decision tree, supporting regional and rural women and their health professionals to determine the best form of contraception for them.
- \$5.5 million over three years to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare to develop a sexual and reproductive health data set to support an understanding of service access deserts, regional needs, contraception uptake and preferences, and pregnancy outcomes.
- \$7.0 million over four years for national miscarriage education and awareness activities, including resources to promote community understanding and awareness of miscarriage and early pregnancy loss. Information packs for women and families will also be developed and distributed to GPs, medical services and hospitals across rural and regional Australia.
- \$1.5 million over two years for a national audit of Early Pregnancy Assessment Service clinics. This will develop a service listing so women and families in rural and regional Australia are aware of, and can access, appropriate services in their local area for treatment and follow-up care.
- \$6.0 million over two years to support the provision of holistic and integrated healthcare in crisis, temporary accommodation and services to support women and children experiencing family, domestic and sexual violence (FDSV). Funding will be provided to six Primary Health Network sites to implement place-based models of service to meet the unique needs of victim-survivors of FDSV, including those living in rural and remote communities.
- \$3.5 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$0.4 million per year ongoing) to expand the Midwife Professional Indemnity Scheme to include indemnity insurance cover for privately practicing midwives providing low-risk homebirths and intrapartum care outside of a hospital, and for specified entities providing Birthing on Country models of care.

Ensuring dignity and choice in aged care

The Government is continuing to invest in growing and developing the aged care workforce, particularly in rural and remote Australia. The Government is investing \$88.4 million over four years from 2024–25 to meet demand from an ageing population and to support the successful implementation of key Government commitments, including the 24/7 registered nurse and care minutes responsibilities. It is expected that 15 per cent of workforce development program services will be provided to regional areas, including the revised Home Care Workforce Support program, which will be delivered exclusively in regional, rural and remote areas.

From 1 July 2024, the Rural Locum Assistance Program for aged care will be extended for 12 months to facilitate continued temporary workforce support. This will support aged care providers in rural and remote Australia when experiencing high turnover, workforce shortages, and to cover staff leave and continuing professional development. From 1 October 2024, residential aged care providers will be able to meet up to 10 per cent of their mandatory registered nurse care time targets with enrolled nurse care time. This will support providers, particularly in rural and remote areas facing registered nursing shortages, to meet their care time requirements.

The Government will provide \$10.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to continue two critical palliative care education and training activities targeting capability development in the aged care workforce. This includes:

- \$6.1 million for the Palliative Aged Care Outcomes Program to support residential aged care facilities in the use of standardised patient assessments and symptom response protocols in their facilities.
- \$4.0 million for the Program of Experience in the Palliative Approach Aged Care Program to provide tailored education, training and ongoing mentorship to aged care staff and primary care practitioners, supporting them to deliver quality palliative and end of life care in their communities.

People in residential care often have more complex healthcare needs at the end of life than those in the community. This funding will ensure older Australians receive the care they need at the end of life, including those living in regional, rural and remote areas.

Other initiatives

The Government will continue funding of \$0.5 million over three years from 2024–25 to support the Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s Heywire competition. Heywire is an annual competition, operating for over 20 years, which invites young regional, rural and remote Australians to submit written and digital stories about their experiences and ideas for change, usually related to themselves and their community. Winners are invited to participate in the annual Heywire Regional Youth Summit, which provides a chance for participants to further develop their ideas and present them to a panel. Ideas presented through Heywire have been taken forward by industry, universities, government, and non-government organisations.

Home Affairs

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

The portfolio's primary role is to make the nation more resilient for the future, safeguarding Australia's domestic interests from national security and border threats, while supporting a prosperous and united Australia through management of 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 knowing they are safe and able to participate equally in contributing to society.

The portfolio gives effect to this role through the delivery of its diverse responsibilities, all of which support the Australian community. Functions directly related to regional communities include emergency management, disaster preparedness, response and recovery, enhancing social cohesion and democratic resilience, and the protection of critical infrastructure (including the aviation and maritime transport sectors).

New initiatives in the 2024–25 Budget of particular relevance to supporting a strong, safe and secure regional Australia relate to delivery of Australia's migration and settlement support programs, and national resilience and emergency management response and recovery.

The portfolio remains committed to integrating migrants into regional communities and continues to enhance its efforts to combat the exploitation of migrant workers, who can be particularly vulnerable in rural and regional settings. During 2022–23, 33,944 regional work visas were delivered through the Migration Program, an increase of 86.3 per cent on the 18,223 regional work visas delivered in 2021–22. Recognising the important role migration plays across the country, and through delivery of the 2023 Migration Strategy – Getting migration working for the nation, the portfolio will continue enhancing outcomes for regional areas through a migration system that is responsive to skills needs, and adaptive to the evolving labour market.

The portfolio works with partners across all levels of government and industry to improve Australia's capacity to anticipate, prepare, absorb, adapt and evolve from crisis. During 2023, 148 local government areas were impacted by disasters, with the majority 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. NEMA continues to play a vital role in supporting communities outside of Australia's capital cities through its network of regional officials and its oversight of a range of initiatives that support rural and regional Australia, including the Disaster Ready Fund, which provides up to \$200.0 million per year for disaster risk reduction projects. The portfolio 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

2024–25 permanent Migration Program and transition to a multi-year migration planning model

The planning level for the 2024–25 permanent Migration Program has been set at 185,000 with 33,000 places for permanent Regional visas and 33,000 places for permanent State and Territory Nominated visas. Since 2020–21, the permanent migration planning level for skilled Regional visas has increased significantly from 11,200 places to 34,000 places in 2022–23, and 32,300 places in 2023–24, reflecting the Government’s commitment to supporting regional development and growth. Skilled regional migration addresses critical skill shortages both directly by filling skills gaps and indirectly by transferring specialist skills and knowledge that are difficult to develop locally, supporting continued growth of essential services infrastructure and regional industries. This is a key factor in attracting other in-demand professionals to regional areas and growing broader economic activity.

The transition to a multi-year planning model for migration from 2025–26 will further support positive regional migration outcomes through greater alignment with other key planning levers, such as planning for land use, housing, infrastructure and essential services. The extended 4-year planning outlook will help align investments by the Australian and state and territory governments to deliver strategic regional priorities. This will assist in revitalising regional communities while attracting and retaining the skilled migrants needed to address critical workforce shortages and essential services.

National Emergency Management Agency

The Government will invest \$73.3 million over four years from 2024–25 to sustainably fund the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), allowing for the continued support to the community in preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. This investment supports NEMA to have an ongoing regional presence and direct impact on regional communities, through state and territory governments.

National aerial capability

The Government is investing \$35.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to support the National Aerial Firefighting Fleet by providing immediate additional funding to allow for extended lease periods of highly specialised multi-use aircraft. This will ensure the fleet includes adequate aerial firefighting and multi-use capability aircraft, and can respond to other types of disasters such as floods and cyclones, in addition to fires.

This funding will also support a comprehensive review into Australia’s national aerial firefighting requirements, the current fleet, and funding model. With climate change resulting in more frequent, more intense and more complex natural hazards, extended higher risk weather seasons have heightened the demand on global aerial firefighting aircraft and have increased market pressure and costs. This review will inform the development of a proposal for a future fleet that is cost effective, incorporates multi-use capabilities, and can meet the increasing national demands of climate induced disasters.

Illegal foreign fishing

The Government is investing \$48.8 million in 2024–25 to support the continuation of whole-of-government operational efforts to counter illegal foreign fishing in Australia’s northwest waters and coastline. This investment will help the Australian Border Force mitigate the illegal foreign fishing threat and support Australia’s maritime interests in the region. It will also provide positive benefits across parts of Western Australia and the Northern Territory with regional investment and the creation of 17 jobs. The Government has also committed an additional \$1.7 million in 2024–25 for the Australian Fisheries Management Authority and \$2.0 million over two years from 2023–24 for the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions to further mitigate the illegal foreign fishing threat.

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.

Regional Australia is home to many of the resources, skills, ideas and industries needed to achieve a Future Made in Australia. The portfolio is central to delivering on the Government's vision of a Future Made in Australia to boost investment, create jobs and seize the opportunities of a shifting global economy. Investment will be guided by where Australia is competitive, how we contribute to an orderly path to net zero, and the capabilities of Australian people and regions. This means there are important opportunities in areas like refining and processing critical minerals, moving up the value chain of battery production, and green metals. The portfolio's new and existing support through grants and partnerships for regional businesses and communities is complemented by ongoing investment in scientific and technological capability.

The portfolio touches regions across the whole country through initiatives and programs like the Cooperative Research Centres program, which has a proven track record of encouraging innovation and collaboration between universities, science institutes and business to tackle national challenges with the potential to transform industries and create jobs.

The portfolio's Industry Growth Program builds strong businesses with high growth potential. In the 2023–24 Budget, the Government committed \$392.4 million for the Industry Growth Program to provide advice and matched grant funding for innovative Australian start-ups and small to medium enterprises to commercialise their ideas and grow their businesses, including businesses from regional Australia. This supports industry-led commercialisation within the Government's priority areas for the National Reconstruction Fund. The National Reconstruction Fund Corporation targets investment in Australian projects that drive diversification and transformation across seven priority areas of the economy, including those with a significant presence in regional areas.

Australia's economy is transitioning in many existing and emerging industries, and the work of the portfolio in the regions will ensure regional communities are positioned to take advantage of the opportunities available. Australia's strategic Landsat Next earth observation partnership with the United States and upgrading the ground station in Alice Springs, alongside existing systems such as southPAN, will provide a step change in land imaging capability and open access to imaging data with unprecedented accuracy, underpinning a range of key regional industries including, crucially, the critical minerals industry.

The portfolio's support for the resources sector will create new economic opportunities in regional Australia and help enable the transition to net zero in Australia and around the world. Additionally, the portfolio's support for decarbonisation of Australia's resources sector will help create both direct and indirect employment for businesses in regional Australia. The Critical Minerals Strategy 2023–2030 provides a framework to grow Australia's critical minerals sector, overwhelmingly located in the regions, and critical minerals programs support the industry to build sovereign capabilities.

New initiatives

Resourcing Australia's prosperity

The Government has committed \$566.1 million over ten years from 2024–25 and \$111.8 million per year on average from 2034–35 to 2058–59 for the Resourcing Australia's Prosperity Program, for Geoscience Australia to progressively map the whole of onshore Australia by 2060. This investment will deliver high quality data and information to provide a deeper understanding of regional and remote areas' resource potential. The program includes building strategic partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to support their economic self-determination. Over the life of this accelerated and enhanced program, precompetitive geoscience data analysis and decision support tools will position Australia as a global leader in geoscience, double Australia's known resource endowment, and advance understanding of Australia's potential for critical minerals, alternative energy sources, groundwater, and other resources necessary for the transition to net zero.

Supporting Australia's critical minerals sector

The Government supports critical minerals projects, typically located in regional areas, through the Critical Minerals Facility (CMF) managed by Export Finance Australia. This includes a recently announced package for Arafura Rare Earths totalling approximately \$840.0 million, which includes approximately \$495.0 million under the CMF, \$200.0 million through the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, up to approximately \$115.0 million on Export Finance Australia's Commercial Account and an approximately \$30.0 million grant under the Modern Manufacturing Initiative. It will also support the development of a rare earths mine and refinery near Alice Springs in the Northern Territory.

The CMF has also provided Alpha HPA with a combined \$400.0 million loan for building a commercial scale high purity alumina production facility in Gladstone, in regional Queensland. This includes \$160.0 million from the CMF, \$200.0 million from the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility, and \$40.0 million from Export Finance Australia's Commercial Account.

The Government has committed \$7.0 billion over the decade to support critical minerals processing in Australia through the new Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive. The Incentive provides a 10 per cent refundable tax offset for the eligible costs of processing critical minerals in Australia.

The Government has also committed \$10.2 million in 2024–25 to establish the Critical Minerals National Productivity Initiative, to extract further value from Australia’s resources by growing onshore processing of critical minerals. The Australian Government will work in partnership with state and territory governments to develop pre-feasibility studies for critical minerals common user processing facilities. These facilities, when developed, will be accessed by participants across the resources sector, including miners, processors and exporters. The Government is also strengthening the resilience and security of the critical minerals sector by supporting small-mid tier mining companies to detect and mitigate the risk of foreign interference.

Supporting the critical minerals sector through these initiatives will help strengthen the resilience of regional and remote communities, where projects are located, by generating opportunities for economic growth, creating more diverse businesses and sustainable jobs, and attracting increased investment.

Future Gas Strategy

The Future Gas Strategy sets out the Government’s plan for how gas will support the country’s transition to net zero. Australian gas is an important enabler of global energy transitions, and will continue to be a significant part of Australia’s economy through to 2050. The strategy will deliver certainty for the sector, which provides well-paying jobs in the regions, and ensure gas remains affordable for Australian users.

An Australia-United States partnership in Landsat Next

The Australian Government has committed \$448.7 million over 11 years from 2023–24, (and \$43.2 million per year ongoing from 2034–35), to support Landsat Next, the pioneering satellite program led by the United States National Aeronautics and Space Administration, and United States Geological Survey. The program will give access to high quality land imaging data for a range of activities essential to Australia’s future prosperity and the community safety of regional Australia, including data to inform mining prospects, understand crop yields, and aid flood and bushfire management and response. An upgraded satellite ground station will provide new employment opportunities in the Alice Springs region, including for First Nations businesses, in areas such as ground station operation, construction, and facilities management.

Regional cooperation on transboundary carbon capture and storage

The Government has committed \$32.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to establish regulatory frameworks and bilateral instruments to enable heavy industry to reduce emissions to meet Paris Agreement commitments, both in Australia and overseas. This will provide industry with the option of safely moving carbon dioxide to suitable and secure geological storage sites to support energy security, meet obligations under Australian law, and provide carbon management solutions for regional partners, consistent with our obligations under international law.

Becoming a green metals powerhouse

The Government has committed to support Australia to become a green metals powerhouse through initiatives such as the Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund, to incentivise innovation, catalyse investment and enhance research translation in green metals. These initiatives will add value to Australia's resources, support regional employment, and accelerate decarbonisation, 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 Whyalla, Port Kembla, Gladstone, Portland, the Pilbara and Collie.

Supporting the Australian battery industry

The Government has committed \$549.1 million over seven years from 2024–25 to transform Australia's battery industry. This includes supporting the new National Battery Strategy, that will guide the growth of a home-grown battery manufacturing industry. This funding will drive the creation of a diverse and competitive domestic battery manufacturing industry. It includes targeted initiatives to build large scale battery manufacturing capacity and to encourage businesses to move up the battery value chain.

Increasing diversity in STEM for a Future Made in Australia

The Government has committed \$38.2 million over eight years from 2023–24 and \$1.3 million per year ongoing to attract Australians from diverse backgrounds in STEM careers and education. Initiatives include scaling up and increasing investment in existing STEM diversity programs that are delivering results. These initiatives are helping to address shortages and will have a positive impact on regional and remote Australians through promoting greater inclusion, access, participation and retention in STEM, from education to employment and leadership. They will support people who live in regional or remote areas to access and remain in local STEM industries across tech, agriculture, net zero and clean energy, mining, and manufacturing.

Implementation of the offshore decommissioning roadmap

The Government has committed \$6.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to implement the Offshore Decommissioning roadmap to ensure Australia benefits from the \$60.0 billion estimated cost of decommissioning ageing offshore infrastructure over the next 30-50 years. Supporting the decommissioning industry will create well-paid jobs across regional Australia, particularly in Western Australia and Victoria where most decommissioning work is located.

Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

The Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts delivers programs and policies across a broad and varied remit to improve the lives of all Australians. The department provides critical infrastructure and services to connect people, places and industries across Australia, and enriches communities and economies through supporting access to, and participation in, media and the arts. The work of the department spans all corners of the country, including through managing Australia's external territories and supporting local governments.

Over 2023–24, the department embedded the Australian Government's Regional Investment Framework in policy design and decision making – shaping policies from the local level up, to support coordinated and targeted investments in regional Australia. This includes strengthening the role of Regional Development Australia committees through a refreshed charter and regular Ministerial briefings, and building the regional evidence base with the release of the 2024 State of Australia's Regions report. The Framework is supporting local voices to be heard by Government, including through the Australian Council of Local Government, Ministerial roundtables and engagement with a diversity of regional communities, industry sectors and research groups.

The Framework underpins the department's approach to supporting regional Australia, with programs delivered across the four focus areas of people, places, services, and industries and local economies. The principles of integrity and fairness are firmly embedded in the design of the Government's flagship regional programs – the \$600.0 million Growing Regions and the \$400.0 million regional Precincts and Partnerships programs. The department engages widely with the people, communities and industries that rely on its services and policies, such as through the Regional Telecommunications Review, and works in partnership with local, state and territory governments to deliver what regions need. The department welcomes the recently announced parliamentary inquiry into local government sustainability, given the vital role local governments play in supporting regions.

Recognising the important cultural and economic contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the department is pursuing self-determination and economic empowerment approaches to achieve important outcomes with First Nations people, complementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The department is working in partnership with First Nations communities and organisations, including through the Languages Policy Partnership, and the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group. The 2024–25 Budget further strengthens the Government's support for First Nations people, with initiatives supporting First Nations languages and digital inclusion.

With regional Australia being home to many of the resources and industries needing to adapt or grow to achieve a net zero future, the department remains focused on ensuring regional communities benefit from this transition. The Budget includes funding to support the Government's New Vehicle Efficiency Standard and development of a domestic low-carbon liquid fuels industry in Australia – helping to reduce emissions, and providing savings to regional Australians on their fuel.

Through its infrastructure and transport programs – covering road, rail, air and shipping – the portfolio helps to create and maintain the networks that keep regions connected and underpin economic activity in regional Australia. The department supports the delivery and management of the more than \$120.0 billion 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline, which is informed by the Government's Infrastructure Policy Statement and its focus on nationally significant transport infrastructure projects that promote productivity and resilience, liveability, and sustainability. At the 2024–25 Budget, the Government is providing \$1.2 billion towards 33 new major projects in regional Australia under the Infrastructure Investment Program, and \$1.5 billion to support the delivery of existing projects. A further four new projects will benefit both regional and urban communities. The Budget also includes funding to improve the resilience and reliability of the interstate rail network, increase the safety and accessibility of regional and remote airports, and strengthen national sovereignty and security through establishing a strategic fleet of vessels that could be called on in times of need.

The Government continues to deliver on its commitment of \$2.2 billion to strengthen regional connectivity, recognising reliable and accessible digital networks support regional Australians' social and economic participation, as well as access to critical services like banking, health and education. To support economic growth and participation, the Government is also consulting on a more modern and fit for purpose universal service framework for telecommunications.

By enabling access to and participation in arts, media and entertainment, the department is also supporting regions to be great places to live, while boosting their local economies. Just over a year into the 5-year National Cultural Policy – Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place, the Government is delivering on its commitments, including the establishment of Creative Australia with expanded funding and functions to support artists and arts organisations across Australia, and increasing funding for the Regional Arts Fund. New initiatives in the Budget will provide vital support for live music venues and music festivals, including in regional Australia, as well as national arts training organisations to ensure world class training and career pathways for Australia's most talented artists, wherever they may live, are maintained into the future.

New initiatives

Infrastructure Investment Program

The Government is committed to a 10-year infrastructure investment pipeline of over \$120.0 billion to deliver a sustainable program of nationally significant transport infrastructure projects across Australia that are guided by the Infrastructure Policy Statement.

As part of the pipeline, the Government is continuing to invest in infrastructure that builds connections between Australia's regions, communities and major gateways for agriculture, tourism, resources, retail and manufacturing. Through the 2024–25 Budget, the Government is making a substantial investment in regional Australia, including:

- \$605.7 million to new projects that will deliver critical road upgrades in northern Australia
- \$137.5 million to the Nelson Bay Road – Williamstown to Bobs Farm project in New South Wales
- \$80.0 million to the Lyell Highway – Granton to New Norfolk project in Tasmania.

In November 2023, the Government also announced improvements to a number of subprograms of the Infrastructure Investment Program that improve the safety, resilience and connectivity of our road network. As a result, in 2024–25, regional Australia will directly benefit with the Government building on its existing commitment towards the Roads to Recovery Program by progressively increasing funding from \$500.0 million per year to \$1.0 billion per year. This funding benefits local governments and unincorporated areas responsible for local road infrastructure works. In addition, from 1 July 2024, \$200.0 million will be available per year towards the new Safer Local Roads and Infrastructure Program aimed at addressing emerging priorities in road infrastructure needs, with focus areas such as safety, productivity, bridge renewal, resilience (betterment) and sustainability. The Road Safety Program will also continue to roll out lifesaving road treatments through to June 2026, many of which are in regional and remote areas.

Housing Support Program

The Government will make available a further \$1.0 billion stream in the Housing Support Program (HSP) fund for urgent and significant infrastructure projects in order to build more homes for Australians, including those in regional Australia. This is in addition to the existing HSP streams, which are providing \$500.0 million from 2023–24 to 2024–25 to fund enabling infrastructure, community amenity and planning capability.

National Response to Road Trauma

The \$32.0 million National Response to Road Trauma package will support immediate actions to reverse the disturbing increase in road trauma across Australia. It provides \$10.8 million in 2024–25 for a 1-year National Road Safety Education and Awareness Campaign, and \$21.1 million over six years from 2024–25 to improve the reporting of national road safety data via the National Road Safety Data Hub.

Active Transport Fund

The Government has committed \$100.0 million over four years from 2025–26 to fund bicycle and walking paths to encourage the use of active transport across Australia. Well-designed and planned active transport infrastructure, such as bicycle and walking paths, supports regional development, road safety, reduced greenhouse gas emissions and improved productivity, health and community amenity.

New Vehicle Efficiency Standard

The New Vehicle Efficiency Standard Bill 2024 was introduced into Parliament on 27 March 2024. The New Vehicle Efficiency Standard (NVES) aims to limit the average carbon dioxide emissions across the range of light vehicles sold by each supplier, to incentivise the supply of more fuel-efficient petrol, diesel, hybrid and electric vehicles. As well as reducing emissions, the NVES will ensure motorists benefit from the lower fuel costs that come with more efficient vehicles. The Government has committed \$84.5 million over five years from 2024–25 (and \$12.6 million per year ongoing) for the department and the Clean Energy Regulator to establish a regulator to administer the NVES, including to capture emissions data, establish a credit trading platform and undertake monitoring and compliance activities, and to undertake further work to bring Australian vehicle standards into line with those of its peers.

The consultations that informed the Bill included consideration of the needs of regional motorists. The NVES framework has been designed for Australian conditions and is calibrated to reflect the mix of vehicles Australians need for work and leisure. While all Australian motorists will benefit from fuel savings, larger savings are expected in regional areas, where people tend to be more reliant on their cars and travel greater distances than those in metropolitan areas.

ARTC Network Investment Program

The Government is investing \$540.0 million over three years from 2027–28 in the national rail freight network through Australian Rail Track Corporation's (ARTC) Network Investment Program, including \$150.0 million for the upgrade of the Maroona to Portland Line in regional Victoria. The program is designed to improve the resilience, reliability, safety and efficiency of the rail freight network. This will ultimately support a more sustainable rail industry, reduce the intensity of freight emissions and accommodate long term freight demands.

Parkes Intermodal Terminal business case

The National Intermodal Corporation Limited will invest \$5.0 million from 2024–25 to deliver a final business case and progress environmental planning for an open access intermodal terminal facility at Parkes, in regional New South Wales.

Parkes will be a crucial consolidation and deconsolidation hub in the national rail freight network with the arrival of Inland Rail, where interstate freight operators can transfer freight from smaller eastern seaboard trains into more efficient, long double-stacked services to Melbourne, Perth and Darwin. This will enhance efficiency and productivity benefits from the Government's investment in Inland Rail, providing additional resilience, and helping drive efficiency and competition across the national freight network. These benefits will ultimately flow onto savings for business and consumers, including in regional Australia, as well as creating further economic development opportunities for the Parkes region.

Aviation transport initiatives

The following initiatives are outcomes of the Aviation White Paper.

Extending the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program

The Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program will be extended to provide an additional \$50.0 million over three years from 2024–25 in competitive grant funding, to support improving safety of remote airstrips across Australia. The program recognises aviation's critical role in connecting regional Australians and provides support for remote aviation where it is not commercially viable, but essential for the social and economic wellbeing of the communities.

Since 2011, the program has funded over \$100.0 million of critical safety and accessibility upgrades for airstrips in remote communities. The focus of the program is to improve the safety of aircraft, operators and passengers at remote airstrips, which has involved capital works, including resheeting runways and upgrading safety lighting or fencing to stop incursions by animals or people.

Extending the Regional Airports Program

The Regional Airports Program will be extended and expanded to provide an additional \$40.0 million in competitive grant funding over three years from 2024–25, for regional airport owners to invest in safety and accessibility upgrades. The program will be extended to allow for infrastructure that will assist air services to transition to net zero emissions, such as electric chargers, or hydrogen production or storage facilities.

Funding the Remote Aerodrome Inspection Program

The Government will extend funding of \$0.5 million per year (indexed) from 2024–25 to the Remote Aerodrome Inspection Program, which has been in operation since 1992. The program provides critical inspection services to ensure the safety of airport operations. It provides annual aerodrome inspections and reports for a closed group of operators of up to 56 identified remote aerodromes across the Northern Territory, Queensland and Western Australia that are predominately located in, or adjacent to, First Nations communities. The program supports these aerodromes to meet their aviation safety obligations, providing the ability for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and other service providers to safely land in remote communities and provide critical community services.

The continued funding affirms the Government's longstanding commitment to remote connectivity, and support for safe and accessible aviation services.

Automatic Dependent Surveillance Broadcast (ADS-B) Rebate extension and mandate

ADS-B technology allows an aircraft to automatically communicate its precise location via a digital data link, offering significant safety and efficiency benefits that increase with the number of aircraft fitted with the technology. In regional areas, which often have uncontrolled airspace, the technology will warn pilots of other nearby aircraft so steps can be taken to avoid collision.

Use of the technology will become increasingly necessary as airspace becomes more congested with drones and other new aviation technology. As part of the 2024–25 Budget, the Government has committed \$3.6 million over three years from 2024–25 to extend and broaden the eligibility of the current ADS-B Rebate Program.

The rebate scheme to incentivise use of ADS-B technology in Australian aircraft operating under Visual Flight Rules commenced in 2022. The rebate covers 50 per cent of the purchase cost (and where applicable, installation costs), up to a cap of \$5,000 per eligible aircraft. This program was set to end in mid-2024, but the Government has committed to extend it by a further three years to June 2027, with broadened eligibility to include more ADS-B equipment, and aircraft operating under Instrument Flight Rules.

Extension of the program will improve the uptake of ADS-B technology, resulting in immediate safety and efficiency benefits for airspace users, including those in the regions. The extension will also help to mitigate the cost of complying with a future ADS-B mandate.

Strategic Fleet Pilot Program and shipping legislation reviews

The Government has provisioned funding in the Budget to establish and administer a strategic fleet pilot program. Funding for the pilot has not been published to preserve the Australian Government's negotiating position with prospective pilot applicants.

An additional \$26.9 million over five years from 2024–25 has also been committed to undertake reviews of the *Coastal Trading (Revitalising Australian Shipping) Act 2012* (CTA) and the *Shipping Registration Act 1981* (SRA).

The Government is committed to strengthening Australia's economic sovereignty and national security by establishing a strategic fleet of Australian-flagged and crewed commercial vessels. The pilot program will secure three vessels to enable the Government to secure maritime capability to call on in times of need, such as supply chain disruptions and natural disasters. The pilot program will also provide an evidence base for future expansions of the strategic fleet to fulfil the Government's election commitment for a strategic fleet of 12 vessels.

The Government's investment will benefit regions of Australia that are susceptible to natural disasters and supply chain disruptions. Communities in affected regions will benefit from the assistance the strategic fleet can provide during times of crisis or need.

Delivering on the Australian Government's urban agenda

The Government has committed \$12.6 million over four years from 2024–25 to support the delivery of the Government's urban agenda, supporting a national approach to sustainable urban development and the continued delivery of city and regional deal projects, including the Albury Wodonga Regional Projects, and appropriate governance and oversight for the Macquarie Point precinct in Hobart and Launceston urban renewal projects.

Review of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act

The Government is providing \$1.9 million to undertake an independent statutory review of the *Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act 2016* (NAIF Act). The Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility (NAIF), a \$7.0 billion Government Specialist Investment Vehicle, was established in 2016 to facilitate economic and population growth in northern Australia through financing transformational infrastructure projects. Its approach is tailored specifically to the unique needs of the north, with specialist expertise in this region and in those sectors that contribute to the region's economic prosperity, including critical minerals.

Since its establishment, the NAIF has committed more than \$4.0 billion towards projects across northern Australia to unlock the region's potential. This includes investments in regional airports, university student accommodation, energy and renewables, agriculture and water, transport and logistics, and critical minerals, fertilisers, and other resources.

NAIF's investment in these projects, on behalf of the Government, is forecast to generate \$32.3 billion in public benefit for the north and support the creation of more than 16,300 jobs. Every NAIF project must have an Indigenous Engagement Strategy, which outlines how each financed project will create economic opportunity for First Nations people in the north.

This statutory review of the NAIF Act will provide advice to the Government on how to most effectively invest in economic infrastructure development across the north, crowd in additional finance sources and realise economic and population sustainability objectives. The NAIF Act requires that the review be conducted as soon as possible after 30 June 2024 and consider whether the time limit of 30 June 2026 for making decisions to provide financial assistance should be extended and the appropriate governance arrangements for the facility after that date.

50th anniversary of Cyclone Tracy memorial

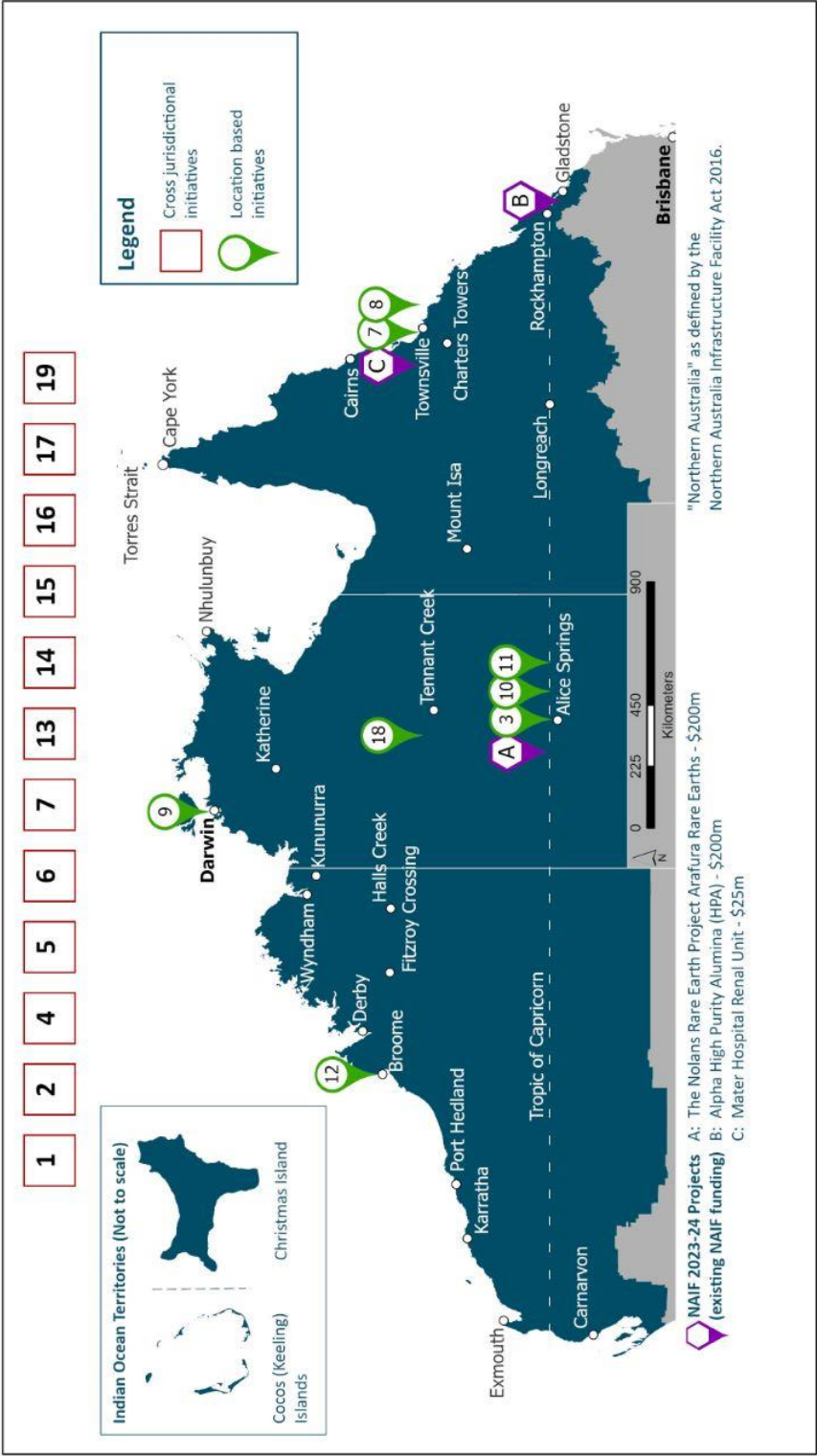
The Australian Government has committed \$0.6 million in 2024–25 to the Northern Territory Government, towards the construction of a permanent monument and separate permanent memorial in Darwin to honour the memory of those who died and whose lives were irrevocably changed by Cyclone Tracy, which hit Darwin in the early hours of Christmas morning in 1974.

Highlights for Northern Australia

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

The Government is refreshing the White Paper on Developing Northern Australia through the development of a new Action Plan. The Action Plan will update the Government's northern Australia agenda and respond to contemporary economic, social and environmental challenges and opportunities, including the: new Future Made in Australia agenda, commitment to transition to net zero and the ongoing commitment to working with our First Nations people. Highlights of the Government's new investments in the 2024–25 Budget that significantly benefit northern Australia are summarised below.

	Initiative	Investment	Portfolio
1	Future Drought Fund	\$519.1 million	Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
2	Improving outcomes for native title holders and solving the claim backlog	\$20.8 million	Attorney-General's
3	Strengthening Community Safety in Central Australia	\$14.2 million	
4	Future Made in Australia – Making Australia a renewable energy superpower <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hydrogen Production Tax Incentive - Hydrogen Headstart extension - First Nations Renewable Hydrogen Engagement Fund additional round - Supercharge ARENA's core investments 	\$8.0 billion \$1.5 billion	Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
5	Future Made in Australia – Attracting investment in strategic industries	\$1.7 billion	
6	Responsible investment in water infrastructure for the regions	\$174.6 million	
7	Australian industry support to Army aviation	\$646.0 million	Defence
8	Upgrade to Defence Force bases in North Queensland	\$35.0 million	
9	Building a strong and self-sufficient medical workforce	\$24.6 million	Education
10	Boarding school capacity for First Nations students	\$18.0 million	
11	Remote Training Hubs Network	\$30.2 million	Employment and Workplace Relations
12	Extending Broome Employment Services	\$3.7 million	
13	Supporting Australia's critical minerals sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Critical Minerals Production Tax Incentive - Critical Minerals National Productivity Initiative 	\$7.0 billion \$10.2 million	Industry, Science and Resources
14	Resourcing Australia's prosperity	\$566.1 million	
15	Boosting First Nations digital inclusion	\$68.0 million	Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
16	Extending the Remote Airstrip Upgrade Program	\$50.0 million	
17	Review of the Northern Australia Infrastructure Facility Act	\$1.9 million	
18	Multi-year funding for Northern Territory homelands and housing	\$2.1 billion	Prime Minister and Cabinet
19	Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program	\$777.4 million	



Essential capital works funding in the Indian Ocean Territories, Jervis Bay Territories and Norfolk Island

The Government has committed an additional \$22.5 million over four years from 2024–25 to maintain and repair essential assets in Australia’s non-self-governing territories. Ensuring these assets operate safely and effectively will support communities in these regions to have uninterrupted access to essential goods and services, such as food and medicines, fresh water, and electricity.

Boosting First Nations digital inclusion

As part of the Commonwealth Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2024, the Government committed to deliver community Wi-Fi services in around 20 remote communities, in partnership with NBN Co. This initiative will deliver enhanced connectivity and digital inclusion outcomes in remote communities, including through in-community support from digital ambassadors.

The community Wi-Fi services will use NBN Co’s Sky Muster satellite technology, with funding provided for both initial deployment and ongoing operation. NBN Co will closely consult each identified community to ensure the operation of the free Wi-Fi service aligns with their needs and priorities for connectivity.

Together with new initiatives in the 2024–25 Budget, \$68.0 million will support the digital inclusion of First Nations people. This includes a second round of community Wi-Fi in remote communities through a contestable program for the provision of broadband connectivity solutions, the establishment of a First Nations Digital Support Hub and network of digital mentors, and funding to improve the collection of data on First Nations digital inclusion. These initiatives are consistent with the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan and deliver on recommendations from the initial report of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Advisory Group, released in October 2023.

Universal service modernisation

The Government has an existing framework in place to provide people across Australia with access to baseline fixed voice and broadband services. This includes the Universal Service Obligation, a longstanding safeguard so people in Australia are able to access, on reasonable request, fixed phone services and payphones regardless of where they live or work, and the Statutory Infrastructure Provider (SIP) regime, which supports access to fixed broadband. The SIP requires that NBN Co and other similar providers connect premises to their networks and supply wholesale services that allow retail providers to provide broadband services with peak download and upload speeds of at least 25/5 megabits per second.

The Government has committed to examining universal service arrangements in light of changes in available technologies and consumer preferences over recent years. For example, by the end of 2024, more than 97 per cent of Australian premises will have access to high-speed NBN broadband services that can support quality voice services. The deployment of satellites and other technologies also shows promise for providing greater options for voice services in the most remote areas of Australia.

A key principle for the Government in this review is that any change to existing arrangements will only be considered if there are tested and proven alternatives to existing technologies and services.

Urgent priorities for the First Nations languages sector

The Government has committed \$53.8 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$17.8 million per year ongoing from 2028–29), to establish two new First Nations language centres, increase funding for existing language centres and for community language learning.

Critical support for live music venues and festivals

The Government will provide essential support for Australian live music businesses to withstand the current operating climate and stimulate long-term sustainability, through the Revive Live program – delivering on commitments made in the Government’s National Cultural Policy, Revive. The program will provide \$8.6 million in 2024–25 to support Australian live music venues and festivals, supporting small-to-medium sized live music venues and small-to-medium sized music festivals across Australia.

Grant recipients will include live music venues and festivals located in regional and remote Australia, bringing benefits including increased employment, tourism and access to live music, which is critical to the survival of contemporary Australian music. Of the grant funding, \$1.2 million will be dedicated to projects targeting access and inclusion at live music venues and festivals, to build new audiences and foster career pathways for musicians and music workers with disability.

Financial sustainability of the national arts training organisations

The Government has reviewed the financial sustainability of the national arts training organisations, collectively referred to as the Arts8, and is providing an additional \$117.2 million over four years from 2024–25 to ensure these organisations can continue to provide the pipeline of artists and essential arts workers needed to safeguard Australia’s growing creative economy, including in regional Australia. This includes funding support for NAISDA Dance College located in Kariong, on the New South Wales Central Coast and the Flying Fruit Fly Circus in Albury.

Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Prime Minister and Cabinet portfolio works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and the Coalition of Peaks across metropolitan, regional and remote locations to set the direction of Indigenous affairs policy, and shape the design of policies, services and the Closing the Gap agenda across the Australian Government. It also delivers a number of programs, supporting First Nations people to thrive, advancing equity in access to services and helping Indigenous businesses and economies to grow, with a focus on the strengths of communities and places.

In the 2024–25 Budget, the Government introduced First Nations initiatives focused on accelerating action in the priority areas of education, housing (and related community infrastructure), jobs and economic development. This builds upon existing initiatives, including the Indigenous Rangers Program expansion, which will double the number of First Nations rangers by the end of the decade and work towards greater representation of women in ranger positions. The expansion will be rolled out in 2024 by First Nations organisations across Australia and will create First Nations ranger jobs, including in areas where employment opportunities may be limited. It will also improve Indigenous-led land and water management services in regional, rural and remote communities.

The portfolio, through the Net Zero Economy Agency, is supporting regional economic transformation as Australia decarbonises and the energy system changes. The Agency is a precursor to a new, national Net Zero Economy Authority, for which the Government introduced legislation on 27 March 2024. The Authority will drive a positive and orderly transformation to a net zero emissions economy and ensure Australia's regions and workers benefit. A particular focus of the Authority will be industries that traditionally powered Australia's economy – as old industries phase out, the Authority will work to ensure new industries are coming online, and workers, communities and regions are supported through the change.

Since its establishment on 1 July 2023, the Agency has progressed the design and stand up of the Authority. In drafting the legislation and developing the Energy Industry Jobs Plan, the Net Zero Worker Transition Strategy and the Authority's investment facilitation role, the Agency has engaged with a variety of stakeholders, including First Nations groups, education and training groups, industry, investors, regional bodies and communities, unions and state, territory and local governments.

In addition, the portfolio, through the Office for Women, works across government to place women and gender equality at the centre of policy and decision-making. In March 2024, the Government launched Working for Women: A Strategy for Gender Equality. The strategy outlines the Government's vision to drive gender equality in Australia over the next ten years, through five priority areas: gender based violence; unpaid and paid care; economic equality and security; health; and leadership, representation and decision making.

Working for Women acknowledges people do not have the same experience of gender inequality, and their experiences are shaped by factors including location, socio-economic status and First Nations identity. Women living in regional, rural and remote locations can

face additional barriers to economic security, to accessing appropriate healthcare and are more likely than women living in urban areas to experience family and domestic violence. The strategy acknowledges gender equality cannot be achieved by Government alone, and that every individual, community, organisation and institution has a role to play.

The Office for Women is also leading the rollout of gender responsive budgeting across government, where departments are responsible for undertaking gender analysis on new policies to support Government decision-making that closes gender gaps and improves the lives of women, including those in regional, rural and remote areas. This approach recognises considering gender in policy design and implementation has the potential to drive improved gender equality outcomes. The Office for Women will continue to monitor the impacts and outcomes of the gender responsive budgeting system over successive Budget cycles.

New initiatives

Further investment to Closing the Gap

Custody Notification Services

The Government announced \$4.6 million in 2024–25 to continue funding for the Custody Notification Service (CNS) providers. The CNS provides a 24-hour culturally appropriate health and wellbeing check and basic legal information to all First Nations people brought into police custody in Western Australia, the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Victoria, the Northern Territory and South Australia.

National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment

The Government will invest \$111.1 million in 2024–25 to maintain funding provided under the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment – Extension (NTRAI). Through the NTRAI, the Australian Government delivers supplementary funding to the Northern Territory Government for critical service delivery in First Nations communities, including women and children’s safety, remote policing, alcohol harm reduction and treatment services, Aboriginal interpreter services, children and schooling services, and oral and hearing health services.

Return of Cultural Heritage

The Government has committed \$10.3 million over four years from 2024–25 (and ongoing funding of \$2.7 million (indexed) per year from 2028–29) to extend the Return of Cultural Heritage Program, which commenced in the 2020–21 Budget. This funding will secure the ongoing return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material held in overseas collections back to Traditional Owners and Custodians. The program will continue to work in partnership with First Nations people and communities to preserve unique cultures across regional and remote Australia.

Northern Territory homelands and housing

Multi-year funding for Northern Territory homelands and housing

On 12 March 2024, the Australian Government announced \$2.1 billion over ten years from 2024–25 to improve housing in remote Northern Territory communities and develop a sustainable Community-Controlled Housing Model – of this, \$2.0 billion for remote housing is being matched by the Northern Territory Government. The investment will support significant progress against Closing the Gap, reducing overcrowding and improving housing quality by delivering up to 2,700 houses over ten years and a comprehensive repairs and maintenance program.

The Government has also committed \$120.0 million over three years from 2024–25 to extend funding for repairs and maintenance on housing and essential infrastructure on Northern Territory homelands. This funding will continue improving housing on homelands, while further work is undertaken with housing stakeholders to develop a long-term approach to housing on homelands.

Additional houses under the Northern Territory Remote Housing Federation Funding Agreement

The Australian Government has committed an additional \$20.0 million in 2023–24 to support the delivery of additional houses under the 1-year Remote Housing Northern Territory Federation Funding Agreement. This funding is being matched by the Northern Territory Government.

Suicide prevention for First Nations youth

The Government has committed \$12.8 million over four years from 2024–25 for the continuation of the Indigenous Youth Connection to Culture (IYCC) program, which commenced in 2020. First Nations Elders and youth in 12 communities will continue to deliver place-based activities and build leadership skills. IYCC is a suicide prevention measure that responds to advice from First Nations Elders and evidence from key stakeholders on the importance of culture for improved mental health outcomes. The program, delivered predominantly in regional and remote locations, supports youth to proactively engage with their culture, families and Elders, and contributes to strengthening resilience by building identity, self-esteem and connection. The community plans will recognise and apply local knowledge systems and cultural practices to support capacity building and contribute to improved social and emotional wellbeing.

Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program

The Government will provide \$777.4 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$255.5 million per year ongoing) to establish the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program. This investment is the first step to deliver on the Government's commitment to replace the Community Development Program (CDP) with a new program that has real jobs, proper wages and decent conditions.

- \$536.1 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$194.3 million per year ongoing) to fund the creation of 3,000 jobs that will help close the gap in employment outcomes in remote Australia. The program will commence in the second half of 2024 and will be developed in partnership with First Nations people, remote communities and other stakeholders.
- \$188.7 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$61.2 million per year ongoing) for a Community Jobs and Business Fund, which will fund capital, equipment and capacity building services for community organisations, creating jobs under the Remote Jobs and Employment program.
- \$45.5 million over three years from 2024–25 to meet the costs associated with the increased number of job seekers, which form part of the CDP caseload as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. This additional funding for the CDP will ensure unemployed people in remote Australia are properly supported to build skills, address barriers, and find employment.
- \$7.1 million over two years from 2023–24 to increase the number of jobs funded under the New Jobs Program Trial, to support current demand until the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program commences.

Youpla Support Program – continuation

On 8 February 2024, the Government announced the \$96.9 million Youpla Support Program package, which will replace the Youpla Group Funeral Benefits Program from 1 July 2024. The Youpla Support Program will receive applications over two years and is expected to help more than 13,000 people recover from financial loss and provide certainty to families, including those from regional and remote Australia.

The new program will be for people who held an active policy on or after 1 August 2015. Under the program, eligible recipients will be offered the choice of a resolution payment – assessed at 60 per cent of the premiums paid up to the benefit limit of their former Youpla Group policy. Eligible recipients may choose to use their resolution payment to access a low risk prudentially-regulated funeral bond or opt out for a cash payment. Information sessions will commence in June 2024 with communities like Yarrabah, Palm Island, Cairns and Townsville, and financial counselling will be available to help eligible recipients better understand their choices.

National Australia Day Grants

The National Australia Day Grants program will continue to provide \$10.0 million in 2024–25 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) to deliver community activities and events on Australia Day. Local governments 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, and will enable them to recognise the day in a way that is meaningful to their local identity.

Energy Industry Jobs Plan

The Energy Industry Jobs Plan will provide \$44.4 million over four years from 2024–25 to set up and administer pooled redeployment plans. These redeployment plans are a key tool in supporting workers in some closing coal and gas-fired generators and their dependent employers. They will include obligations on those employers to support their employees to be job ready, incentive programs to encourage receiving employers to participate, and job and skills matching services to maximise the number of workers redeployed.

Social Services

Through the Social Services portfolio, the Australian Government delivers essential social services, including through Services Australia and the National Disability Insurance Agency, to improve the wellbeing of individuals and their families across the nation. By tailoring and targeting support, particularly for vulnerable Australians, the portfolio responds to the needs of individuals and promotes social and economic participation in local communities.

Services Australia provides support to almost every Australian at some point in their lives. It is the Government's primary service delivery agency, connecting people across government and community services through its significant presence across Australia. This includes many regional and remote service centres, a network of agents and access points, 26 remote servicing teams and four mobile service centres to ensure regional and remote communities have access to the same range of services, including natural disaster emergency support.

The National Disability Insurance Agency – with staff located across Australia, including a regional presence – delivers the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The Scheme provides Australians with a permanent and significant disability with financial support to build capacity, increase independence and establish stronger connections with their community and workplace.

The portfolio partners with all levels of government and community organisations to deliver place-based programs with a strong community-led focus, tailored to the local needs of regions, to ensure no one is held back or left behind.

In the 2024–25 Budget, the Government continues to invest in initiatives to improve and deliver meaningful change to the lives of people across Australia, particularly those who are most vulnerable and disadvantaged. This includes providing additional funding to state and territory governments, which deliver homelessness services, as well as funding to deliver initiatives that will support services in remote and regional Australia for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, parents and unpaid carers.

The Government is committed to strengthening services and systems to help victim-survivors to leave violence and support their long-term recovery. Financial insecurity is a major barrier to a victim-survivor leaving a violent intimate partner relationship. The Government will establish a permanent Leaving Violence Program, which will provide financial support, safety assessments and referrals to support pathways for victim-survivors leaving a violent intimate partner relationship.

In addition, the Government remains committed to supporting Australians to cope with rising cost-of-living pressures, through a range of income support initiatives in the Budget, such as freezing the social security deeming rates for a further year and increasing the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance.

The Government's policy to pay superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave will help normalise parental leave as a workplace entitlement, like annual and sick leave, reduce the retirement savings gap for some women and improve the fairness of Australia's retirement income system.

The Social Services portfolio is also working closely with other portfolios and levels of government to deliver key Government priorities focused on people with disability, including delivering a staged response to the Disability Royal Commission, with the initial response to be provided by mid-2024. The portfolio recognises all levels of government need to work together in a coordinated way to ensure all people with disability have access to culturally appropriate, safe and quality services and supports, regardless of where they live in Australia.

New initiatives

Leaving Violence Program – financial support for victim-survivors of intimate partner violence

Intimate partner violence is a problem of epidemic proportions in Australia, with a quarter of all Australian women having experienced intimate partner violence in their lifetime. Financial insecurity is a major contributing factor in a woman's decision to leave, stay in or return to a violent relationship.

More than 45,000 Australians have accessed the Escaping Violence Payment (EVP) since its commencement in 2021. The Temporary Visa Holders Experiencing Violence Pilot (TVP) has also provided over \$14.0 million in financial assistance to over 4,300 victim-survivors on temporary visas who have experienced family and domestic violence, including those in regional, rural and remote areas.

The Government is investing \$925.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to establish a permanent Leaving Violence Program. The Leaving Violence Program builds on the successes and learnings of the EVP trial and the TVP.

The Leaving Violence Program will commence from mid-2025 and support victim-survivors of intimate partner violence to make choices about leaving violent relationships through the provision of financial support packages, safety assessments and referrals to support pathways. Eligible victim-survivors, regardless of visa status or gender, can access up to \$5,000 in financial support, as well as short-term referral services, risk assessments and safety planning.

The Leaving Violence Program is not a crisis payment. It is focused on providing financial support to individuals who are looking to stabilise their lives after leaving a violent relationship, as well as those who are seeking support and a safety plan to leave a violent relationship.

Disability employment reforms

The following initiatives outline the Government's commitment to strengthening services and supports available to people with disability, including improving employment services for people with disability across all regions in Australia to achieve better outcomes.

New Specialised Disability Employment program

The Government has invested an additional \$227.6 million over five years from 2023–24 to deliver a new Specialised Disability Employment program, which will replace the current Disability Employment Services program from 1 July 2025.

The new program will see more people with disability enter the program through expanded eligibility and removing the 2-year limitation on the program. It also seeks to improve the quality of services, increase flexibility and embed tailored supports and services that reflect individual's diverse pathways to find and retain employment. The new program will reset the provider market to increase the diversity of providers offering specialist services, while ensuring coverage and accessibility for participants and employers in regional areas. Providers will be expected to work with local employers to identify employment opportunities and increase employer confidence and capability to employ people with disability. Regional employers will also benefit from the revised wage subsidy program of up to \$10,000 when hiring an eligible participant.

Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

As part of the 2024–25 Budget, the Government committed \$23.3 million over four years from 2024–25 to establish a Disability Employment Centre of Excellence, delivering on an election commitment. The centre will be an evidence informed, best practice hub that will focus on providing resources and tools to help providers in all regions deliver quality employment services to both people with disability and employers. Training for employment services will become available as the Centre of Excellence matures.

Reforms to better connect people with disability to services that meet their needs

The Government has committed \$20.0 million over two years from 2024–25 to design navigation supports for all people with disability, carers and families across Australia, aligning with the recommendations of the Independent National Disability Insurance Scheme Review.

This funding will be used to work with the disability community and existing service providers to design a navigation service model that is fit-for-purpose, and accommodates the different levels and types of navigation support people with disability need both inside and outside the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

The navigation function will have a positive impact on regional, rural and remote communities by assisting participants living in these areas to link to available services most suited to their needs.

State and territory governments will be consulted in the design of navigation services, to ensure the design appropriately connects with the many services for which states and territories are responsible. Engagement with regional and remote communities will support better outcomes and help ensure navigation functions are user friendly, location sensitive and appropriate.

Supporting income support recipients

In the 2024–25 Budget, the Government is investing \$2.0 billion over five years from 2023–24 to promote workforce participation and deliver targeted support to income support recipients across Australia, demonstrating the Government’s ongoing commitment to providing support to those in greatest need and addressing disadvantage in Australia.

Commonwealth Rent Assistance – increase maximum rates

The Government is investing \$1.9 billion over five years from 20 September 2024 to increase the maximum rates of Commonwealth Rent Assistance (CRA) by 10 per cent, which will help ease rental pressures for households in receipt of the maximum rate of CRA in regional and remote Australia.

A further 12-month freeze on social security deeming rates

The Government has committed to keeping the deeming rates frozen for a further 12 months to 30 June 2025.

By keeping deeming rates unchanged, the Government is supporting pensioners and other income support recipients, including those in regional, rural and remote areas, who rely on income from deemed financial investments in addition to their income support payment, to manage cost-of-living pressures.

Carer Payment – changes to the 25-hour participation rules

This initiative provides \$18.6 million over five years from 2023–24 to make changes to the participation limit for Carer Payment. This includes increasing the 25-hour per week limit to an allowance of 100 hours over four weeks, and removing travel time, education and volunteering activities from the limit. The travel time change will particularly assist carers who live in regional and remote areas and are more likely to need to travel further for work.

A higher JobSeeker Payment rate for recipients with a partial capacity to work

This initiative provides \$41.2 million over five years from 2023–24 to expand eligibility to the higher rate of JobSeeker Payment to single JobSeeker Payment recipients with a partial capacity to work of 0–14 hours per week.

More super for parents

The Government is providing \$1.1 billion over four years from 2024–25 and \$623.1 million per year ongoing from 2028–29 to provide greater support to Australian families by paying superannuation on Government-funded Paid Parental Leave. Eligible parents with babies born or adopted on or after 1 July 2025 will receive an additional payment, based on the Superannuation Guarantee (12 per cent of their Paid Parental Leave payment), as a contribution to their nominated superannuation fund. Payments will benefit around 180,000 families each year, including parents in regional, rural and remote areas, with recipients being primarily women.

National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness

To support the provision of social housing and homelessness services, the Government has offered state and territory governments a new, 5-year, \$9.3 billion National Agreement on Social Housing and Homelessness, to take effect from 1 July 2024. This represents an additional \$423.1 million over the life of the agreement compared to funding previously allocated. Under the new agreement, the Government will double the homelessness funding component it provides to states and territories, which deliver homelessness services nation-wide including in regional, rural and remote areas, to \$400.0 million per year – funding state and territory governments are required to match.

Financial wellbeing and capability

The Government will provide \$138.0 million over five years from 2023–24 (and \$35.4 million per year ongoing) to boost support for Australians in financial distress or experiencing financial hardship and to build financial resilience. This will be delivered through additional funding to the Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activity, which will also be restructured to operate under two streams of support: Financial Capability and Resilience, and Financial Crisis Response and Recovery.

The measure includes ongoing funding to help address sustained high demand for critical frontline services, such as emergency relief and financial counselling, including in regional and remote areas across Australia. Australians living in remote and regional areas will also benefit from the expansion of the Saver Plus program to enable participants to build financial skills, capabilities and resilience, and ongoing funding for the No Interest Loan Scheme for Vehicles for vulnerable people needing to purchase vehicles for essential use. The additional funding also enables better accessibility to financial counselling services through the National Debt Helpline, including an appointment booking system and live webchat function.

In addition, the Government will reprioritise existing resourcing to support a number of initiatives. This includes expanding the Money Support Hub program to focus on early intervention supports, predominantly located in regional areas. Support to the STEPS Students Financial Counselling program will continue, which includes assisting students in regional areas. The national food relief program will be expanded to enable local service footprints and provision of material aid to Australian Government-funded emergency relief providers, which will help alleviate service gaps in regional and remote communities. Data and evaluation activities will support the implementation of new initiatives to ensure services continue to support vulnerable cohorts, including in regional and remote areas.

Early Years Strategy – aligning investment

The Government has committed \$0.4 million over five years from 2024–25 to establish a parents and carers reference group to provide a forum for parents and carers to contribute to future reform activity and new policies and programs for families with children aged 0-12 years, and provide opportunities to hear directly from children on matters that affect them. Members of the group will be diverse and include representatives from regional Australia.

Additionally, the Government has committed \$13.9 million over two years from 2024–25 to extend and expand existing community support for parents and caregivers to improve child outcomes in the early years. The Government has also agreed the \$100.0 million Outcomes Fund will support positive outcomes for families and children to prevent cycles of intergenerational and community disadvantage as one of three focus areas of investment.

This funding contributes to outreach and tailored supports to people in regional and remote areas to strengthen community support for families and improve child outcomes in the early years, setting them up for success in later stages in life.

Establish a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

The Government will provide funding of \$5.9 million over two years from 2024–25 to establish an interim National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commissioner), and to establish an Office of the National Commissioner. This is the first step towards establishing the ongoing, legislated and independent National Commissioner.

The interim National Commissioner will be appointed in mid-2024 to consult with First Nations stakeholders to identify the full suite of functions for the ongoing statutory role of the National Commissioner and the Office of the National Commissioner, which will be established under legislation.

This consultation process will ensure the voices of First Nations children and young people (including those from rural, regional and remote locations) can underpin the development of the National Commissioner role.

The Government will work with First Nations leaders to support the establishment of, and ongoing support for, the permanent and fully empowered National Commissioner.

A stronger and more diverse and independent community sector

The Government is committed to a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector. This commitment is being delivered through the development of a community sector partnership framework to underpin how Government and the community sector can work together to support Australians in need.

The aim of this initiative is to achieve better quality grant agreements, which respond to the operational context of community sector organisations by allowing for longer-term grant arrangements, more flexibility in grant arrangements and providing meaningful consultation processes. It also aims to support funding more diverse organisations and strengthen partnerships with community sector organisations with strong local links to deliver services that meet the needs of local communities, including those in regional and remote settings.

This builds on investments in the Government's first two Budgets, including an additional \$560.0 million over four years from 2022–23, to support community service organisations in recognition of rising cost pressures, and \$4.0 billion over four years from 2023–24 to make an ongoing adjustment to the Wage Cost Indexation framework, to ensure it better aligns with economic conditions.

Government investment in Services Australia

The Government is investing \$2.8 billion in Services Australia from 2023–24 to 2027–28 to deliver safe, effective and efficient government services for every Australian. The activities covered by the additional funding are outlined below.

After a decade of outsourcing, reduced service outcomes and underinvestment under the former Government, these investments are part of the Government's commitment to rebuild the Australian Public Service to ensure it is appropriately resourced to deliver the services Australians expect. The actions the Government is taking to rebuild the public service and reduce its reliance on consultants and contractors recognises delivering outcomes for Australians must be built on the foundations of a strong public service.

Services Australia – additional resources

Services Australia will receive an additional \$1.8 billion over three years from 2023–24 to ensure the agency delivers quality services and customer payments to vulnerable Australians in the midst of a cost-of-living crisis. The funding also continues resourcing to support the agency's emergency response capability.

The additional funding will enable Services Australia to better support customers through enhanced claims processing capacity, allowing Australians to access high-quality government services and payments. This includes responding rapidly to support customers who experience natural disaster events across Australia, including in rural and regional areas.

Services Australia improved safety for staff and customers

The Government will invest \$314.1 million over two years from 2024–25 to enhance safety and security at service centres for Services Australia staff and customers.

The measure is designed to minimise incidents of aggression and violence at Services Australia service centres. This will enhance safety for Services Australia staff and customers in 318 service centres, including those located in rural and regional areas.

Operating and enhancing myGov

The Government has committed \$580.3 million over four years from 2024–25 and \$139.6 million per year ongoing from 2028–29 for Services Australia to operate and maintain the myGov system. This funding will ensure the myGov platform remains contemporary, stable and secure. myGov is the critical entry point for access to whole-of-government services throughout Australia, including rural and regional areas. As the Government’s largest authenticated digital platform, myGov is critical in delivering essential government services to people through times of economic uncertainty, disasters and when people experience a change in life circumstances.

The Government will also invest \$50.0 million over four years from 2024–25 to develop further enhancements to the myGov system, which will keep people safe while using myGov. This includes helping people to secure their myGov accounts, improving fraud prevention and enhancing digital communications.

This measure will enable ongoing customer support, call centre and SMS services, and ICT business maintenance services to myGov users, including people in rural and regional Australia.

Treasury

The Treasury portfolio takes a whole-of-economy view to support the Australian Government to deliver a more resilient and modern economy, and achieve strong and sustainable economic and fiscal outcomes for all Australians. Treasury also works to support effective government policies, programs and regulation, and improve the supply and affordability of housing. Current priorities for the portfolio include budget repair, easing cost-of-living pressures on the community, and addressing housing cost and availability pressures, including for regional communities.

Treasury is coordinating the development of the Future Made in Australia legislation and associated policy frameworks, which are expected to generate significant benefits for regional Australia. Treasury also supports the delivery of the Government's comprehensive and ambitious housing agenda, including the Regional First Home Buyer Guarantee. New measures in the 2024-25 Budget continue to expand support for social and affordable housing.

The portfolio undertakes regional engagement, including through visiting regional Australia, and works with other Australian Government portfolios to deepen its understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing regional economies. 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.

In July 2023, the Government released the Measuring What Matters Framework, Australia's first ever national wellbeing framework. Measuring What Matters seeks to put people and progress at the very core of thinking about the economy and society, including for the development of regional policy. The framework captures 50 wellbeing indicators across five themes: Healthy, Secure, Sustainable, Cohesive and Prosperous, with inclusion, equity and fairness cutting across all themes. In addition, more data on wellbeing outside of major cities will become available to decision makers, stakeholders, and the community, through funding in the Budget for the ABS to conduct an annual wellbeing survey.

Treasury is also leading efforts across government to build evaluation capability through the Australian Centre for Evaluation, which commenced on 1 July 2023. The centre's mission – in partnership with other portfolios – is to put evaluation evidence at the heart of policy design and decision making across government. The centre oversees the Commonwealth Evaluation Policy and the associated Evaluation Toolkit, which both support evidence-based decisions in regional policy.

New initiatives

Future Made in Australia

The Government's Future Made in Australia agenda will bring significant benefits to regional Australia. The Future Made in Australia Bill will guide transformational investments and initiatives that leverage private investment in areas where Australia has a comparative advantage or a national interest imperative. As part of this, the Government is

lifting its investment in its plan to become a renewable energy superpower, unlocking private investments and ensuring the regions that have traditionally powered Australia continue to do so.

This includes strategic investments in producing renewable hydrogen, refining and processing critical minerals and moving up the battery production value chain, and making other targeted investments in the manufacturing of clean energy technologies such as solar panels. In addition, a new Future Made in Australia Innovation Fund will be established to coordinate pre-production innovation and support through the Australian Renewable Energy Agency for eligible priority sectors – more information on the Fund is available in the Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water chapter.

The establishment of the Net Zero Economy Authority will support affected regions through public and private investment, facilitating worker transition in key industries, and driving skills development – helping communities to seize the opportunities of Australia’s net zero transformation.

More social and affordable housing

The Government will further expand the Affordable Housing Bond Aggregator program by increasing Housing Australia’s liability cap by \$2.5 billion to \$10.0 billion, and lend an additional \$3.0 billion to Housing Australia to support ongoing delivery of the program. These changes will enable Housing Australia to provide more low-cost finance to community housing providers, including in regional areas.

The first \$500.0 million minimum annual payment from the \$10.0 billion Housing Australia Future Fund (HAFF) will be made in 2024–25. These funds will support social, affordable, and acute housing, including in regional areas. The Government will also make available \$1.9 billion in concessional loan funding for community housing providers and other charities to support delivery of social and affordable dwellings under the HAFF and the National Housing Accord.

Mental and financial wellbeing of small business owners

The Government recognises small business owners face unique challenges, with their mental health connected to the financial health of their small business. The Government is providing a further \$10.8 million over two years from 2024–25 to support the mental health and financial wellbeing of small businesses. This funding will extend the Small Business Debt Helpline, a national free and confidential phone-based financial counselling service for small business owners, and the NewAccess for Small Business Owners program, which provides tailored, free and confidential mental health support to small business owners.

Energy bill relief extension

The Government is providing \$3.5 billion of additional energy bill relief to ease cost of living pressures for energy consumers, including in regional Australia. From 1 July 2024, more than ten million households will receive a total rebate of \$300 and eligible small businesses will receive \$325 on their electricity bills throughout the year.

Improving small business cash flow

The Government is supporting up to four million small businesses to invest and grow by extending the \$20,000 instant asset write-off to improve cash flow and reduce compliance costs.

Small businesses with an aggregated annual turnover of less than \$10.0 million, including those in the regions, will continue to be able to immediately deduct eligible depreciating assets costing less than \$20,000, which are first used or installed ready for use by 30 June 2025. The asset threshold applies on a per asset basis, so small businesses can instantly write off multiple assets.

Veterans' Affairs

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

For veterans and their families in regional areas, the Government understands the importance of connecting people and providing the right services. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA) continues to expand the Veterans' and Families' Hub Network, with 16 hubs to be in place by 2026 and most hubs in regional areas or servicing them. More broadly, the geographic reach of the department enables a wide range of services and support to be delivered through its Veteran Access Network. The department continues to have an active strategy to employ staff in regional areas, such as Townsville.

The Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide will soon hand down its findings. The Government has already committed to addressing the recommendations outlined in the Royal Commission's interim report, and is developing legislation to reform the complex system of veterans' compensation and rehabilitation legislation to create a simpler and easier system for the veteran community.

The Government is committed to reforming the veteran support system to ensure veterans and their families thrive in their lives after service, regardless of where they live. Initiatives in the 2024–25 Budget will boost training for psychiatrists in regional areas, and assist veterans to remain independent for longer by supporting Veterans' Home Care and Community Nursing providers.

New initiatives

Reform of veterans' compensation legislation

The Government will provide \$222.0 million over four years from 2024–25 (and \$83.4 million per year ongoing) to reform the legislation framework for veterans' compensation and rehabilitation by moving to a single ongoing Act from 1 July 2026.

The Government will simplify and harmonise veterans' compensation and rehabilitation legislation with all new compensation claims assessed under an improved *Military Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2004*. Under the single ongoing Act, eligible veterans and their families will receive more generous benefits, such as increased death compensation, travel for treatment, Gold Card eligibility and additional payments for eligible young persons.

This measure supports the Australian Government Response to the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide and will benefit veterans across Australia, including in regional Australia.

Military & Veteran Psychiatry Training Program

The Government has committed to extending the Military & Veteran Psychiatry Training Program until 30 June 2025. Since commencing in 2021, the program has supported training for 33 psychiatrists through placements that expose them to the complex mental health needs of veterans. This training recognises the additional skills required to treat the unique occupational risks and mental health challenges associated with military roles. The extension will allow up to ten further placements over 2024–25.

The placements are targeted at facilities that often work with military and veteran personnel in locations with a high Australian Defence Force and/or DVA service provision presence, and may include placements outside capital cities, such as Townsville and Wollongong. In these cases, the placements improve the quality of mental health care provided to regional veterans and may also provide some broader benefit to regional workforce distribution.

Ensuring the sustainability of veterans' care and support programs

The Government has committed to ensuring the sustainability of veterans' in-home care and support services, providing funding of \$48.4 million over two years from 2024–25 for the Veterans' Home Care and Community Nursing programs. This will facilitate continued access for the veteran community to these services, particularly for those in rural and regional areas. This recognises the important role care and support providers play in helping veterans to remain independent in their homes for longer.