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Our Community Health News



WINNUNGA NIMMITYJAH
ABORIGINAL HEALTH & COMMUNITY SERVICES

Nothing About Us Without Us

September 2026

Winnunga acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to land, water and community. We also pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that newsletters may contain images or names of deceased persons in photographs, films, recordings or printed materials.

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CEO UPDATE by Julie Tongs



I have become increasingly concerned about the worrying nature of the relationship between ACT Policing and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community of Canberra.

My concern has been exacerbated by the recently released and excoriating 131 page report delivered by the Ombudsman into the treatment by ACT policing of an innocent Aboriginal boy travelling on a Canberra bus to visit his aunt.

I have included in this edition of Winnunga News two pages of excerpts from the report which illustrate the depth and extent of the appalling treatment, which included holding a loaded gun, meted out by ACT policing on this innocent and fragile Aboriginal boy.

My concern about the behaviour and attitude of ACT police to members of the Aboriginal community has been exacerbated by the recent reporting by the ABC of the alleged brutal treatment meted out by three ACT police officers in a police cell on a compliant and defenceless Aboriginal detainee to whom the ABC attributed the pseudonym "SHANE".

I am not aware of what, if any, disciplinary action has been initiated in response to this issue or indeed if the officers involved have been charged with an offence. I do, however, believe that it is incumbent on either the head of ACT policing or indeed the ACT Minister for Police to inform the community of the formal response of the ACT Government and by relevant authorities, to the allegations aired by the ABC.

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In similar vein I have been contacted by an Aboriginal boy who has advised me

that he was in the space of three weeks strip searched by ACT Police Officers, including in public, on no less than twelve occasions.

He has informed me that on one of these occasions he was stripped to his underpants while forced to stand, in the cold, on the side of a busy road. He has further advised me that not once, during this series of forced strip searches in public spaces, was any illegal substance or stolen product revealed.

I should emphasise that these three events have been brought to my attention in just the last month or so and hence raise the obvious question of how many other similar incidents of unjustified targeted police action involving members of the Aboriginal community have not been disclosed.

It is clear to me, as it should be to anyone concerned about the nature of the relationship between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of Canberra and ACT Policing that nothing less than a thorough and independent external inquiry, perhaps even along the lines of a Royal Commission, is required to address this disturbing situation.

ACT AUDITOR GENERAL REPORT INTO THE MANAGEMENT OF THE AMC

It is surprising how often one is confronted with information that reveals that a situation that one had long believed, with deep regret, was deeply flawed is in fact far worse than one thought it to be.

A recent example of this are the findings contained in the recently released report of the ACT Auditor General into the management of the Alexander Machonochie Centre (AMC).

In summary the Auditor has reported that the bizarre rostering regime at the AMC has, among other things, resulted in stunning rates of unplanned leave leading to vital posts within the prison not being staffed and training sessions being abandoned.

The Auditor advises that the posts that have been de-manned, typically include

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The Auditor concludes that the de-manning of posts such as those relating to education programs and activities seriously impacts the rehabilitation of detainees. Not that rehabilitation has ever been, as far as one can determine, a priority of the current government.

The Auditor has also noted that in 2022 more than 35,000 hours of overtime were worked at the AMC in the previous year.

While the current levels of overtime were not reported the Auditor also noted that there were on average 49 prison officer unauthorised absences per month over the 18 months from January 2024 to June 2025 and that there were also, in addition an average of 28 unauthorised part shift absences per month between January 2024 and June 2025.

Unsurprisingly the Auditor also reports that a resultant impact of unplanned and unauthorised leave is a shortfall of custodial officers which inevitably results in detainees not being afforded access to programs and activities.

This leads, he notes, to limited detainee rehabilitation such as through reduced program or activity schedules and potentially compromises the safety and security of the prison.

In addition, the report reveals that between January and July 2025 there were a total of 360 overtime shifts at the AMC, i.e. an average 60 per month.

The major, albeit unwritten but unavoidable finding to be elicited from this report is that the current ACT Government is simply not committed to the philosophy of rehabilitation that underpinned the decision to establish the Alexander Machonochie Centre.

Poor Alexander, a world-famous prison reformer, is almost certainly spinning in his grave to have a prison that clearly produces the worst outcomes for detainees of any prison in Australia, operating under his name.

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Meet Uncle Tom

Winnunga has been running a men's support group for over sixteen years.

Each week, an average of ten men from our community turn up to connect and support each other, with numbers reaching as high as twenty on some occasions.



Image: Wayne S, Uncle Tom & Wayne G at Winnunga

The program, led by Wayne S and Wayne G is centred around culture and connection - and that's exactly what has kept Uncle Tom coming back to the men's group every week.

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Uncle Tom has openly shared his challenges with the group and has said when the group isn't running, the boredom that ensues can often lead toward destructive behaviours.

His self-awareness and understanding of his own journey and personal triggers help others in the group, and the men often meet outside of sessions to catch up through friendship and to support one another.

Through the men's group, Uncle Tom has learned to make cultural tools using traditional methods.

He's also spent time out on Country and has developed a real love for the outdoors.

Uncle Tom has completed his food handling certificate through Winnunga and can often be relied on to help with Winnunga BBQs and community



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MEN'S GROUP CULTURAL TOOLS AND ARTEFACTS

The Men's Group have been spending time out on Country and have recently finished cutting Clapsticks and Boondi's.

Our clients now have the tools, space and knowledge to be able to work on and perfect their own artefacts.

Practicing Culture out on Country has enabled the men to heal and grow, finding mindfulness in the activity of woodwork.



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WINNUNGA MIDWIFERY

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Image: Winnunga Midwifery Cultural Support Worker Kristie with one of our perfect little Booris

Winnunga Midwives Gemma and Lianne, along with Cultural Support Worker Kristie, have been working hard to support First Nations mums and bubs in our community through the Aboriginal Midwifery Access Program (AMAP), a Winnunga designed program that's been operating for 25 years.

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AI/AB offers expectant mums; woman-centred care maternity care, cultural support and health education alongside wrap-around primary health care and

integration with other Winnunga programs including access to the Child and Family Health Team, Social Health Team, No More Boondah, Connected Beginnings.

The midwives share their greatest highlight is seeing women returning to the program for a second or in some cases third pregnancies and they are currently providing support to approximately 30-40 families.

In the last three years, the team have seen 136 babies delivered safely, "our women are reaching full term, with improved birth weights," the midwives report.

Since joining the program, the majority of mothers have reported improved levels of wellbeing and once connections are made with other mums in the group, many continue to meet outside of the program.

When asked how they came into midwifery, Kristie shared that personal experiences of past trauma inspired her to help others avoid similar circumstances where possible.

Lianne was a secondary school teacher when she decided to become a midwife to help support women through one of the most important times in their life. Gemma, on the other hand, began her career as a nurse and followed a natural progression into midwifery.

Together, the team provide a culturally safe, relationship-based service built on trust, offering mums in our community genuine continuity of care.

STAFF PROFILE

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Image: Nathan King at Winnunga

- **NAME** Nathan King
- **POSITION** what does this job require – Social Health Worker (mainly working in Alcohol and Other Drugs space alongside Sid). My role requires me to support clients with their mental health or other immediate health needs. This may also require me to provide more intensive outreach support to clients when needed to perform mental health check-ins or transport to urgently needed engagements with services/refer to services. I also support Sid with our Road to Recovery clients who are learning about drugs and alcohol through our facilitated modules.

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WHO IS YOUR MOB AND WHERE IS YOUR COUNTRY Gunditjmarra (South-West coastal area of Victoria), and Bundjalung (Northern coast

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NSW)

- **FAVOURITE SINGER/BAND** My grandmother's baby brother, my Uncle Archie Roach
- **FAVOURITE SONG** Walking Into Doors by Uncle Archie Roach (hits home for me as I witnessed the song topic a lot growing up)
- **FAVOURIE FOOD** Spicy ramen
- **WHAT DO I LIKE ABOUT WORKING AT WINNUNGA** working in a team that cares and working for community and being amongst it rather than working from a government desk job. I also get to finally use my psych degree and exhibit my understanding of mental health and struggle/triumph garnered from my own lived experience.
- **PETS** Missing my 14 year old chocolate Shar Pei named 'Yogi' down in Melbourne

IT's NOT HIM

The **ACT and Commonwealth Ombudsman** report titled "It's Not Him ", with the sub-title "Rebuilding Trust after ACT Policing's mistaken arrest of a teenager," is deeply disturbing.

The 131-page report is not just disturbing it is, in its expose of ACT policing's modus operandi in its interaction with the Aboriginal community, quite disturbing.

That the Ombudsman's report into this egregious assault of an Aboriginal boy is 131 pages long speaks for itself.

The following excerpts from the report, which include a range of findings delivered by the Ombudsman in the report provide a sense of the culture which the ACT Government, through ACT Policing, has tolerated in its interaction with the Aboriginal community.

At the heart of this scandal is "Jay" a nom de plume employed by the Ombudsman out of respect for the privacy of the victim at the heart of this outrage.

In the words of the Ombudsman Jay was an innocent boy who was simply sitting on a Canberra bus on his way to visit an aunt when he was removed, at

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[gun point, by three ACT Police officers who had mistaken him for someone else](#)[Translate ▼](#)

He was dragged off the bus and thrown to the ground to be searched, again at gun point, while pleading that he had done nothing wrong.

The following excerpts from the report convey a sense of the treatment meted out by ACT policing to this innocent Aboriginal child.

They also reflect the Ombudsman's interpretation and analysis of the prevailing culture within ACT Policing and by extension the ACT Government when it comes to the treatment of and regard for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

"Once ACT policing had recognised their mistake that Jay was not the person they were looking for, I consider that officers failed in their responsibilities to Jay as a young Aboriginal person who had just been through as traumatic experience at their hands."

'I consider the search of Jay, after he had been released from arrest, inappropriate as well as contrary to law.'

"At the scene no one took Jays contact details and there was an unacceptable lack of effective follow up systems and processes for contacting his family."
(Page 11.)

"In responding to information that the alleged offender was on a bus officers acted with urgency and did not pause to review uploaded photos, refresh their understanding of what the suspect was described as wearing, nor checked CAD for any new information they may have missed." (Page 40.)

"As the incident unfolded there were missed opportunities to get an earlier identification of the offender and to provide a more accurate description to Transport Canberra. (Page 45)

'Jay was innocent, mistakenly arrested and subjected to the use of potentially lethal force. It was clearly a shocking and traumatic experience.' (Page 46).

"At the time of the search there was no information before any of the police present to provide reasonable grounds for suspicion that Jay may have been in possession of a knife. As such the threshold for a lawful search under s 193 of the Crimes Act was not met. (Page 64) .

"Section 193 (2) (b) of the Crimes Act provides that a police officer may only

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reasons for the search. The requirements for a lawful search were not met.

(Page 64.)

“The search of Jay was not appropriate and also contrary to law, by not meeting the requirements of the Crimes Act 1900, (Page 65)

“Jay and his family have expressed concern he was racially profiled. In particular they believe race caused him to be targeted, the levels of force used against him were heightened and that his race contributed to his poor treatment after the event.

The Racial Discrimination Act 1975 makes it unlawful to discriminate against a person based on their race, colour or ethnic origin.

“We are concerned that the AFP originally adopted a narrow definition requiring race to be the sole factor. Finding 12: “The AFP lacked a clearly understood definition of racial profiling and initially adopted a definition that may have been inconsistent with their obligations under the Racial Discrimination Act 1975.”

(Page 71)

“Finding 15: The bus incident has had an ongoing negative impact on Jays wellbeing and his mental health. “(Page 76)

“Two of the three officers who were “hands on” in Jays arrest offered personal apologies as soon as they realised their mistake.” (Page 78)

While two officers apologise spontaneously, we consider it more than regrettable that neither of the two senior officers on scene did. (Page 79).

“Even though 3 officers present at the incident knew or suspected Jay was only 17 years old none of the officers took his name, contact details or the name and contact details of a responsible person nor did they discuss with Jay alternatives to him getting back on the bus.

These failures to engage with Jay led to more misunderstandings with Jays family which aggravated the already broken trust and further traumatised him/.

“Finding 16 “Officers failed in their responsibilities to Jay as a young Aboriginal person who had just been through a traumatic experience at their hands.”

(Page 82)

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assumptions that Jay was in the child protection system and repeatedly attempting to justify police actions in a media release, in a meeting with the family and in a public apology. Jays' family did not learn about the incident for a number of days . (Page 86).

Finding 19 The initial failure to obtain contact details at the scene and lack of effective follow up systems and processes for contacting Jay's family were unacceptable."

Page 94; "It is our view that even if not intended to do so, the public statements (by ACT Police) did in fact downplay the incident. Making statements of support for officers' actions ahead of any investigations into officers' actions aggravated the hurt felt by the family and substantiated their distrust in any subsequent investigation process.

It also reinforced the deeply held Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' views that the police and Government would not listen, would not accept responsibility, nor be held accountable and that ultimately nothing would change to ensure something similar would never happen again.

Finding 21: To the extent that public statements by the Chief Police Officer emphasised support for police actions and sought to justify decisions made these statements undermined public confidence in any subsequent police investigative processes.

Our thoughts on Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2026

The [Penington Institute](#) recently released the latest Australia's Annual Overdose Report 2026, and the numbers reported for our First Nations communities are of great concern.

The report shows that unintentional drug-induced deaths among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have risen sharply since 2009, reaching 29.3 per 100,000 in 2024, more than four times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

Amphetamine-type stimulants and opioids were the drugs most commonly involved, and deaths were concentrated among younger people, with a third

[Subscribe](#)[Past Issues](#)[occurring between the ages of 20 and 39.](#)[Translate ▼](#)

For our community these are not just numbers, they are our brothers and sisters, our aunties and uncles, people we love and care about.

Winnunga's view is that these figures point to more than a public health statistic; they reflect the compounding effects of intergenerational trauma, disadvantage, and inequitable access to culturally safe health care.

What concerns us most is the underlying and contributing factors driving these outcomes are often not adequately addressed in national or state funding and support structures.

Too often, we see the system left responding at the pointy end, acting reactively to crisis rather than investing proactively in the prevention, early supports, and community-led initiatives that could change this trajectory.

The ACT Government however have made a substantial commitment toward improving outcomes for our community by investing in the new Watson Precinct and we look forward to delivering culturally safe rehabilitative services in the near future.

IN THE NEWS!

Next step takes Boomanulla Oval closer to Aboriginal community control

Article by [Jasper Lindell](#) - Canberra Times - July 15 2026 - 5:30am
Boomanulla Oval is a step closer to returning to Aboriginal control after an interim management committee met for the first time to discuss the future of the culturally and historically significant site in Canberra's inner south.

The committee, which met on Tuesday, is made up of community and government members and will oversee the transition of the oval to Aboriginal community control, the government said.

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Kim Davison, the co-chair of the joint committee tasked with returning Boomanulla Oval to Aboriginal community control. Picture by Keegan Carroll

Committee co-chair Kim Davison said the transition was about ensuring the community could make decisions for the oval and create lasting opportunities.

"Our community has long recognised the importance of Boomanulla Oval as a gathering place and cultural asset. This committee provides a pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to shape its future and strengthen its role for generations to come," Ms Davison said.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Minister Suzanne Orr said the joint committee of community and government members showed the ACT's commitment to supporting self-determination for Indigenous people.

"Boomanulla Oval is a place of immense cultural significance and community pride. Establishing this interim committee is an important step toward ensuring the oval's future is guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community aspirations," Ms Orr said.

The oval, named after Indigenous advocate Mervin John "Boominulla" Williams and established in Narrabundah in 1984, is a significant football ground for the national Aboriginal community and once hosted training sessions for visiting NRL teams.

The Aboriginal Corporation for Sport and Recreation Activities (ACSRA) owned the oval's 50-year concessional lease but shut the site in late 2014 due to financial difficulties. ACSRA was wound up in mid-2015 and the lease was surrendered back to the ACT.

The ACT began a tender process to find a new Aboriginal community-controlled organisation to manage the oval and Winnunga Nimmityjah, an Aboriginal primary healthcare service, developed a proposal the government decided would not work.

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"This is regrettable and the ACT government acknowledges that the tender process for Boomanulla has had its challenges and is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Canberrans to improve future processes," the City and Environment Directorate has said previously.

The government has been responsible for the site since 2015, refurbishing and upgrading the sporting facilities in 2018. ACT Labor has long promised the oval would be returned to Aboriginal community control.

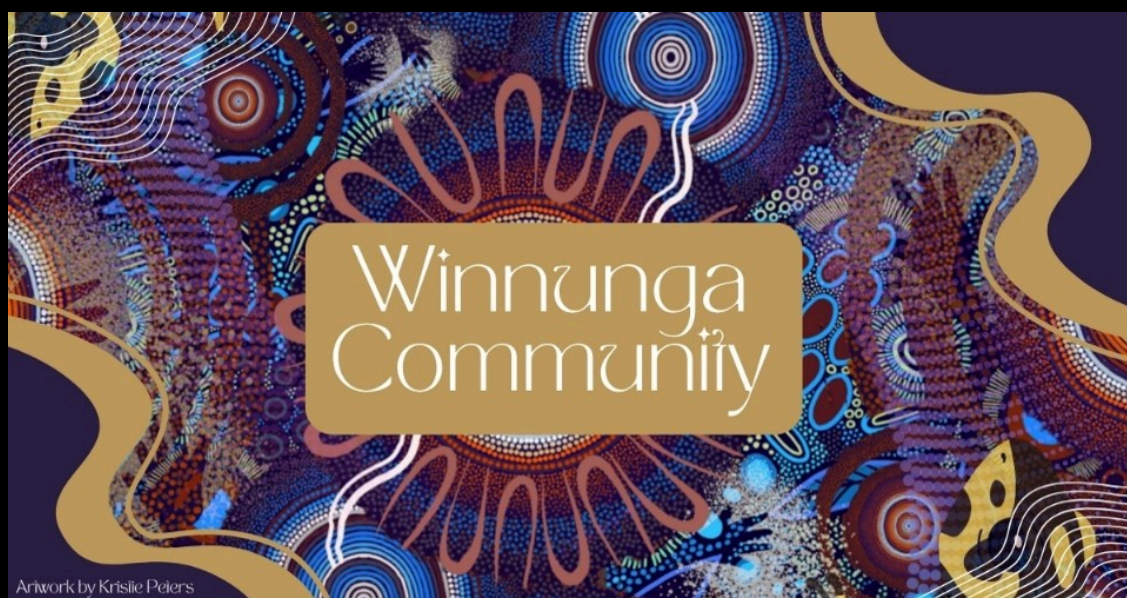
The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body in 2025 reiterated its recommendation the government finalise and implement transition plans for community control of Boomanulla Oval, the Ngunnawal Bush Healing Farm and the Yarramundi Reach cultural centre.

The body said the government ought to ensure "each transfer includes long-term operational funding and legal agreements for long-term stewardship".

The body in August 2025 agreed in principle to the government's proposed community advisory committee but said the site was more than just a sporting facility.

"It is a place of cultural and community significance for our people, and its management must reflect that," the body said in a statement.

The members of the committee are: Kim Davison - Community Co-Chair, Bruce Fitzgerald, Deputy Director General, City and Environment Directorate - ACT Government Co-Chair, Aunty Caroline Hughes AM - Ngunnawal representative, Christine Dragisic - Committee representative, Stella De Cos - Committee representative, Buddy Martin - Committee representative, Maurice Walker - ATSIEB representative.



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Meeting to Upgrade the Narrabundah Basketball Court - 7 August 2026



Morning Tea With Community Services #1 For NAIDOC Week - 9 July 2026

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Win Tv Business of the Month Award Presentation At Winnunga - 2 July 2026

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THANK YOU's

Robyn D'Arcy has been knitting tigers for Winnunga for approximately 11 years which is amazing.



Julie Collins for your donation of hand knitted baby clothes for our little Booris very much appreciated.

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**Brindabella Trefoil guild for the hand knitted beanies, scarves and babies
beanies for the community this is very much appreciated.
Jake loves his new Beanie.**



Deja Williams loves her Gloves and Beanie.



A screenshot of a web-based email client interface. At the top, a blue header bar says "New Message" on the left and has icons for a minus sign, a copy icon, and a close (X) icon on the right. Below the header, the "To" field is labeled "To" and contains the text "Winnunga". The "Subject" field is labeled "Subject" and contains the text "Thankyou". The main body of the email contains the following text: "Hi Team Winnunga and Aunty Beth, Tilly and Daisy Lardner came in today to have a health check and flu vaccination. Thanks for the deadly choices shirt and the flash handmade beanies! Made visiting the doctor a bit less scary! Thanks Winnunga! Cass (Mum of Tilly and Daisy)". At the bottom of the interface is a light gray bar containing icons for a warning triangle, a paperclip (attachments), a smiley face (emojis), a trash can, and a dropdown arrow. To the right of these icons is a blue button with the word "SEND" in white capital letters.

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Afternoon Tea with Brindabella Trefoil Guild, Girl Guides NSW, ACT & NT, (Thankyou for the wonderful donation of hand knitted Beanies and Gloves for the community) Taimus Werner-Gibbings MLA, ACT Legislative Assembly and Jason Haines, Managing Director, St Johns Care – 10 September 2026.



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