



Inquiry into annual and financial reports 2024–2025

Answer to question taken on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

In relation to: Closing the Gap and ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund

Hearing: 13 November 2025

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Answer Due: 25 November 2025

THE CHAIR: May I ask how funding, through the fund, what framework is in place to ensure it aligns with the socioeconomic outcome areas and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap?

Ms Sabellico: So at this stage, given that it is— so in its early days, it is very much focused on the self determination of agencies to consider what it is that they need. And as we go forward, then there will be—

THE CHAIR: Sorry, agencies being the community service organisations?

Ms Sabellico: The ACCOs. Yes, the ACCOs.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Sabellico: And so it is based on their self determination of need. And so the panel do not make necessarily judgement around that. If it is a need, it is a need. And then the work that ASD then does with them is about well how does that then get built into their service delivery in order to achieve for some of those other areas of reform that we need.

Ms Orr: Sorry, Mr Emerson, can I just check, you asked against the socioeconomic? So this particular fund sits very much under priority reform 2, which is building the community-controlled sector. So it is very clearly within the Closing the Gap commitments. And I think in going to what Ms Sabellico said, it is not necessarily— it is taking an agile approach in how it can support the ACCO sector for the reasons that Ms Sabellico outlined in allowing for that space for self-determination and for the direction to come from the sector itself.

THE CHAIR: Okay. No, to be clear, I think it is great that it exists. And obviously very reliant. I am curious whether there is any framework or anything to that effect to ensure that it aligns with the government's specific commitments. The answer might be known and like developed at a later date.

Ms Sabellico: As I said, there is a continuous improvement approach. But I will take it on notice and also speak to ASD around that.

THE CHAIR: Okay.

Ms Orr: Mr Emerson, as well I think if you look at the range of ACCOs that we do have in Canberra, and the work that they are doing, it is very easy to draw the lines to the Closing the Gap work and focus areas.

THE CHAIR: Yes.

Ms Orr: So I think it is— you raise a very valid point in the sense that we want to be aligning with that and progressing that work. I think, in going to your point as to whether there is a particular guideline or policy that goes to that, I think it is probably fair to say, everyone is focused on those, so it has happened without necessarily needing a strict rule in place for it.

Having said that, I would note, we do have guidelines around this work.

Ms Sabellico: They are our guidelines. It will just be about whether they cover off that issue.

THE CHAIR: And especially like, to be candid, there can be a public perception, which I do not agree with whatsoever, of we are just throwing money out the door at these Closing the Gap initiatives. And without some clear evaluation and targeting, you know, without a clear framework to ensure the funding is used well, they will go back to these ACCOs rather than just—

Ms Sabellico: No, I think it is a useful point to take back and have a look at. So, thank you.

THE CHAIR: Yes. I am worried about the public perception.

Ms Orr: Yes. No, and there is guidelines that the fund is operated against. And maybe Ms Sabellico could run through just a little bit about how some of the applications are assessed. Because it is actually quite a considered and rigorous process.

THE CHAIR: I do not want to use up other members question time. So I am happy for that question to be taken on notice.

Ms Orr: Yes.

Ms Suzanne Orr MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

The Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation (ACCO) Establishment and Expansion Fund (AEEF) responds to what we have heard from the community-controlled sector and provides a stream of funding for eligible ACT ACCOs to support capacity and capability building projects/activities in line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Priority Reform 2: Building the community-controlled sector.

As per the AEEF Grant Guidelines, all eligible applications are assessed by the Grant Assessment Team against the assessment criteria, including alignment with the aim and intent of the AEEF Grant Program: the extent to which the application supports the growth and sustainability of the ACT ACCO by building and/or strengthening the organisation capacity and capability.

In designing the AEEF, external partners and stakeholders identified a need for a simple, flexible and broad application process to accommodate ACCOs at different stages of development. Partners sought clear and concise guidelines to ensure the grants purpose and how to apply would be easily

understood. When consulting on the draft guidelines, external partner and stakeholder feedback indicated the draft guidelines provided sufficient information without being overly complicated and were simple to engage with and were likely to support successful outcomes.

The AEEF does not fund ongoing frontline service delivery, so the grant guidelines do not seek to specify alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap socio-economic outcomes and targets. However, by supporting ACCOs to help them establish and grow, the AEEF strengthens the foundations for better health, wellbeing, and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over mainstream services. The AEEF directly supports the wellbeing goals which matter most to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and contributes to the majority of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap socio-economic outcomes and targets, including:

- Everyone enjoys long and healthy lives
- Children are born healthy and strong
- Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years
- Children thrive in their early years
- Students achieve their full learning potential
- Students reach their full potential through further education pathways
- Youth are engaged in employment or education
- Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities
- People can secure appropriate, affordable housing that is aligned with their priorities and need
- Adults are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
- Young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system
- Children are not overrepresented in the child protection system
- Families and households are safe
- People enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing
- Cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing
- People have access to information and services enabling participation in informed decision-making regarding their own lives.

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The AEEF is an enabler of change, providing a practical, locally-responsive approach to achieve National Agreement on Closing the Gap socio-economic outcomes and targets. Through the AEEF, the ACT Government continues to empower Aboriginal-led organisations to grow their capability, expand their reach, and lead positive change.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

A large, stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, consisting of several sweeping, interconnected strokes.

Signature:

Date: 21/11/25

By the Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Ms Suzanne Orr MLA