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Services to remote Aboriginal communities have generally improved but the risk of unsafe drinking water remains

The Auditor General today tabled in Parliament the [*Delivering Essential Services to Remote Aboriginal Communities – Follow-up*](#) report that assessed whether the Department of Communities effectively addressed findings from our 2015 audit into the same subject.

Auditor General Ms Caroline Spencer said the Department has made progress on all 6 recommendations from the initial audit.

'We found power and water supplies to remote communities were more reliable, wastewater services were more consistently monitored and more communities had clean drinking water.

'But 37 communities we looked at in 2015 still had water that did not meet Australian Drinking Water Guidelines and in 44 of the smallest communities (all formerly-Commonwealth-managed) the water is not being tested for microbes,' Ms Spencer said.

During our audit the Department was responsible for delivering essential services to around 12,000 people, 13% of WA's Aboriginal population, in 143 remote communities. This has now reduced to 140 communities.

Since our last audit, the *Remote Service Level Guidelines for Essential Services in Remote Settlements in Western Australia* which outlines service delivery levels and standards for water, wastewater and power, has been finalised.

However, the Department is not transparent in how it applies the service level criteria it uses and its documentation of decisions affecting remote communities is poor.

Ms Spencer said it is hard for Aboriginal communities to assess the services they receive as there is a lack of public reporting on service delivery performance and no formal process to raise concerns.

The report includes recommendations to assist the Department improve the delivery of services including regular testing of water quality, improved transparency around performance and planning to address priority risk areas.

Ms Spencer said the Department has already acted on several of the recommendations.

Report resources

- [PDF version](#)
- [summary video](#)