The New South Wales Aboriginal Land Council (**NSWALC**) is the peak body representing Aboriginal peoples across the State of New South Wales and the largest Aboriginal member-based organisation in Australia.

We are working closely with our Aboriginal community controlled counterparts to lead and respond to crises, including COVID-19.

While the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the resilience of our communities, it has highlighted and exacerbated ongoing issues. Solutions must be developed and delivered in genuine partnership with Indigenous peoples and community-controlled organisations.

Key challenges affecting Australia’s Indigenous peoples, heightened by COVID-19, include health and mental health concerns, the lack of access to safe, affordable and culturally appropriate housing, and food insecurity.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up 3 per cent of Australia’s population but 20 per cent of the nation’s homeless. This is predicted to increase substantially due to COVID-19.

Prior to COVID-19, there was a social housing supply gap for Aboriginal families in New South Wales of 11,000 dwellings, which was predicted to rise to over 30,000 dwellings by 2031. Due to COVID-19 these numbers are expected to be much more.

COVID-19 has increased the social and economic isolation experienced in Indigenous communities, disrupted the education of our young people, and increased unemployment.

Without increased efforts, goals set prior to the pandemic, including to increase the educational outcomes of our young people, will not be met.

The restrictions on movement, combined with existing economic and social inequalities, have limited the ability of Indigenous people to exercise cultural practices. Indigenous Elders and persons with a disability are particularly impacted by isolation and effects of reduced outreach services to communities.

The NSW Aboriginal Land Council is taking a proactive approach to alleviating the negative effects of COVID-19. We have strongly advocated to Government to ensure Indigenous communities are not forgotten during the recover recovery phase and aftermath. We are developing tailored programs to support Indigenous communities, businesses, entrepreneurs and the work of Indigenous community controlled health organisations.

We are running food relief programs, distributing approximately 6000 food and hygiene boxes, prioritising Elders in remote communities. We also run programs to assist indigenous businesses via the Yarpa Business Hub.

We have secured donations from corporates, including 99,000 single use face masks.

Positively, our communities have experienced a rate of COVID-19 infection **six times lower** than the broader Australian population. This highlights the success and importance of Indigenous community controlled organisations and peoples leading and responding to crises.

To help overcome this crisis, and protect Indigenous rights in the recovery stage and aftermath, Governments need to work in genuine partnership with, and resource, Indigenous community controlled organisations to be at the forefront of leading responses. This includes dedicated economic stimulus measures to support our communities.