



Australian Government

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Australian Institute of Family Studies

# Closing the gap clearinghouse

## The role of community patrols in improving safety in Indigenous communities

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### Summary

Community patrols have the potential to increase Indigenous community safety. They can assist in reducing crime rates and alcohol-related harm and empower the local community. The most successful community patrols tend to enjoy community involvement and ownership and strong collaboration with police and a network of community services. This paper summarises the key evidence in support of community patrols. It also summarises some of the evidence on best practice.

### What we know

- Lack of safety in Indigenous communities in urban, regional and remote areas, adversely affects the physical, mental and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australians.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented as both perpetrators and victims of violent crime. This is confirmed by high hospitalisation and death rates due to assault, and by high detention and police apprehension rates for Indigenous people for 'acts intended to cause injury'.
- Community patrols vary in how they operate, reflecting the needs of their particular community. Their functions include safe transportation for those at risk of causing or being the victims of harm; dispute resolution and mediation; interventions to prevent self-harm, family violence, homelessness and substance misuse; and diversion from contact with the criminal justice system. Community patrols cooperate closely with other community-based programs and initiatives as well as the local police unit.
- Indigenous community patrols are one type of safety initiative among a range of initiatives that are directly or indirectly designed to improve community safety. Together these initiatives enable a holistic approach to improving community safety.
- Community patrols need to be independent from the police and justice sector, to allow them to take a flexible approach and keep their communities' trust; however, good relationships with local police are crucial for the functioning of community patrols.



## What works

Empirical evidence on the outcomes of community patrols in Indigenous communities is scarce. Other types of evidence, however, indicate the value and success of patrols, including formal recognition by commissions, inquiries and awards; evidence from overseas, and evidence from case studies. In addition, research into community perceptions of safety shows that both service providers and community members believe that patrols help to make their town or community safer.

- Monitoring data on community patrols in two remote communities in Western Australia suggest that they can substantially reduce the number of admissions to police lock-ups in some communities.
- Other reported outcomes from patrols include reduced juvenile crime rates when the patrols operated; reductions in alcohol-related harm and crime; improved partnerships and cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and empowerment of the community.
- Overseas, community safety schemes such as community wardens are active in a number of countries and there is some evidence to show that they reduce levels of crime and victimisation.
- Patrols have associated benefits for communities, including employing local people and building community capacity to deal with community issues.

## What doesn't work

- Community safety interventions that focus on crime prevention only, without attention to the economic, social and cultural needs of the community. Patrols cannot be considered to be an answer on their own, but need to be part of a holistic approach to crime prevention.
- A lack of long-term resource commitment for the patrols and/or the services they cooperate with, including the local police unit and youth/recreational services.
- Lack of understanding of, and respect for, the community patrol by local police or other service providers.
- External agencies imposing too many rules and regulations on a community patrol, as this can reduce the patrol's flexibility in how it operates and may cause it to lose its credibility with community members. While patrols need operational guidelines, they need to be developed and implemented by local community members.

## What we don't know

- There is a lack of empirical data on the effectiveness of community patrols, both in Australia and overseas. Good-quality data can help community patrols to improve their practices and can assist governments in supporting the most effective programs. One Australian evaluation is currently under way: details are provided in the final section of this paper.
- There is a need for better administrative data for ongoing program monitoring. Publicly available data on the reasons for, and outcomes of, encounters by community patrols could provide useful insights into the role community patrols play in relation to community safety.
- Crime-related data are important for monitoring levels of crime. However, there is a lack of information about violent offending in Indigenous communities at both the national and the local level. For example, the quality of Indigenous identification in police apprehension data is variable across the states and territories.



## Introduction

The importance of living in safe communities has been recognised by governments and organisations around the world. In 1989, the World Health Organization (WHO) called for a collaborative approach between government and non-government agencies as well as business groups in making communities safer. WHO also emphasised the need for the local community to be involved in solutions as this would empower the members of the community (Queensland Health 2011). WHO developed seven indicators for action, with the third indicator stating the need for 'programs that target high-risk groups and environments, and programs that provide safety for vulnerable groups' (WHO Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion 2012).

In Australia, some Indigenous communities are among those most at risk, experiencing high levels of violence and social and psychological alienation. Ensuring the safety of individuals, particularly women and children, in such communities is a challenge.

All levels of government and many local communities across Australia have initiated community safety-related programs. For example, the Australian Government has developed a range of policies and programs to try to improve safety in Indigenous communities. In 2010–11, as part of its commitment to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) building block 'Safe Communities', the Australian Government committed more than \$50 million for initiatives and services including family safety programs, child protection workers, safe places for women, children and men and support for Community Engagement Police Officers (Australian Government 2011:4–5).

One approach that is aimed at improving safety and that has been instigated by some Indigenous communities in Australia is the community patrol. A community patrol can also be referred to as a night patrol, youth or women's patrol, bare-foot patrol or street patrol. When working well, community patrols fulfil the criteria of community involvement and ownership, empowerment and collaboration.

This resource sheet starts by setting the context, with some relevant statistics and a brief description of the types of safety programs and initiatives operating in Indigenous communities. The paper then summarises the available evidence on community patrols and some of the evidence on best practice. Evidence in a number of forms is presented, ranging from the level of Indigenous community support received to formal recognition by commissions, inquiries and awards; evidence on best practice; evidence from case studies, and effectiveness estimates in terms of outcomes including crime levels, both measured and perceived.

For information on recent government initiatives in community patrols see Appendix 1.

## Background

Much has been written about the risk factors and underlying causes of violence and social unrest in Indigenous communities. For both the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous population, risk factors include low socioeconomic status, poor education, unemployment, being young and/or male and substance abuse. However, the much higher incidence of these risk factors combined with other underlying factors related to the historical circumstances of Indigenous people results in higher rates of violent offending in Indigenous communities (Allard 2010:4–5; Memmott et al. 2001:10–13).



## Safety and crime in Indigenous communities

It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented both as perpetrators and victims of violent crime. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data (ABS 2012a) showed that rates of imprisonment for Indigenous adults were 15 times those for non-Indigenous adults. The detention rate for young Indigenous Australians (aged 10 to 17) was 24 times the rate for non-Indigenous youth (AIHW 2011). Of all Indigenous offenders who were in prison on 30 June 2011, one-third (32%) had a principal offence of 'acts intended to cause injury'. This compared to 15% for non-Indigenous prisoners (ABS 2011a:55). Similarly, 2010–11 police apprehension data for four states and territories (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory) show that, in each of these jurisdictions, a larger proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders had a principal offence of 'acts intended to cause injury' than non-Indigenous offenders had. This excluded offenders with a penalty notice as their principal method of proceeding (ABS 2012b: Table 3.10).

Rates of victimisation as a result of violent crime are also higher in the Indigenous population than in the non-Indigenous population. In 2008–09, young Indigenous people aged 12 to 24 were hospitalised as a result of assault at a rate 5 times that of other young people (AIHW 2011d:86). For Indigenous adult males, the age-standardised death rate due to assault was also much higher, at more than 7 times the death rate for non-Indigenous males (AIHW 2011c:16). Based on the recorded crime statistics (victims collection), in 2010 in New South Wales, sexual assault rates for Indigenous people were 4 times those of non-Indigenous people. In Queensland and South Australia the rates were more than 4 times and in the Northern Territory twice those for non-Indigenous people (ABS 2011b:38–40).

Three-quarters (74%) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participated in the 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) reported the presence of at least one neighbourhood or community problem in their area and one in four (25%) reported being a victim of physical or threatened violence in the previous 12 months (25% in non-remote and 22% in remote areas) (AIHW 2011a:1141–2, 1153).

In a study of community safety in the Northern Territory, nearly half (48%) of service providers in remote communities reported fighting and/or violence as a reason for some people to be unsafe in their community or neighbourhood, while nearly one in five (19%) mentioned domestic/family violence as a reason why some people were not safe (Putt & FaHCSIA 2011:112).

Victimisation due to violence is associated with higher levels of distress. Indigenous adults who reported high or very high levels of distress were more likely to have been a victim of physical or threatened violence than those with no or lower levels of distress (35% compared with 18%) (AIHW 2011a:38).

### Remote versus non-remote

Wundersitz (2010) presents data showing that there is no substantial difference in the level of violence in remote and non-remote areas, although a higher percentage of Indigenous people living in remote areas believe that violence is a problem in their community. This absence of difference in official crime data could be due to the fact that violent offences in remote areas are less likely to be reported to police, but data also suggest that levels of violence may be more likely to vary intra-regionally, that is, from one community to the other. Community characteristics such as history as a mission centre, extent of disadvantage, dependence on welfare, low level of or no police presence and lack of access to services are all factors related to higher rates of violent offending (Wundersitz 2010:70–8).

Protective factors at the individual and community level, for example resilience, social cohesion and connection to land and culture, may also provide a key to understanding differences between communities and effective ways to improve safety in specific communities (Wundersitz 2010:97–9).



## Violence and safety programs

Indigenous community patrols are one type of initiative among a range of initiatives that are directly or indirectly designed to improve community safety. These range from preventive programs to programs that deal with the consequences of violence, for example those that work with the victims or perpetrators.

A broad, overarching classification for community safety programs was suggested by Capobianco (2006), consisting of three categories (Table 1). A more detailed classification of nine types of violence programs was presented by Memmott and colleagues (2001) in their report *Violence in Indigenous communities* (Table 2). Note that these categories are not mutually exclusive. One other separate but important category not included in Table 2 is ‘situational crime prevention’, which includes good street lighting, appropriate housing design, availability of relevant amenities, closed circuit television and reduced access to alcohol. It can play a critical role in improving safety, particularly when used in conjunction with other programs (Gray & Wilkes 2010:4–5; Wundersitz 2010:99).

The two tables below show that community safety programs are diverse and address the issue of safety from different angles. Together these initiatives, which include both preventive and reactive measures, enable a holistic approach to improving community safety. A focus on specific crime prevention alone ignores the impact that a range of risk and protective factors have on community safety (Cunneen 2001:10; Memmott 2002:4; Richards et al. 2011:6).

In his paper *Understanding and preventing Indigenous offending*, Allard (2010) also makes the point that Indigenous crime prevention programs need to take into account the risk factors for Indigenous offending and the offender profiles. He suggests that, based on risk factors, the most effective strategy is a holistic approach that includes social and economic initiatives and involves both criminal justice and community-level interventions.

**Table 1: Broad classification of community safety programs**

Social and economic measures	Policing and justice	Capacity building
Recognises the influence of social, economic and cultural processes on crime and victimisation—strengthening of personal, social, health and economic factors	Development of partnerships between communities and police and improvements in the treatment of Indigenous people by the criminal justice system	Strengthening of the capacity of Indigenous people, communities and organisations—helps to increase sustainability of crime prevention
Includes employment and training, mentoring, culture and recreational programs and youth centres	Includes Indigenous justice groups, community patrols and policing and restorative justice practices	Includes developing leadership capability and improving Indigenous governance (Capobianco 2006)



**Table 2: Types of interventions that may improve community safety**

Program type	Includes/description
Support programs	Family support and parenting programs, culturally competent/safe services, e.g. mental health services, men’s and women’s groups, outstations and homelands initiatives, suicide prevention strategies, pre- and post- release support for offenders and their families
Identity strengthening programs	Cultural safety (programs encouraging connection to family, community and culture), outstations and homelands initiatives, sport, art, education, youth interventions/centres, men’s and women’s groups, group therapy
Behavioural reform programs	Alcohol and other drugs reduction and management, youth interventions/centres, group and individual therapy/counselling
Policing programs	Community policing and ‘self-policing’ e.g. community/night patrols
Justice programs	Community justice programs, court diversionary programs, Aboriginal courts and circle sentencing
Shelter/protection programs	Safe houses, women’s and youth refuges, sobering up shelters, return to country programs
Mediation programs	Mediation/dispute resolution
Education programs	Attitudes to violence, women and children, pornography and movie ratings, personal safety, education through the media
Composite programs	Draw on many of the above areas (Memcott et al. 2001)

## Indigenous community patrols in Australia

Aboriginal community night patrols emerged in the late 1980s in the Northern Territory community of Tennant Creek (Blagg 2003; Langton 1992). In Tennant Creek, community patrols were established by the Indigenous community ‘because there was nothing else’ (Blagg 2003:15). Although the problem of over-policing in Indigenous communities has been widely documented, the converse problem—under-policing—can also have negative impacts on Indigenous communities (Blagg & Valuri 2004b; NTER Review Board 2008; Tangentyere Council Executive 2008). Similarly, in Yuendumu in the 1990s, community night patrols were instigated by Indigenous women to ‘help protect the community in the absence of effective intervention from mainstream justice systems’ (Lui & Blanchard 2001:18). In other communities, patrols emerged to address over-policing—‘to divert Indigenous people from unnecessary contact with the criminal justice system’ (Blagg 2003:7).

Community patrols can now be found in urban and regional as well as remote areas, with funded Indigenous community patrols Australia-wide (see Table 3). However, while there are some community patrols in urban areas, they are especially common in small communities in rural and remote locations in the Northern Territory, Western Australia, South Australia and New South Wales. Community patrols may carry out a number of functions (Box 1).

A community patrol may be referred to as a night patrol, youth or women’s patrol, bare-foot patrol or street patrol. It is not possible to give one definition of patrols, as they vary in how they operate, with the character and functions of each patrol reflecting the needs of the community it serves and from which it arises (AIC 2004). They tend to take an anticipatory approach, aiming to increase community safety through prevention and intervention (AIC 2004). Community patrols help members of the community ‘who may be at risk of either causing harm or becoming a victim of harm’ (ANAO 2011:27).



It is important to note the non-coercive nature of the assistance provided. For example, no individual is required to accept assistance from a patrol, nor do patrols have coercive powers. While patrols work in close relationship with police, and through the development of memorandums of understanding in some communities, their success rests in part in that they are an intervention before an individual comes into contact with the criminal justice system, that is, the police.

**Table 3: Government-funded Indigenous community patrols in Australia**

State/ territory	Approximate no. of patrols	Details
NSW	11	New South Wales had 11 Safe Aboriginal Youth Patrol programs as at 2010. These replaced the Aboriginal community patrols program (SCAG Working Group on Indigenous Justice 2010:40).  In 2008, there were 15 Aboriginal community patrols in NSW (Blagg 2008:114).
Victoria <sup>(a)</sup>	2	Koori Night Patrols originated in Mildura and Shepparton in the mid-1980s and 1990s respectively. Through the Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement, funding was provided between 2001 and 2009 for six Koori Night Patrol programs (KNPP) in six locations, including North Metropolitan Melbourne. As at February 2012, two of these continued to operate (in Mildura and Shepparton).
Queensland <sup>(b)</sup>	10+	The Queensland Department of Communities administers a number of programs that include a night patrol function, though some are not Indigenous-specific. Of the 31 services funded under the Alcohol Management Reforms Initiative, three include a night patrol (in Cherbourg, Doomadgee and Mornington Island). Several alcohol-related services, funded under the Public Intoxication Services initiative, also have night-time community patrols, including Murri Watch patrols in Brisbane and Townsville and a patrol on Palm Island. Four community services have been funded under the pilot Drink Safe Precincts to provide a 'Chill Out' Zone and foot patrols. Other services provide patrols for homeless and at-risk young people, including one service aimed at young people engaged in volatile substance misuse.
Western Australia <sup>(c)</sup>	14	As at March 2012, patrols operated in 14 cities/towns, including Perth.
South Australia <sup>(d)</sup>	n.a.	A night patrol model for the Anangu, Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara (APY) lands is under development by the South Australian Police (SAPOL). A volunteer based model has been approved for trial in Amata. This will be evaluated after 6 months, after which expansion of the program will be considered.
Northern Territory <sup>(e)</sup>	80+	The Australian Government Attorney-General's Department provides funding for community night patrols in at least 80 communities in the Northern Territory as part of the Stronger Futures in the NT National Partnership. This includes 73 remote communities, growth towns and the major centres of Alice Springs, Tennant Creek, Katherine and Darwin region.

*Note:* The numbers in this table do not represent a complete count of community patrols, as a significant number of community patrols in operation are unfunded or receive funding from other, non-government sources.

- (a) Information on community patrols in Victoria was provided by email by the Victorian Department of Justice on 14 February 2012.
- (b) Information on community patrols in Queensland was provided by email by the Queensland Department of Communities on 13 February 2012.
- (c) Information on community patrols in Western Australia was provided by email by the West Australian Department of Indigenous Affairs on 6 March 2012.
- (d) Information on community patrols in South Australia was provided by email by South Australia Police on 7 February 2012.
- (e) Information on community patrols in the Northern Territory was provided by email by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department on 21 March 2012.



### **Box 1: Roles and functions of community patrols**

#### **Community patrols may:**

- act to protect vulnerable people from harm
- act to prevent self-harm, family violence, substance misuse and homelessness
- act to prevent disorder in the community
- participate at major community or sporting events to discourage disorderly behaviour
- intervene to prevent people committing crimes and to divert them from contact with the criminal justice system
- intervene to divert intoxicated people from contact with the criminal justice system.

#### **The functions of community patrols may include:**

- transporting people safely to a family member's home or their own homes, a designated safe house, a sobering up shelter, a women's refuge or another type of support service
- dispute resolution
- mediation
- follow-up case work
- liaison with relevant service and agencies
- liaison with the local police unit
- contributing to community safety planning and implementation.

*Source: AIC 2004; Barcham 2010; Beacroft et al. 2011; Blagg 2008; Blagg & Valuri 2003; Richards et al. 2011.*

## **Australian and state/territory government support**

Funding for community patrols is provided by both the Australian and state governments. The Australian Government funds patrols primarily in the Northern Territory through the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory National Partnership Agreement. State funding is provided through various mechanisms and departments.

Table 3 provides an overview of the number of government-funded community patrols operating in each state. It should be noted that this is not an exhaustive list, as there is a significant number of community patrols in operation that are unfunded or that receive funding from other, non-government sources.

## **Evidence in support of community patrols**

Only a small number of patrol programs have been assessed for effectiveness and administrative data collected by patrols are mostly not publicly available. As a result, there is little empirical evidence in the public domain on outcomes from patrols in the Australian context. However, judgments about the success or otherwise of programs may be based on considerations that include Indigenous community support for patrols, formal recognition by commissions, inquiries and awards, evidence on best practice, evidence from Australian case studies and effectiveness estimates.



## Indigenous community support

There is strong support for community patrols among Indigenous communities and organisations. Two examples are provided below.

In its *Independent Review of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory*, the Allen Consulting Group reported that there was strong support from community members for effective night patrols and safe houses as ways to help improve community safety (ACG 2010:44).

In its report *Reviewing the Northern Territory Emergency Response: perspectives from six communities*, the Central Land Council reported that community members from the six communities surveyed commented that patrols could have an important role in promoting community safety (Central Land Council 2008:5).

In 2002, the *Inquiry into Response by Government Agencies to Complaints of Family Violence and Child Abuse in Aboriginal Communities* found that a number of Aboriginal communities and community groups regarded community patrols as successful as they intervened in more minor conflicts, played an important liaison role and helped people affected by alcohol or drugs. Some communities saw patrols as essential (Gordon et al. 2002:199).

## Formal recognition

### Commissions and inquiries

A number of commissions and inquiries have recommended that Indigenous community patrols should be continued and more patrols instigated. For example, night patrols programs started to gain support in Australia as a result of the report by the 1991 *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody*. It recommended that patrols be instigated in Indigenous communities to help improve the relationship between Indigenous people and the police and to reduce crime rates (Blagg 2006).

Community patrols have enjoyed community and government support in urban as well as regional and remote areas. One urban example is the particularly long-running Nyoongar Patrol in Perth, which began in 1998 (Barcham 2010:51–2; Blagg 2008). Nyoongar Patrol started in the suburb of Northbridge, but it has expanded to cover a larger metropolitan area including the City of Perth, Vincent, Midland and Fremantle and was recently extended to include the south-east corridor, including Burswood and Gosnells, and the northern corridor to Joondalup. There has been some controversy over the role of the Nyoongar Patrol in the past, with reports that the patrol had to resist pressure to act as a ‘de facto security service’ and remove Aboriginal people from the street in Northbridge. However, the patrol has consistently regarded itself as an outreach or support service (Blagg 2006:42–4). While no evaluations of the Nyoongar Patrol are available, its role in Northbridge was the subject of two inquiries—a West Australian state government inquiry and a visiting inquiry carried out by the Parliament of Victoria Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee 2001. Both inquiries supported the patrol’s early intervention and mediation role and its continuation (Blagg 2008:119).

The Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse recommended in its 2007 report *Little children are sacred* that the government provide infrastructure to run night patrols, safe houses and other related services and ‘that the government support community efforts to establish men’s and women’s night patrols in those communities which identify a need for these services’ (Anderson & Wild 2007:31: Recommendations 76 and 78).



More recently, the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, Brian Gleeson, noted the following in his 2012 6-monthly report (OCGRIS, 2013:41):

I think everyone who spends time in remote communities recognises that sometimes mainstream approaches don't work and a different approach is needed. I continue to be struck by how effective night patrols can be and recently was privileged to meet the women who run the night patrol at Maningrida. These amazing women sacrifice their family time to invest in the security of the wider community and are often working to clean up the streets well into the night. It's not a clock on, clock off job for them—it's a personal responsibility they take on to invest in the future of their community. Maningrida is also lucky to have a Community Engagement Police Officer who works alongside local police but also works directly with the community to support them in their efforts to make it a safer place. In Maningrida they have gone so far as to have a formal understanding that some crimes are dealt with through cultural means rather than exposing people to the criminal justice system. This can often end or shorten conflicts as well as re-establishing traditional authority and supporting local people to take responsibility for the safety of their own community.

## Australian Violence Prevention Awards

The Julalikari Council Night Patrol in Tennant Creek, Northern Territory, which began in 1985, was recognised for its success when it won an inaugural Australian Violence Prevention Award in 1992 (Grabosky & James 1995). The main function of these awards is to recognise community-led crime prevention activities, reward good practice, provide encouragement and help governments to identify programs that may reduce violence and crime (AIC 2011). Principles for good practice in crime prevention, as outlined in the Australian Institute of Criminology Crime Prevention Framework, involve qualities such as strong collaboration between parties, capacity building and maintenance and promoting community engagement (AIC 2012).

Other Indigenous community patrols have since received AIC violence prevention awards:

- Gove Peninsula Community Patrol (Northern Territory) in 2006
- Tangentyere Night Patrol (Northern Territory) in 2005, 2002 and 1999
- Nyoongar Patrol System (Western Australia) in 2001
- Geraldton Community Patrol (Western Australia) in 1998
- Geraldton Aboriginal Yamatji Patrol (Western Australia) in 1997
- Kullari Patrol (Western Australia) in 1993 (AIC 2011).

## Evidence on best practice

Community patrols are generally initiated by Indigenous community members and can empower the community. Patrols aim to contribute to crime prevention and are not a substitute for police, but rather complement the local police unit in achieving a safer community. 'Patrols operate on the basis of cultural authority... rather than formal legal authority' and their role is distinct from that of the local police command (Blagg 2006:3–4). Beacroft and colleagues (2011) describe the main purpose of community patrols as 'primary and secondary crime prevention rather than crisis intervention or de facto policing' (Beacroft et al. 2011:3).

A number of programs and initiatives potentially contribute to improved safety in a community, and the effectiveness of community patrols needs to be considered in that context. Their specific purpose and their functions also need to be considered. Community patrols focus on increasing or maintaining security and wellbeing and 'stopping things from occurring'. Outcomes may include, among other things, alcohol-related



harm reduction, improved community governance and empowerment of the local community, so they cannot be measured through crime reduction measures alone (Beacroft et al. 2011:4; Blagg 2006:3–4, 46). Capturing data on the preventive work of community patrols is often difficult, as their work can involve a wide range of brief interventions over weeks, months or even years. Some of these activities may not be reported. This means that statistics on a community patrol's activities could be biased towards specific incidents and may not accurately reflect the role they play (Turner-Walker 2011:76).

Elements that appear to be important for the success of patrols include long-term government support, endorsement by key community members, good community governance and social cohesion and ensuring that the patrol is part of a holistic approach (Beacroft et al. 2011:4; Blagg & Valuri 2003:80). Patrols cannot work in isolation. They often cooperate closely with other community programs and initiatives such as women's and youth refuges, health clinics and hospitals, safe houses, sobering-up shelters, mediation programs, community justice groups, alcohol and other substance abuse support services, youth centres, and outstations and homelands initiatives. To carry out their work effectively, patrols require the back-up of such services, as well as routine first response services such as police and emergency health services (ANAO 2011:83; Beacroft et al. 2011:3–4; Blagg & Valuri 2003:59; Cunneen 2001:41). As well as providing care and support and assisting with harm minimisation, these services, together with patrols, play an important role in diverting Indigenous youth and adults from the criminal justice system (ANAO 2011:93–8; Blagg 2006:2–3).

Like other community safety programs, patrols may face difficulties such as burn-out of workers, difficulty recruiting staff, dependence on volunteers and lack of ongoing or recurrent funding. They may also have to deal with more specific challenges such as working late at night, dealing with dangerous situations, problems with vehicles, cultural differences within the patrol team and between the team and community members and incorrect or unrealistic expectations by others about the role of the patrol. Secure funding and strong government support are important factors in the success of comprehensive safety programs (ACG 2010:66; Beacroft et al. 2011:4; Blagg 2006:37–44; Memmott 2002:4).

Feedback from Indigenous communities suggests that community ownership is crucial to the success of patrols. According to Turner-Walker (2011), community patrols are authoritative cultural insiders. They function most successfully when they are community-owned as they 'are in the best possible position to know who is most at risk in their families and settlements, and to be able to effectively minimise the risks to their families from alcohol and violence' (p.55). Some of the patrols created under the Northern Territory Emergency Response are run by shire councils. This raised some challenges in relation to engaging and involving the local communities directly in the service delivery. With the introduction of the Stronger Futures initiative, however, community engagement and participation are a priority to ensure service provision is more inclusive and tailored to meet the needs of individual communities. The over-arching guidelines are necessary to provide legitimacy and some consistency towards achieving program outcomes while retaining opportunities for coordinating with other stakeholder community safety programs and activities.

## Patrols and local police

Police presence is a crucial element in community safety and crime prevention in urban, regional and remote communities alike. For example, increased and permanent police presence has improved community safety in remote communities, according to local Indigenous people and service providers in the Northern Territory (FaHCSIA 2011b:100–1, 117–18). However, another study found that, while the majority of respondents (75%) wanted a permanent police presence in their community, the proportion of people who thought police were doing a good job ranged from 11% to 85% (Pilkington 2009:43–46). Pilkington's research also showed that successful approaches ranged from 'heavy-handed' to a 'light touch', but the common factors were an active and visible police presence and a general involvement with the community (Pilkington 2009:8).



Other studies, too, found that successful policing practices needed to be appropriate for the local community's distinct demands and, to be effective, police needed to build strong relationships with the local community (Blandford & Sarre 2009:194; Eversole 2004:78–81).

Langton (1992) concluded that Aboriginal people wanted policing which was 'in sympathy with the problems which the communities face'; 'in conjunction with the elders' authority'; 'prevents and reduces crime', and responds 'flexibly and innovatively' (pp.12–13).

Strong relationships between local police and patrols are particularly important. According to Blagg and Valuri (2003:78), research suggested that partnerships with, and support from, local police had been an important factor in the success of many patrols.

Good cooperation between police and patrols may be enhanced by mutual respect and understanding. Increasing police officers' understanding of, and respect for, Indigenous people through cross-cultural training is seen as important by Indigenous communities (Eversole 2004:79; FaHCSIA 2011b:100; Law Reform Commission of Western Australia 2006:211). A report by the Allen Consulting Group (2010) also suggests that good coordination between police and community patrols and protocols for working together should increase clarity of roles and responsibilities (ACG 2010:71).

While patrols need to maintain strong links with the police force, they also require a healthy distance from the police and justice sector. Being functionally independent and community-controlled allows patrols to take a flexible approach and to keep their communities' trust (Barcham 2010:53; Blagg & Valuri 2003:81).

## Evidence from case studies

For about 20 years, the success of Indigenous community patrols has been described in a range of forums, for example in journal articles, conferences and awards. Together, these case studies show that patrols in specific communities can be successful in meeting their purpose. Measures of success include the patrol being accepted and judged as successful by the local community; involving key components generally accepted as important to the success of a patrol, such as strong collaboration with other services and community engagement; and promising local statistics on the number of encounters and their outcomes.

Some positive results achieved by an individual patrol can be ascertained from an Indigenous Law Bulletin article on Tangentyere Council Patrollers (2007). Established in 1990, the Tangentyere Council Patrollers patrol the city of Alice Springs and surrounding town camps. Data show that, in 2006, the patrol was involved in 9,396 encounters, assisting 5,474 clients. Nearly one in 10 cases (8.7%) involved violence or a disturbance and in the majority of these cases the patrol defused the situation and avoided contact with the police and the criminal justice system. In two-thirds (68%) of all actions, the client was transported home or to a safe place, potentially preventing injury or other harm (Tangentyere Council Patrollers & Elek 2007:3).

## Estimates of effectiveness

### Australian studies

The results of studies in Western Australia in the late 1990s showed that, in two remote communities, Aboriginal patrols were successful in diverting people from contact with the criminal justice system—data on admissions to police lock-ups showed significant reductions in the number of detentions as a result of Aboriginal patrols (Blagg 2006:24; Blagg & Valuri 2003:20–1).



Cunneen (2001) claims a number of outcomes from patrols. He draws on data from the Geraldton Aboriginal Yamatji Patrol reported in 2001, an evaluation by Hearn in 2000 and police data from Julalikari Council Night Patrol in the early nineties (Cunneen 2001:41–2). Cunneen found reduced juvenile crime rates when the patrol operated; increased perceptions of safety; reductions in alcohol-related harm and crime; a reduction in protective custody figures; support for partnerships and cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and empowerment of the community (Cunneen 2001:9).

In recent years, research on the perception of safety has also been undertaken. While perceived improvements in safety do not equate with evidence of *measured* outcomes, it could be argued that people ‘feeling safer’ may be a valid indicator of a safer community.

In a research project on community safety perception undertaken by FaHCSIA in 2011, 699 service providers in the Northern Territory were surveyed. When town-based providers were asked whether night patrols had made their town safer, nearly half (47%) of the respondents reported that patrols had improved safety either a lot or a bit. Other responses included the patrol ‘made no difference’ (29%) and ‘don’t know’ (18%). Of the service providers based in remote communities, when asked the same question two-thirds (66.8%) of respondents believed that patrols had improved safety (Putt et al. 2011:71–4).

In the second study in the same FaHCSIA project, local Indigenous people in 16 communities in the Northern Territory were surveyed about community safety. Three-quarters (74.8%) of the respondents reported that patrols had made a difference, with 43.3% believing that they had made a ‘big difference’. The proportion was even higher in small communities (that is, with a population less than 350), where 90% reported that patrols had made a positive impact on community safety. Nearly three-quarters (72.6%) of all respondents agreed that their community was safer than it had been 3 years earlier (Putt & FaHCSIA 2011).

Another recent study on perceptions of service providers found that nearly half of respondents (48%) believed initiatives such as night patrols and community police were the most important community safety initiatives (Willis 2010:38).

A performance audit on Northern Territory night patrols (ANAO 2011) did not measure outcomes; however, it did assess the administrative effectiveness of the Attorney-General’s Department’s (AGD) management of the Northern Territory Night Patrols Program. The audit report describes how AGD implemented patrols in a large number of communities (50) in a short time. To achieve this, the department took a common service delivery approach, ‘with limited variation in the model to match specific community needs’ (ANAO 2011:17). The audit found that community patrols dealt with very different environments and incidents. For example, in some urban communities the patrol faced a larger service area with a larger population, more languages spoken and a higher likelihood of family conflicts. Communities also had different main issues such as drinking, drug use, family violence or fighting. Some service providers reported that it was sometimes hard to provide an effective service within the AGD’s operational requirements, jeopardising community safety outcomes (ANAO 2011:89). To improve the patrols’ effectiveness, one of the report’s four recommendations was to work with service providers to promote the use of more flexible program arrangements to tailor service delivery to community needs and priorities. In its response to the recommendation, the department stated that flexibility in program delivery had been increased and that it would continue to collaborate with communities and service providers to find local solutions (ANAO 2011:92).



## International studies

Some indigenous communities overseas have employed measures similar to community patrols. For example, in New Zealand Maori wardens were recruited to perform a community policing role with functions not unlike those of patrols in Australia (Barcham 2010; Synexe 2007). In Canada, the Squamish Nation North Shore Peacekeepers are volunteers who perform a similar role, with an emphasis on mediation and liaison (Barcham 2010). Unfortunately, no evaluations of these initiatives are available. However, some evidence on overseas non-indigenous programs is presented here.

In her report *Community safety workers: an exploratory study of some emerging crime prevention occupations*, Gray (2006) describes community patrols or warden programs in a number of countries. She makes the point that evaluations are scarce and limited in scope and that more evaluations are required. Some of these overseas initiatives have commonalities with community patrols in Australia in that they may be community-initiated, independent of the police, aim to prevent or reduce harm and have a similar range of functions. Two of the programs and their outcomes are outlined below.

England and Wales have invested considerable funds in neighbourhood wardens. Wardens work with the community to 'improve conditions in poor neighbourhoods, counter social exclusion and improve the quality of life'. They provide visible reassurance to members of the community and may address disorderly behaviour and environmental problems. By 2006, the program had been operating for 6 years and an evaluation found that wardens had reduced crime and anti-social behaviour, and attracted strong public support. An earlier evaluation of the program found that victimisation rates had reduced by 28%, while in comparison areas these rates had increased. It also found that people felt safer (Gray 2006:13–17).

The South African Community Peace Worker (CPW) initiative began in Nyanga Western Cape province in 1997 and has since expanded to other areas. The main aims of this program are crime prevention and youth development in targeted low income areas. The recruits are drawn from the local community, with equal numbers of men and women and an average age of 22. They are required to serve their community for one year and are given basic training in mediation, problem-solving and leadership skills. They are expected to perform tasks such as helping to decrease drug trafficking, assisting crime victims, educating people about HIV/AIDS and building trust with the local community. Half of their time is dedicated to foot patrols and the rest to training. According to a monitoring report, there was a dramatic reduction in burglaries, thefts and attacks in the areas where CPWs were active. Another benefit of this program is that many of the former CPWs find employment as a result of their involvement in the program (Gray 2006:35–7).

## Gaps in the evidence

There is a lack of empirical data on the effectiveness of community patrols, both in Australia and overseas. One Australian evaluation is under way (Box 2).

### **Box 2: Evaluation of night and community patrols by Edith Cowan University**

Edith Cowan University, in consortium with the University of New England, is evaluating night patrols (one in New South Wales and one in Western Australia) to determine their effect on community safety, preferably in comparison with statistically similar communities that do not operate night patrols. The evaluations, funded by the Australian Government, are part of a larger cross-jurisdictional project under the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework to build the evidence base about effective Indigenous justice initiatives. The evaluation is expected to be completed in the second half of 2013. For further information, contact the Indigenous Policy Section, Attorney-General's Department, email <SIDIndigenousPolicysection@ag.gov.au>.



Better administrative data on community patrols regarding the reasons for and outcomes of encounters, including the types of services referred to, could provide important insights into the role that patrols play in community safety. While administrative data on patrols are collected by funding agencies, these are not usually publicly available. Six-monthly data are reported on the number of people transported by night patrols in the Northern Territory (FaHCSIA 2013).

The Australian Institute of Criminology has developed a new performance and reporting framework for community patrols in the Northern Territory in consultation with key stakeholders, including a discussion forum and visits to patrols to conduct observations. It outlines key performance indicators and a reporting guide, capturing qualitative and quantitative information such as whether the community has safety and support services, the types of patrol actions, the presence of a well-functioning referral process and whether demand for repeated assistance has reduced due to support by other services. The framework's main focus is on immediate outcomes, particularly those that the community patrol can influence (Beacroft et al. 2011:17–21). This new framework 'should help to provide more comprehensive and detailed data on the night patrols' operations and impacts' (FaHCSIA 2011b:190). Good quality data can help community patrols improve their practices and assist governments in supporting the most effective programs. The framework may also be a useful tool for patrol programs in other areas in Australia.

Among the many roles that patrols play is that of reducing and preventing crime. Crime-related data are important for monitoring levels of crime, including levels of crime in Indigenous communities. However, there are large data gaps related to violent offending in Indigenous communities at the national and the local level. While police apprehension data are collected, the quality of Indigenous identification in the data is variable, with data from only four (New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory) out of eight states and territories of sufficient standard and quality for national reporting in 2010–11 (ABS 2012b). However, all states and territories have undertaken to implement the use of the ABS standard question for identification of Indigenous people (Al-Yaman et al. 2006; Wundersitz 2010:94–7).

## Conclusion

Lack of safety is an issue in Indigenous communities across urban, regional and remote areas. Communities and individuals with higher levels of disadvantage and substance abuse are particularly at risk.

Community patrols are one of a number of initiatives that aim to improve community safety and reduce harm. There is limited empirical evidence available on the effectiveness of community patrols, but the available evidence suggests they can reduce juvenile crime rates, alcohol-related harm and crime and the number of police lock-ups. They have also been shown to increase perceptions of safety, improve partnerships and cultural understanding between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and empower the local community.

Overseas, community safety schemes such as community wardens are active in a number of countries and there is some evidence to show that they reduce levels of crime and victimisation. A South African initiative is also particularly effective in improving employment outcomes for workers following their involvement in the program.

Most community patrols in Australia are initiated by the local community. To be successful, patrols need strong community support and control as well as government support. Not only do patrols need adequate resourcing themselves, they also need well-resourced local police and other services to which they can refer.

Although the amount of empirical data on the outcomes of community patrols is limited, there is widespread support of community patrols by Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, communities and organisations, and patrols have received support from a number of commissions and inquiries.



# Appendix 1

## Recent government initiatives

The section below provides further context for the reader regarding national initiatives that are in place. These initiatives are not examined within the body of the paper because they have not been evaluated or do not have publicly available evaluations.

The Stronger Futures in the Northern Territory initiative is a 10-year commitment with significant investment in families, education, health, housing, jobs and safety, building on extensive consultation with Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The Stronger Futures legislation came into effect in July 2012 and repeals the *Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007*.

Total funding of \$3.4 billion has been committed for measures to make Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory safer and families and children healthier. The funding will also help to create jobs in communities, support local people in getting jobs and give people living in outstations and homelands certainty that support for basic services will continue.

Community safety highlights include funding of \$619 million over 10 years to:

- ensure the Northern Territory Government can continue to employ 60 full-time Northern Territory police officers in 18 remote communities
- build an additional four permanent remote area police complexes
- maintain community night patrols in 80 communities
- continue to provide additional funding for legal assistance services
- support the trial of Community Engagement Police Officers in the Northern Territory (FaHCSIA 2012).

The Attorney-General's Department manages the Community Night Patrol Program on behalf of the Australian Government. Patrols currently operate in 80 communities and towns to support members, especially women and children, and defuse violent incidents before serious consequences arise. This program not only provides an important safety service, it also employs more than 350 local Indigenous people in Northern Territory remote communities. Surveys undertaken as part of the evaluation of the Northern Territory Emergency Response and development of the Stronger Futures package indicated that community night patrols are highly valued by the communities in which they operate. The program is moving to a more community-focused approach allowing greater responsiveness to local needs and priorities.

In 2009, the Attorney-General's Department committed \$2 million to evaluate 26 programs under the National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework (NILJF). As part of this initiative, two community patrol programs (in Western Australia and New South Wales) are being evaluated to determine whether the patrols can be considered good practice, and on what basis, with a particular focus on outcomes. Both the West Australian Northbridge Policy Project and New South Wales Safe Aboriginal Youth programs are youth-focused night patrols. The evaluation reports are being finalised and are expected to be released in the second half of 2013.

## Appendix 2

Table A1 contains a list of Closing the Gap Clearinghouse issues papers and resource sheets related to this resource sheet.

To view the publications, visit <http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/publications/>.

**Table A1: Related Clearinghouse resource sheets and issues papers**

Title	Year	Author(s)
Community development approaches to safety and wellbeing of Indigenous children	2010	Higgins DJ
Parenting in the early years: effectiveness of parenting support programs for Indigenous families	2012	Mildon R & Polimeni M
Strategies to minimise the incidence of suicide and suicidal behaviour	2013	Closing the Gap Clearinghouse
Strategies and practices for promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	2013	Closing the Gap Clearinghouse
Programs to improve interpersonal safety in Indigenous communities: evidence and issues	2013	Day A, Francisco A & Jones R
Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children	2013	Atkinson J

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## Abbreviations

AGD	Attorney General's Department
APY	Pitjantjatjara and Yankunytjatjara
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPW	Community Peace Worker
NILJF	National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework
SAPOL	South Australian Police
WHO	World Health Organization



## Terminology

**Indigenous:** 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' are used interchangeably to refer to Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse uses the term 'Indigenous Australians' to refer to Australia's first people.

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