Commonwealth Priority Reforms Roadmap

Building APS Readiness for Transformation

2025

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia and acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to the people, the cultures and the Elders past and present.

Cultural notice

We acknowledge the strength, resilience, and leadership of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, whose voices continue to shape the transformation of government systems.

This document uses the terms **Aboriginal**, **Torres Strait Islander**, and **First Nations** throughout. We recognise that no single term captures the full diversity of cultural, kinship, and language groups across Australia. These terms are used respectfully and with good intent to ensure this Roadmap can be applied across the Australian Public Service (APS).

Content notice

This document discusses issues that may be emotionally distressing, including references to racism, discrimination, and the ongoing impacts of colonisation. These discussions are necessary to support truth-telling, accountability, and the transformation of government systems under the Priority Reforms.

If reading this content causes distress, the following free and confidential support services are available 24 hours a day:

- 13YARN: 13 92 76

- Lifeline: 13 11 14

- For further support services please visit ReachOut Australia

Executive summary

The *Commonwealth Priority Reforms Roadmap: Building APS Readiness for Transformation* (the Roadmap) sets out a practical pathway for transforming how the Australian Public Service (APS) operates to deliver on the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (the National Agreement). It outlines immediate, achievable actions that APS agencies can take to build readiness ahead of the forthcoming *Commonwealth Priority Reform Strategy* (the Strategy).

Transformation under the National Agreement requires more than incremental change. It demands a fundamental shift in how government organisations think, behave, and make decisions. It calls on the APS to embed cultural safety, eliminate racism, and strengthen accountability mechanisms that uphold the rights and aspirations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with shared decision-making and co-governance embedded at every level.

This Roadmap is a readiness tool for Commonwealth agencies. It focuses on:

- Clarifying the purpose and expectations of transformation
- Providing a clear link between barriers and practical action
- Strengthening leadership accountability and capability
- Building consistent and practical approaches across agencies
- Ensuring transformation is led in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations.

The Roadmap recognises the significant work already underway across the APS to embed the National Agreement and close the gap. Many agencies are leading initiatives that strengthen partnerships, build capability, and improve outcomes with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. This Roadmap complements and connects these efforts. Actions in this Roadmap build on previous work undertaken across the APS, including early reform initiatives and lessons learned from implementation of the Priority Reforms.

Together, these efforts highlight that transformation is a long-term process requiring persistence, cultural humility, and structural reform across government.

Who this Roadmap supports

- **APS agencies:** to assess readiness, identify practical actions, and embed reform in everyday business.

- **Senior executives and reform leads:** to champion cultural and structural change, drive accountability, and align agency governance and planning frameworks with the Priority Reforms.

Introduction

In 2020, all Australian governments recognised the need to address the systemic inequities experienced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples by signing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap with the Coalition of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (the Coalition of Peaks).

At the heart of the National Agreement are the four Priority Reforms, designed to work together to achieve real and lasting change:

1. Shared decision-making.

2. Strengthening the community-controlled sector.

3. Transforming government organisations.

4. Improving access to data and information.

The Roadmap will guide and prepare the APS for the forthcoming Strategy. It provides a clear and practical foundation for change, helping agencies understand their role, take early action, and build readiness for long-term system transformation.

This Roadmap is not a preview of the Strategy. It is a readiness and implementation tool designed to help agencies take immediate, practical steps that build capability, strengthen accountability, and foster genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Roadmap focuses on what agencies can do now within existing structures, legislation, and governance frameworks to embed transformation and position the APS for the next phase of reform.

Why now

The APS stands at a critical point in implementing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The systems, relationships, and tools required for transformation already exist within government, but they are not yet being used to their full potential. Acting now allows the APS to shift the way government operates before the 2026 Strategy is finalised.

This is a moment to move from intent to implementation, to deliver the structural change that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples have long called for. Early action will ensure agencies are not only prepared for the 2026 Strategy but already demonstrating measurable progress toward Closing the Gap transformation outcomes.

Transformation

Transformation under [Priority Reform 3](#) is the foundation for systemic change. It requires the APS to reorient its structures, systems, and culture toward equity, accountability, and partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples ensuring shared decision-making and co-governance are embedded throughout.

The APS has a critical opportunity to embed transformation as part of its core business, not as an additional task. Transformation is not a single event or initiative; it is a long-term journey of maturity that requires governments to:

- Acknowledge and address past and present harm, including institutional racism and exclusion.
- Redesign systems to prioritise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices and leadership.
- Invest in capability to ensure public servants understand and act on cultural safety principles.
- Align governance and accountability frameworks to reward collaboration, transparency, and cultural integrity.

Building on previous reform and implementation work, transformation occurs when APS organisations:

- Understand the problem, recognising systemic racism and exclusion.
- Commit to transformation, led by senior executives with clear accountability.
- Collaborate authentically, with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander partners.
- Embed new systems and behaviours, into governance, performance, and culture.
- Ensure that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices are central to decision-making, and that progress is measured and publicly reported.
- Measure and learn, through Indigenous-led evaluation and transparency.

Why transformation matters

Transformation is essential because the current system is limited by:

- **Institutional barriers**, such as inflexible funding models, and narrow accountability mechanisms, limiting the ability of agencies to work in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- **Cultural barriers**, including unconscious bias, deficit framing, and exclusionary workplace cultures, undermining trust and participation.
- **Governance barriers**, such as fragmented decision-making, making it difficult to sustain systemic transformation.

The six transformation elements ([Clause 59](#))

The National Agreement identifies six core elements within Priority Reform 3 that defines what transformation looks like in practice. These elements are interconnected principles that must work together across all levels of the APS.

Figure 1 – Transformation Elements

Transformation element	Description
Identify and eliminate racism	Systematically identify, measure, and address racism within policy, programs and workplaces.
Embed and practice cultural safety	Create organisational environments that respect and value Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities.
Partner and share decision-making	Work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations from the outset of policy and program ensuring co-design and co-governance to enhance the quality and cultural safety of mainstream service delivery.
Increase accountability and transparency	Publicly report progress, decisions, and funding outcomes related to Closing the Gap.
Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures	Recognise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems as integral to good governance, and facilitate truth telling to enable reconciliation.
Improve engagement	Build sustained, respectful relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Transformation focus areas

The six transformation elements become actionable through five interconnected change levers. These levers describe how APS agencies can operationalise transformation within existing systems.

Figure 2 – Change levers

Change levers	What It means in practice
Leadership and accountability	Integrate Priority Reform commitments into governance, corporate planning, and performance frameworks. Senior leaders model transformation through decision-making and reporting.
Capability and culture	Build and sustain a racism free, inclusive workforce through training, allyship, and leadership development. Embed anti-racism standards in recruitment, learning, and leadership pathways.
Partnerships	Move from consultation to shared decision-making and co-governance. Engage early and transparently with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander partners in design, implementation, and evaluation.
Systems and governance	Align internal systems, planning, HR, procurement, and evaluation to reinforce transformation. Use existing legislation (e.g., *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*) to embed accountability.

Change levers	What It means in practice
Data and evidence	Strengthen decision-making through Indigenous-led research, evaluation, and data governance. Apply insights transparently to demonstrate progress and impact.

Barriers to transformation

While progress has been made, the APS continues to face several systemic barriers that limit the consistent and effective embedding of the Priority Reforms. Common challenges include:

- **Fragmented and siloed action** – Reform efforts are often developed in isolation, with limited coordination across portfolios and frameworks.

- **Unclear accountability** – Responsibilities for transformation are unevenly distributed, reducing collective ownership and sustained leadership.

- **Low system capability** – Cultural competence and practical understanding of the Priority Reforms remain inconsistent across agencies.

- **Limited prioritisation** – Transformation is not always embedded in business planning or adequately supported through existing resources.

- **Unclear measures of success** – There is no shared definition of what transformation looks like or how progress is assessed.

- **Data and measurement gaps** – Inconsistent application of Indigenous data sovereignty principles and lack of co-designed evaluation frameworks can undermine evidence-based decision-making and accountability.

- **Inconsistent leadership commitment** – Transformation is not yet embedded across all levels of leadership and planning frameworks.

This Roadmap focuses on building the conditions needed to overcome these challenges and prepare agencies for the deeper structural transformation that will be outlined in the forthcoming Strategy.

Sequencing and the maturity pathway

Transformation is a progressive journey. The maturity pathway helps agencies understand their starting point and identify next steps for embedding the Priority Reforms into their core business.

Agencies will move between stages as they learn, adapt, and embed new practices. Each stage of maturity strengthens the next, creating an ongoing cycle of reflection, accountability, and improvement across the APS. This pathway recognises that transformation is not a checklist but a continuous process of improvement.

Figure 3 – Maturity pathway

Stage	Description
Foundational	Building cultural capability and awareness of the National Agreement, signalling leadership commitment and establishing governance structures, and conducting mapping exercises to recognise systemic barriers within existing systems and practices.
Proactive	Embedding transformation principles into performance expectations, policies, core business functions and decision-making systems, ensuring continuous capability uplift, and building partnership practice.
Leading	Sustained and visible leadership action, embedded Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander leadership and decision-making, and strong accountability and monitoring processes that enable ongoing learning and improved policy outcomes.

The maturity stages described above are aligned to the draft Monitoring and Accountability Framework (MAF). The MAF is a framework for agency self-assessment. It guides agencies to assess and advance their transformation journey using an evidence-based maturity model.

To make sure it is ready to roll out across the APS, a targeted pilot of the MAF is now underway. Depending on pilot outcomes, it is expected that the MAF will form part of the tools available to agencies to implement the Strategy. It will provide a consistent way for agencies to review their maturity stage and identify opportunities to deepen transformation through stronger leadership, capability, and partnership.

Conditions for success

Transformation will only succeed if the right conditions are in place. This requires sustained leadership, effective governance, and a shared commitment across all levels of the APS to embed the Priority Reforms as core business.

Figure 4 – Conditions for Success

Condition for Success	What It means in practice
Clear purpose and shared understanding	Agencies need a unified understanding of *why* transformation is essential and how their actions contribute to national outcomes. A consistent narrative and common frameworks will help staff see their role in system change and align agency priorities with Closing the Gap objectives.
Authentic Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Leadership	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples must be central to transformation design, governance, and implementation. Agencies should recognise and uphold cultural authority by embedding Indigenous governance and decision-making structures to ensure policies reflect lived experience and community priorities.
Alignment across systems	Transformation must be reinforced through the systems that guide how government operates — including corporate planning, workforce strategies, budget frameworks, and performance reporting. Aligning these levers ensures transformation becomes business as usual rather than an additional or time-limited initiative.
Resourcing and capability	Sustained transformation requires investment in people, skills, and structures. Agencies need to dedicate resources to transformation activities, including cultural capability development, leadership programs, partnerships, and strengthening Indigenous data and evidence systems.
Measurement and accountability	Transformation must be transparent and measurable. The forthcoming Strategy will establish a common measurement and reporting framework, enabling agencies to track outcomes rather than just outputs. Clear accountability mechanisms will ensure progress is visible and sustained over time.
Collaboration and learning	Transformation thrives when agencies work together. Building whole-of-government learning networks and communities of practice will accelerate capability development, foster collaboration, and support continuous improvement. Sharing success stories and lessons learned will help build confidence and momentum across the APS.

Transformation in action

The Productivity Commission (PC) is highlighting pockets of good practice within government to share knowledge on what transformative action looks like and what it takes to achieve it. With the support of agencies and their partners implementing change, the PC has developed case studies and practical guidance for public servants to draw on to learn, adapt and implement.

This will be an ongoing project, with new cases and guidance added over time. Please refer to the first two Commonwealth case studies below, focused on strengthening community control and building capability:

- From community voice to community control: the evolution of Connected Beginnings
- CSIRO Indigenous Science and Engagement Program: building capability to engage and partner well

Next steps for APS agencies

To enable successful delivery of this APS-wide transformation, agencies are encouraged to embed the Priority Reforms into everyday business. The actions outlined in this Roadmap at Appendix 1 are structured around the 5 change levers. Agencies can act now to embed transformation internally and to support implementation across the APS.

Embedding transformation within agencies

- Integrate Roadmap actions into corporate plans, workforce strategies, and operational policies.

- Establish a Transformation Governance Group, chaired by a Deputy Secretary or equivalent, to oversee delivery and monitor progress.

- Nominate a senior transformation lead responsible for coordinating implementation and reporting outcomes.

Supporting Whole-of-Government implementation

- Engage actively in cross-agency working groups and co-development forums to share insights and shape collective progress.

- Host regional consultations and roundtables to support place-based engagement and ensure local voices inform policy design and priorities.

- Nominate staff to participate in capability-building initiatives, peer learning networks, and communities of practice to strengthen cultural competency and transformation readiness.

- Promote leadership engagement by ensuring senior executives champion transformation efforts and model culturally safe and inclusive practices.

Call to action

Transformation is everyone's responsibility. By acting now, each APS agency can help build a future where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples lead, shape, and benefit from government systems that are culturally safe, accountable, and equitable.

Together, these actions mark the beginning of a shared journey to build APS readiness for transformation, one that strengthens partnerships, builds trust, and delivers lasting change with and for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Focus areas for APS agencies

Appendix 1

While long-term transformation takes time, there are several areas agencies can focus on now within existing structures and resources to demonstrate leadership and build momentum. The actions directly respond to the systemic barriers identified in this Roadmap.

Each action is designed to address a specific challenge, whether strengthening accountability, improving coordination, or building capability and to move agencies toward the maturity stages outlined in Figure 3. Together, these actions represent a coordinated approach to embedding the Priority Reforms across the APS. All outcomes resulting from the immediate actions outlined in this table are aligned with the transformational elements under Priority Reform 3. These actions have also been designed to support and reinforce objectives under Priority Reforms 1, 2 and 4 – acknowledging the interconnectedness of the Priority Reforms and ensuring cohesiveness in preparing for transformation.

Change lever: Leadership and accountability

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
Establish agency-level transformation governance groups chaired by SES, with a nominated senior transformation lead.	Chief Operating Officers of relevant Commonwealth entities.	Foundational	2026	All Commonwealth entities, tailored to their internal governance structures. Chief Operating Officer leadership and tailored support from APSC and NIAA (if required).	Secretaries.	Drive strategic, entity-specific transformation across PR1, PR2, PR3 & PR4, that progresses activation in a cohesive way by nominating a SES-lead to champion transformation that is reflective of entities' operating environments and capability.
Develop supplementary guidance to accompany the SES performance framework. Guidance will reflect the government's commitment to cultural safety and responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.	Secretaries of relevant Commonwealth entities.	Proactive	In place for 2026-27	Australian Public Service Commission (APSC).	Minister for the Public Service.	Guidance will provide agencies with direction on developing and incorporating appropriate KPIs into senior executive performance agreements. (PR1, PR2, PR3 & PR4).

Change lever: Capability and culture

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
Maximise existing opportunities to build cultural competency.	All senior executives and Executive Level 2 employees complete Cultural Capability training as part of performance expectations. All agencies access Footprints via APS Learn, or an equivalent agency-led program.	Foundational	2025-26	All Commonwealth entities with support from NIAA and APSC.	Chief Operating Officers and Workforce Capability areas.	The agency contributes to truth-telling by creating safe, respectful spaces for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to share their histories, experiences, and perspectives. This deepens understanding across the workforce, supports healing and reconciliation, and

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
						informs culturally responsive policies and practices. (PR3)
Create or strengthen internal Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee networks.	Workforce Capability teams and Diversity Networks within Commonwealth entities.	Foundational	2026	All Commonwealth entities.	Chief Operating Officers.	Create culturally safe spaces for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff to share experiences, network, support career progression, and strengthen organisational accountability. (PR3)
Review and reform workforce policies to identify and remove barriers to the recruitment, retention, and progression of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.	Secretaries, Chief Operating Officers and Workforce and Capability areas.	Foundational to Proactive	Ongoing	APSC and all Commonwealth entities.	Secretaries and Workforce Capability areas.	This results in increased recruitment, retention, and advancement of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees, fostering a more diverse, inclusive, and culturally safe workplace that reflects the communities we serve. (PR1, PR2, PR3 & PR4).
Integrate anti-racism learning and practices into agency capability reviews, recruitment processes, training programs, and HR systems.	Led by Workforce Capability areas and co-developed with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander partners.	Proactive	2026-2027	APSC (APS Academy) & individual Commonwealth entities recruitment processes.	Chief Operating Officers.	The agency strengthens and improves the effectiveness of affirmative measures and embeds cultural competency across all roles to eliminate racism and foster a culturally safe and inclusive workplace. This work complements and reinforces the integration of First Nations partnerships within the APS Capability Review Framework. (PR1, PR3)
Design an evaluation mechanism, drawn from existing best practice tools and First Nations-led frameworks, to support the measurement of cultural safety for First Nations employees in the workplace. Deliver guidance for agencies on how and	Chief Operating Officers, co-developed with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Partners.	Proactive	2025-2026	All Commonwealth entities with support from NIAA and APSC (as required).	Secretaries	The agency fosters a culturally safe and inclusive environment by embedding anti-racism learning across all levels and integrating targeted cultural safety assessment questions into its practices. (PR3)

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
when to use the evaluation mechanism.						

Change lever: Partnerships

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
Conduct systematic reviews of programs to identify which services can be transferred to community-controlled organisations. This action expands the First Nations Health Funding Transition Program to other portfolios across the Commonwealth.	Operational leads	Leading	Ongoing and progressive	While not all Commonwealth entities will have a direct role, this is most relevant to entities delivering programs, services, or grants. Especially those with Sector Strengthening Plans under the CtG framework.	Chief Operating Officers and/or Program Leads.	The agency strengthens the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector and formal partnerships to support locally led, strengths-based decision-making (PR1, PR2, PR4).

Change lever: Systems and governance

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
Embed Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices in agency governance structures to ensure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives directly influence decision-	Chief Operating Officers	Proactive	2026-2027, then ongoing	All Commonwealth entities internal governance mechanisms.	Secretaries	Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander voices are meaningfully embedded in the agency's governance structures, ensuring that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives shape strategic priorities, enhance cultural

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
making, accountability, and strategic direction.						accountability, and strengthen decision-making processes. (PR1, PR2, PR3)
Leverage existing internal audit programs	Heads of Internal Audit	Proactive	Ongoing	All Commonwealth entities internal governance mechanisms, with support from PM&C, AGD and APSC	Secretaries	Testing the effectiveness of transformation measures in agency-level functions supports robust reporting and data analysis of progress against the National Agreement. (PR3)
Leverage the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013*) for transformation reporting.	Secretaries and Commonwealth entities internal corporate reporting areas.	Proactive to Leading	2026	All Commonwealth entities' internal governance mechanisms.	Secretaries, all SES across Commonwealth entities, and relevant governance bodies.	Integrate commitments into *PGPA Act 2013* reporting to embed cultural safety, equity, and partnerships in APS planning, governance, and performance reporting. (PR1, PR3). [Relevant PGPA Act Sections: 10, 15–17, 21–22, 35, 38–39, 46.]

Change lever: Data and evidence

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
Agencies must partner with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities to co-design data indicators and evaluation frameworks, and transparently publish evaluation findings, including	Operational leads, data and evaluation teams, IT and systems leads, and internal governance, integrity, and reporting teams through co-development with Aboriginal	Foundational to Proactive	2026-2027, then ongoing	All Commonwealth entities, with support from the NIAA as required.	Chief Operating Officers.	Ensures that the agency supports evidence-based, community-led decision-making by enabling Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander-led evaluations, strengthening Indigenous data governance, and embedding

Action entities can take now	Responsible for activation	Maturity stage	Delivery timeframe	Lead Commonwealth entity for driving action	Accountable	Outcomes at APS agency level
lessons learned and areas for improvement.	and/or Torres Strait Islander partners.					Indigenous data indicators in corporate reporting. (PR4)
Integrate academic and non-academic Indigenous led research and evidence into policy and legislative development.	Operational leads across Commonwealth entities.	Proactive to Leading	Ongoing	All commonwealth entities.	Secretaries.	This ensures First Nations knowledge systems are respected and embedded in decision-making processes, leading to more inclusive and responsive policy outcomes. (PR1, PR2, PR3 & PR4)