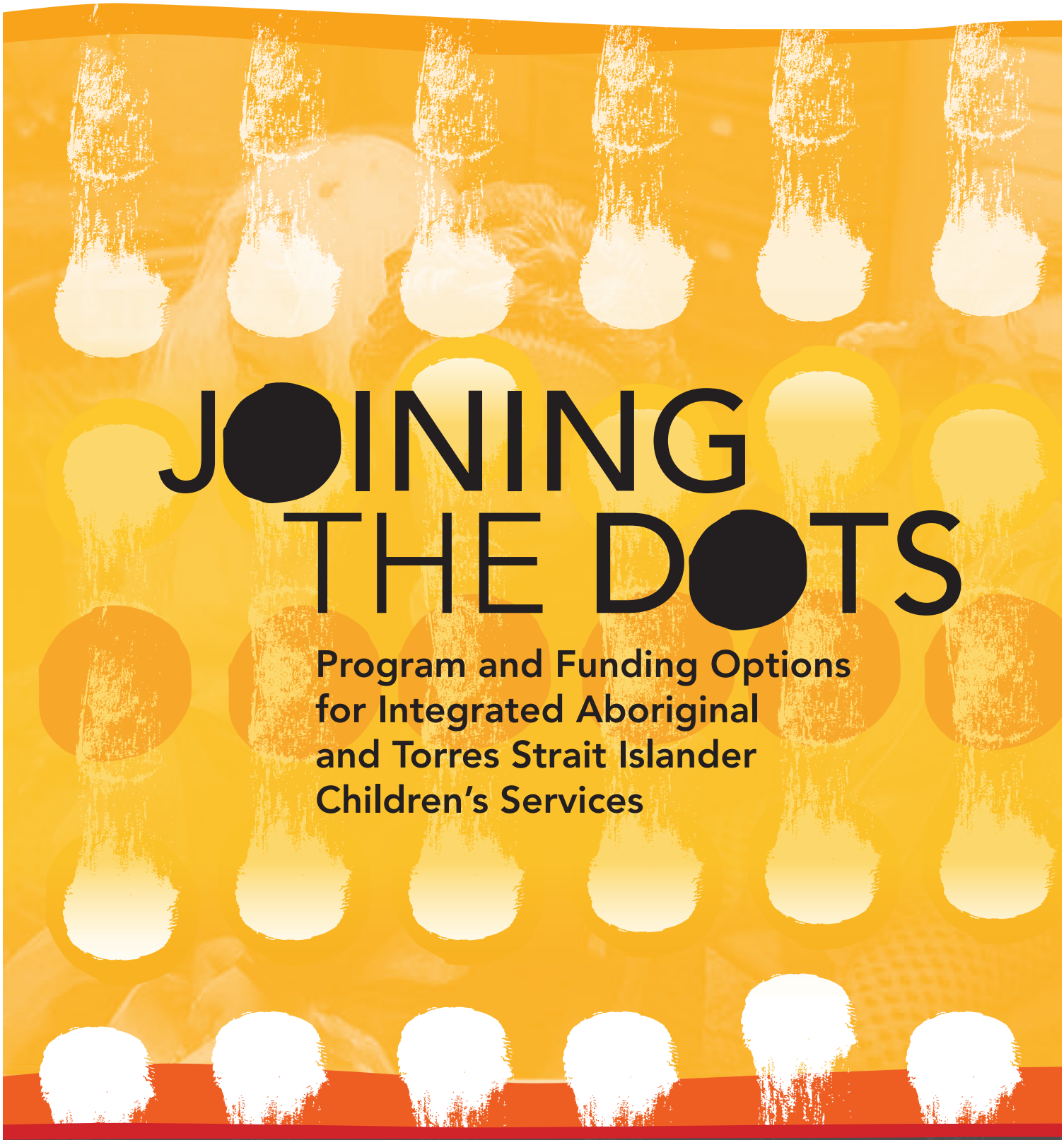

JOINING THE DOTS

Program and Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services

Options paper prepared for
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
by Professor Deb Brennan

SNAICC

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A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

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Summary

This paper presents program and funding ideas to support integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Its immediate focus is the Budget Based Funded (BBF) services and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs). Its broader aim is to help develop policy and funding ideas for sustainable, community-managed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services. The paper calls for a new program objective and endorses, with minor modifications, a funding model developed by SNAICC following extensive consultation, research and analysis.

The paper situates integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities within the high-level policy context established by the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) in relation to both early childhood education and care and 'closing the gap'. It locates these services in the context of evidence about the benefits of high quality early education and care and the service features needed to deliver positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The BBFs and ACFCs are bedrock services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around Australia. They deliver services in flexible, locally determined ways that match community needs and build on community strengths. As a result of the goodwill and trust built up by these services and their staff, sometimes over many decades, they have tremendous potential to help 'close the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Supportive policy and secure funding would enable the BBFs and ACFs to become flagship services, demonstrating excellent and innovative practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, attracting inspiring teachers, linking with local schools and playing a key role in workforce development, leadership and community empowerment.

The building blocks are all in place: high-level **policy**, a strong and growing **evidence base** about 'what works' and a core group of **services** that have close and trusting relationships with their communities and a demonstrated commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. What is needed now is to 'join the dots' by bringing policy and evidence into alignment with program objectives and establishing secure funding arrangements to deliver long-term benefits in a cost-effective way.

1. Introduction

With Commonwealth funding for Budget Based Funded services and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres secure only until June 2014, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) commissioned a report on program and funding options for integrated early years and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The analysis has been conducted independently but builds on extensive consultations conducted by SNAICC as well as documentation provided by the organisation.

Historically, the BBF services were established under a variety of funding arrangements. Despite their diversity, they were consolidated into the BBF program, a sub-program of the Child Care Services Support Program, in 2003 (DEEWR, 2012). Approximately 80% of the BBFs are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused services. Many of the BBFs have poor quality infrastructure and find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Thirty-eight Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) established with funding from the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (2009) are also within scope for this project. These services have all been planned for areas with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and high levels of disadvantage. As with the BBF services, the funding agreement for these services expires on 30 June 2014 and many have been advised to prepare for funding through 'mainstream' program mechanisms such as Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

The services reviewed here provide holistic, community-led programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They seek to build on community strengths and to address a wide range of physical, social, emotional and learning needs – far wider than the needs addressed in mainstream early education and care services. By extending and building on cultural and social strengths, they provide a 'trusted community owned and driven entry point to tackle the trauma, poverty, dislocation and disempowerment many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience' (SNAICC, 2013). Typically, these are services that are actively engaged in building and strengthening their communities. In the words of the Director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Children's Centre, 'I don't think we've ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community' (SNAICC, 2013).

There is a strong human rights basis to this approach. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child encourages early childhood programs that empower parents and other caregivers. It calls on governments to ensure that early childhood services are 'tailored to the circumstances of particular groups and individuals' and that services and programs reflect the needs and characteristics of the specific communities to which they are connected (UNICEF, 2005: 48).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated services address the needs of children, parents and families in a context of 'cultural safety', that is, active

understanding of, respect for and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. Cultural safety has been defined as 'a 'safe environment' where there is 'no assault, challenge or denial' of people's identify, of who they are and what they need. 'It is about respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening' (Williams 2008). Cultural safety is a far stronger concept than cultural awareness, although the latter may provide a useful foundation for becoming more mindful about the history, expectations, strengths and vulnerabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Community and cultural identity are fundamental to the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Identity helps to create a sense of belonging and connectedness and helps to empower children so that they have the skills and capacities to 'take control' of events and influence outcomes (Armstrong et al. 2012: 15). A recent study shows the importance of 'cultural identity, self-reliance and adaptive coping strategies' in enabling children to achieve their goals. Connections to family and community provide the basis of the child's identity as an Indigenous person, their cultural connectedness, and the emergence of their spirituality (Armstrong et al., 2012).

Most BBFs and ACFCs are located in rural and remote parts of Australia, but a small number are in urban areas. The services frequently operate as 'community hubs' rather than conventional childcare centres. In addition to providing services such as early education and care, playgroups, outside school hours care and nutrition advice they link families with other services and agencies. The BBFs take an inclusive approach, catering as far as possible to the children and families who live in and visit their communities, rather than restricting support to those who are formally enrolled and/or able to pay fees.

Mobile services take the educator or play leader to the children, as well as toys, books and play equipment. Staff may travel thousands of kilometres every few weeks in order to take early education and parenting resources to children and families in remote areas. In remote communities where transport and fuel costs are major issues, these mobile services are vital.

A considerable body of research and evidence supports the integrated service model that underpins the BBFs and ACFCs and that connects early childhood services to health, nutrition, training and skills development. According to a recent review:

> The move towards more integrated service delivery has been driven by a growing awareness of how fragmented services for young children and their families are, and how that fragmentation undermines the capacity of the service system to support children and families effectively (Moore and Skinner, 2013).

When planning, funding and service delivery are managed by different agencies and/or levels of government results the system that can be difficult for families

to understand and access. Further, 'the families that are most disadvantaged by this situation are those that are most vulnerable' (Moore and Skinner, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge the profound strengths of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, even as we refer to the disadvantages they experience. The learning environments of these children can be extraordinarily rich. They may learn about kinship, cultural practices, respect for elders and community languages as well as bush tucker, first aid and navigating the bush. Parents and grandparents often work hard to foster a strong Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity and many are keenly aware of the benefits of structured early education. The parents in a recent study noted that 'those who do not attend preschool and other early learning programs miss out on some skills that make it easier for them to settle into school and know what school is about' (Bowes and Kitson, 2011: 4).

The Australian Council for Educational Research invites us to picture this scene:

A three year old Warlpiri boy is picking up tiny ininti seeds from where they have fallen in the red dust of the Central Australian desert. They are almost hidden amongst the leaf litter, or under a strip of bark, or in the shadow of a rock, but he can find them. The orange, red and yellow seeds will later be transformed into necklaces by his Aunties, who are accompanying the children on the walk. One of the women throws something hard at a tree to dislodge the seed pods, which cascade to the ground. The boy prises open the dried up pods and extracts the seeds from within. He places each seed into a plastic cup that is being used as a temporary bead collector. He makes his way around his environment independent of adults and of other children who are on this bush trip.

The boy's fine motor skills are clearly evident. The deft finger movements to grasp the seed and lift it from the ground, to open the pod and free the seed from its casing, the careful placement of the seed in a small receptacle are evidence of his skills. His actions in moving purposefully from seed pod to seed pod and from tiny seed to tiny seed, without close adult supervision, suggests independence, lack of anxiety, easy adaptation to these surroundings, a sense of purpose, confidence, the ability to focus on the task without being distracted by the seed searching of other children, a determination to locate as many seeds as he can and pleasure in the task. During the morning he is exposed to two languages, Warlpiri and English.

Children such as this little boy have considerable knowledge before they start school. They are not simply 'empty vessels ready to be filled with Western knowledge' or 'underperforming children' (Armstrong et al., 2012: 7). However, skilled teaching is required to recognize and build on these strengths. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to trust and to feel connected to the adults at the centres they attend (Shepherd and Walker, 2008; Mann, Knight and Thomson, 2011; Trudgett and Grace, 2011).

2. Policy context

Key policies introduced since the consolidation of the BBF program in 2003 create a powerful and positive framework for supporting and resourcing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These policies include: (i) the National Early Childhood Development Strategy (2009), that sets out a plan for improving the lives of all Australian children; (ii) the National Indigenous Reform Agenda (2008), *Closing the Gap*, that seeks to overcome the legacy of past injustices and the current disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and (iii) the National Indigenous Child Development Strategy.

National Early Childhood Development Strategy

The National Early Childhood Development Strategy is a wide-ranging initiative addressing children's health, education and wellbeing. Its overall goal is to ensure that 'by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation' (COAG, 2009: 4). The strategy aims to:

> … reduce inequalities in outcomes between groups of children. This is especially important for … Indigenous children who, on average, have significantly poorer outcomes than non-Indigenous children (COAG, 2012: 4).

As part of the strategy, a range of measures has been introduced to improve the quality of early education and care and to ensure that children have access to services that will improve their readiness for school, as well as meeting parents' needs for childcare to support social and economic participation.

The benefits of providing early education for all children are widely accepted by governments, researchers and advocacy organisations. The 'human capital' approach proposes prioritising investment in the early years:

> Early childhood is a critical time in human development. There is now comprehensive research that shows that experiences children have in the early years of life set neurological and biological pathways that can have life-long impacts on health, learning and behaviour. There is also compelling international evidence about the returns on investment in early childhood services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the work of Nobel Laureate James Heckman (COAG 2009b: 3).

Quality measures

A new National Quality Standard (NQS) for most early childhood education and care services came into effect at the beginning of 2012. The NQS addresses key determinants of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including educator and caregiver qualifications, group sizes and staff-to-child ratios. An important aspect of the NQS is the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

which Commonwealth approved services are required to apply when planning for and evaluating children's learning (DEEWR, 2009). Most long day care centres, outside school hours care services, preschools (kindergartens) and family day care services are covered by the new standard. Budget-based funded services, with the exception of those that receive Child Care Benefit, are currently excluded.

It is not the purpose of this paper to canvas the merits of bringing the BBF services under the NQS. Nevertheless, it is important to note the anomaly that services catering to some of the most disadvantaged children in Australia are specifically excluded from provisions that would require quality improvements despite evidence that high-quality ECEC services yield particular benefits for the most highly disadvantaged (Goodstart, 2012: 5). This goes directly counter to the recommendations of reports such as *An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in Children's Centres: The Evidence Review* that recommends a platform of universal service provision, with proportionately more resources and supports directed to those in greatest need (Pordes Bowers, and Strelitz, 2012).

The national Early Childhood Development Strategy and the EYLF have considerable potential to strengthen services that cater to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The framework recognises parents and families as children's 'first and most influential educators' and affirms the vital role of partnerships such as those that underpin the BBF and ACFCs (COAG, 2009a: 5).

The EYLF provides an excellent platform for supporting the kinds of holistic, community-controlled service model represented by the BBFs and ACFCs. It specifies that service infrastructure needs to be 'fit for purpose, support interdisciplinary and integrated approaches, and be located to enable ease of access within the community for children and their families.' It also notes that 'innovative approaches are required in providing infrastructure for Indigenous families, such as design that takes into account extended family relationships and that is culturally welcoming.' In relation to governance and funding, the EYLF endorses 'whole-of-government and cross-sectoral governance arrangements, effective consultation with children and families, and more flexible funding and administrative arrangements … to better engage with children and families and respond holistically to their diverse issues' (COAG 2009a: 21).

Finally, the EYLF emphasises the importance of relationships, collaboration, partnerships and continuity in children's learning and development (Harrison and Murray, 2012: 12). It urges educators to develop 'learning communities', to become 'co-learners with children, families and community' and to 'value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders' (COAG, 2009a: 13).

Together, these elements read as a manifesto for the BBF and ACFC models.

Access to early education

In 2008, COAG endorsed the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, committing all state and territory governments to achieve 'universal

access' to preschool by 2013. The 2013-14 Budget extended the National Partnership until the end of December 2014 (Australian Government, 2012: 128-9). Under the agreement, 'universal access' was defined as meaning that:

> By 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling. The preschool program is to be delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year. It will be accessible across a diversity of settings in a form that meets the needs of parents and in a manner that ensures cost does not present a barrier to access (COAG, 2009b: Clause 17).

For the first two years, national priorities included 'increasing participation rates, particularly for Indigenous and disadvantaged children', 'ensuring cost is not a barrier to access' and 'strengthening program quality and consistency'. Children living in remote Indigenous communities were identified as a special focus for universal access. The National Partnership Agreement is bolstered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy.

The models of community engagement and service delivery that underpin the BBF and ACFC services provide an obvious vehicle for advancing this agenda. Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language and identity is deeply embedded in these models.

National Indigenous Reform

The disadvantages experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been extensively and exhaustively documented. Disadvantage begins early, with rates of infant and child mortality two to three times higher than for other Australian children (Productivity Commission, 2011: 347). Indigenous children have lower levels of participation in ECE than non-Indigenous children. Without preschool learning opportunities, they are disadvantaged from their first day of school.

The COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement has six targets to 'close the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage. Three of these relate specifically to children: halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade; ensuring *all* Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education by 2013; and halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (COAG, 2008).

> For an equal start in life, Indigenous children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities. Access to quality early childhood education and care services, including pre-school, child care and family support services such as parenting programs and supports, is critical. Appropriate facilities and physical infrastructure, a sustainable early childhood education and health workforce, learning frameworks and opportunities for parental engagement are also important and require attention. Action in the areas of maternal, antenatal and early

childhood health is relevant to addressing the child mortality gap and to early childhood development (COAG, 2008: 6).

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement includes five principles that are to be central to the implementation of 'Closing the Gap'. Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families need to embody and express these principles – which is precisely the way that the existing BBF and ACFCs operate.

Closing the Gap principles

Priority principle: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.

Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.

Access principle: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible … recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services (COAG, 2008: 6).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan

One of the strongest messages to emerge from research is the importance of services being delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. In order to be effective, programs need to build upon the rich cultural, linguistic and conceptual skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to early childhood education. Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, adopted by governments around the country calls for early learning programs that:

- promote early engagement with learning;
- provide a strong foundation for future educational achievement;
- encourage the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children from birth; and
- support children in their transition to school (MCEEDYA, 2010).

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* has adopted the Closing the Gap principles and added an additional 'Accountability principle' which states that 'programs and services will have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

Key messages

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have skills and strengths that are not necessarily recognised or valued in mainstream services.

2. The early years have life-long impacts on health, learning and behaviour, so this is the optimum time to invest in high quality services.

3. Children experiencing disadvantage have the most to gain from early education yet many, including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are missing out.

4. Together, the ECEC reform agenda and 'closing the gap' measures form a powerful basis for supporting and resourcing integrated services such as the BBFs and ACFCs. These service models strongly and directly advance these major reform agendas.

3. Evidence base

High quality preschool improves school readiness

Early education is central to most BBF services and ACFCs, and is a key element in improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Early education delivered by qualified educators – ideally indigenous educators – must be central to revised program and funding models (Carbonne et al., 2004).

A powerful body of literature shows that 'children who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue on to further education and fully participate in employment and community life as adults' (MCEETYA, 2009: 9).

Participating in high quality early education for at least two years improves children's readiness for school and their life chances in the longer term. The benefits of early education are especially strong for disadvantaged children, as noted in a recent report by the Productivity Commission (MCEETYA, 2009: 9).

Systematic studies such as the High-Scope Perry Preschool Program and the Abecedarian Project show positive, long-term effects of early enrichment on school achievement, employment and social behaviours (McLachlan et al., 2013: 103). The Perry Preschool Program provided intensive early education to disadvantaged African American Children for two years, as well as regular home visits. At the age of 40, adults who had participated in this program were more likely than their peers to have graduated from high school and to be employed, they had higher earnings and were less likely to have committed criminal offences than those who did not participate in the program. Another program that demonstrated the long-term effects of structured, high quality early education is the Abecedarian Project. Typically, children commenced this program when they were less than six months old and continued to be engaged until the age of eight. Graduates of this program were more likely than their peers to be employed, four times more likely to have college degrees and less likely to have used 'public assistance' (Conti and Heckman, 2012).

Participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Although steps have been taken to redress the disadvantage and exclusion experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, there is a long way to go to ensure that these children have equal life chances with their peers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, on average, have poorer educational and health outcomes and lower wellbeing than other Australian children. They have higher rates of hospitalisation and mortality, are at greater risk of being of low birth weight and suffer more childhood illnesses (AIHW, 2011; Productivity Commission, 2011). As well, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have lower rates of access to early childhood education and

lower proportions of students achieving the national minimum standards for reading (Baxter and Hand, 2013).

The disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal children is evident from the results of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), a population-level measure of children's health and development. AEDI results are based on a checklist measures development across five domains: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge. Almost half of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more of these domains – twice the proportion of other children. Further, AEDI data suggest that participation in high quality early childhood education is skewed towards more advantaged populations (Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute, 2009: 12).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have relatively low rates of participation in Australian government approved services such as long day care, family day care and outside school hours care – even though they are a priority target for services. Only 2% of 0-5 year olds and 1.9% of 6-12 year olds who participate in Commonwealth approved care are Aboriginal children, even though they represent more than twice that proportion (4.7%) in the community. Children from regional and remote parts of Australia, which include many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are also under-represented (Productivity Commission, 2013: 3A.15).

As well, despite the general strategy of delivering 'universal access' to early childhood education and the specific goal of ensuring that Aboriginal children in remote communities get access to preschool, a recent analysis undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations shows that Aboriginal children are high on the list of those most likely to miss out on early childhood education (Baxter and Hand, 2013: xvii).

Access to early childhood education means far more than simply increasing the number of preschool places available or the proportion of children enrolled (Baxter and Hand, 2013: xvii). Even if places are available, families may face barriers relating to cost, quality, hours of opening location and – crucially – responsiveness to the needs and concerns of both parents and children. Accessible services need to be genuinely responsive to, and welcoming and respectful of, the children and families they serve. As well, programs need to be 'delivered in such a way that the child is able to fully experience the potential benefits of [early childhood education] (Baxter and Hand, 2013: 55-64).

Whether services are targeted specifically at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, or at the community in general, participation by Aboriginal families is higher in services developed by and with these communities (Mann, 2012; Gooda, 2011).

Delivering services in this way gives effect to two principles of the National Indigenous Reform Agenda, specifically the Indigenous Engagement Principle, which posits that 'Engagement with Indigenous people and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services' and the Access Principle which calls for programs and services to be 'physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people' (COAG, 2008: 21).

Closing the gap in early education - what works

In Australia we are fortunate to know not only 'what is wrong' but also 'what works'. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse summarises the policies and practices that have been shown to be effective in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

The key elements of 'what we know', according to the Clearinghouse, include:

- The early years are a critical period where the pathways to a child's lifetime social, emotional and education outcomes begin.
- Children's literacy and numeracy skills at age 4-5 are a good predictor of academic achievement in primary school
- Indigenous children and economically disadvantaged families are less likely to attend an early childhood program than their non-Indigenous and more advantaged peers.
- Indigenous families want culturally safe environments for their children in the years before school (Harrison et al., 2012).

What works

- ✓ Children at risk of poor developmental and educational outcomes benefit from high-quality education and care programs in the years before school
- ✓ Early learning programs that are supported by the community, provided by educators who are qualified, well-attended, well-resourced, and evidence-based are a key contributor to good early childhood outcomes
- ✓ Helping families and communities to be supportive and effective in their roles in children's live is a key protective factor for the early years and a key component in the design and delivery of high-quality, effective early years programs
- ✓ Uptake of early learning programs by Indigenous families is enhanced by community partnerships, culturally relevant practice that values local Indigenous knowledge, and appropriate teacher training and support

Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to 'hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive'. Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by

schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. There are strong links between wellbeing and learning outcomes (MCEEDYA, 2010).

Services controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people build on the skills and strengths of their children, instead of emphasising their perceived 'deficits'. A recent study notes the independence and autonomy of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as well as their sibling and peer solidarity. In both remote and settled Australia, 'young Indigenous children's superior visual-spatial and motor skills and capacity to assess risks accurately have long been noted', the study says, but 'such skills rarely appear on ECE checklists or school reports as strengths to be encouraged' (Taylor, 2011: 148).

Closing the gap in early education - what doesn't work

- × Children attending early learning programs of poor quality show poorer outcomes at school entry, particularly when poor quality programs are combined with long hours of attendance or poorer home learning environments
- × Service delivery approaches that are too narrowly targeted can miss many of the children and families who need support
- × Programs that lack stability and continuity of staffing, and/or do not integrate families' access to programs, reduce the potential benefits for children
- × Early learning programs that do not reflect the culture and knowledge of the Indigenous community are not seen as culturally safe and tend not to be used by families in that community

Key messages

1. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children miss out on access to sustained, high quality early learning programs

2. Quality measures such as educator qualifications and child to staff ratios make a real difference to children's learning

3. Cultural competence and cultural safety are key components of service delivery for Indigenous families, including the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators

Supporting children and families in remote and very remote communities

Children living in remote or very remote parts of Australia are as entitled to early childhood education as every other child.[1] In reality, ensuring that early education is delivered to remote communities brings particular challenges, especially in relation to staffing, facilities and transport. Specific and proactive measures need to be taken in order to make 'universal access' a reality for children in remote communities. Further, funding agencies need to respect the clearly articulated vision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about 'what works' and 'what does not work'.

Early education services in remote communities not only look very different from their equivalents in suburban or regional centres; they often meet a far wider range of community needs. Communities typically seek to develop multipurpose facilities that meet a range of needs, rather than seeking to deliver a single service such as 'long day care' or even 'child care'.

Research conducted for the Northern Territory government in 2009 identified an urgent need for 'services that provide holistic health, care and education, particularly in remote communities. There was a very strong and consistent view … that childhood services much be delivered as part of an integrated health, care and education strategy' (Elliott, Fasoli and Nutton, 2009: 11).

A 'whole of community' approach, rather than a narrow focus on children, is both desired and appropriate in remote Aboriginal communities. Community members who, from an outside perspective, appear to have no connection with the service, may play a critical role. This is especially likely to be the case with elders and language speakers. 'In the cultural context of many remote Indigenous communities in the NT, elders are seen as knowledge holders and are 'recognised as being able to provide advice, offer support and share wisdom in a confidential way with other members of the community, particularly younger members' (Fasoli et al, 2004). These people are unique to each community and should be part of any decision-making.

[1] The standard method of defining remoteness for statistical purposes in Australia is by reference to the road distance from services (Baxter, Gray and Hayes, 2011).

4. Funding and program options

In devising options for BBF and ACFC services, it is useful to consider the main funding and program models in operation in Australia. How do these position ECEC services in relation to the families and communities they serve? What are their philosophical starting points? What are their strengths and weaknesses as models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

This analysis begins with the 'mainstream' model of Commonwealth funding built around Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate. Recognising that there are lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions such as the States, Territories and local governments, a brief survey of the major approaches to funding preschool/kindergarten is also included.

'Mainstream' Commonwealth funding

Most Commonwealth government expenditure on children's education and care is directed through Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR).

Child Care Benefit

Child Care Benefit (CCB) is a means-tested subsidy that helps eligible families with the costs of childcare. It can be paid directly to service providers, thus reducing up-front fees. CCB is based on an hourly rate that varies according to family income, the number of children enrolled in approved care, the number of hours used, whether children attend school and the type of child care use. Parents who are not employed, studying or training and who use approved services such as long day care, family day care or in-home care may be eligible for up to 24 hours CCB for each child below school age; while those who are working, studying or training could be eligible for up to 50 hours CCB (or more in certain circumstances). The maximum CCB is $3.99 per hour, which equates to a maximum of $199.50 per week for parents who are working, studying or training and using 50 hours. Parents are responsible for the gap between CCB and the fee charged.

How does this work in practice? Take the example of a parent using two days child care in a centre that is open for 10 hours per day. Typically, the parent will be required to pay for the full number of hours the centre is open (in this example 10 hours) even if they only want to use, say 6 hours child care per day. CCB will be payable for the full ten hours. Maximum CCB for ten hours is $39.90, leaving the parent to pay $30.10 per day, or just over $60 for the two days. No CCR would be received, as this is available only to employed parents. Many services charge more than $70 per day, and out of pocket expenses rise accordingly. If the service charge $90 per day, for example, the daily out of pocket cost to a non-employed parent would be just over $50 per day – clearly out of the range of a mother on Parenting Payment (Single) where the base rate is about $300 per week, plus Family Tax Benefits.

Parents receiving income support payments such as Newstart or Parenting Payment, and who are studying, training or undertaking rehabilitation in order to enter the workforce are eligible for additional assistance through Jobs,

Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance (often called JET child care). JET child care pays most of the gap fee for these parents while they are undertaking 'approved activities'. Parents must make a co-contribution of $1 for each hour of care. Parents participating in Helping Young Parents or Supporting Jobless Families[2] or who are teenage parents attending school pay a co-contribution of ten cents per hour of care.

Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) provides additional assistance in situations where a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect, or a family is experiencing exceptional short-term financial hardship which has substantially reduced their capacity to pay child care fees. Services can approve SCCB for a maximum of 13 weeks. After that, Centrelink can approve an extension of the benefit, in 13-week periods, for up to a total of 52 weeks. Administrative barriers (such as the requirement that the cost of the SCCB should not exceed 18% of total fee reductions in the acquitted statement) limit flexibility, especially if there are a significant number of children who might be eligible.

Grandparent Child Care Benefit covers the total fee charged for approved care (up to 50 hours per week) for eligible grandparents who are the primary carers of their grandchildren and have responsibility for day-to-day decisions about their grandchildren's care, welfare and development. In principle, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents could be eligible for Grandparent Child Care Benefit, and thus free child care, but in practice the complexities of demonstrating that they are primary carers deters many from applying (Brennan et al., 2013).

Child Care Rebate

Child Care Rebate (CCR) assists working families by covering 50 per cent of out-of-pocket costs; that is, 50 per cent of fees less any entitlement to CCB and JET Child Care. CCR is not income-tested. It provides the highest levels of assistance to families who spend the most on 'approved' services. For example, a family able to outlay $15,000 on approved ECEC receives Child Care Rebate worth $7,500 each year from the Commonwealth. Substantial family expenditure effectively draws an additional $7,500 from the pubic purse, meaning that the child in question has a total of $15,000 (from private and public sources combined) spent on his or her early education.

CCB and CCR were designed to complement Australia's 'mainstream' market-based child care system. They are individualised subsidies that position parents as consumers shopping for a service in a competitive market place – not as members of a mutually supportive community. The idea behind subsidies of this type is that consumers discipline the market by shopping for the services that best suit their needs, withdrawing their custom from poor quality services and

[2] Helping Young Parents (HYP) and Supporting Jobless Families (SJF) are Commonwealth government programs targeted at recipients of Parenting Payment who live in ten specific Local Government Areas. HYP if for parents aged 19 years or less while SJF is for those under 23 years who have been receiving income support for two years or more and not working or studying and who have a child aged five years or under.

thus signalling to providers what kind of care they are seeking and what they are prepared to pay.

Application of CCB and CCR to BBFs and ACFCs

The CCB model was introduced in 2000 as part of the shift in Commonwealth funding away from the community-based, non-profit sector and towards private for-profit long day care (Brennan, 1998). Reliance upon CCB and CCR for core funding would be inappropriate for most BBF and ACFC services. These are not conventional or mainstream 'childcare' centres; nor do they aspire to be. Imposing the CCB/CCR model could jeopardise the integrated ECEC and family support model that characterises these services and could result in the exclusion of the most vulnerable children and families – the very children and families for whom these services were designed.

Under the CCB model, minor administrative and clerical errors such as misquoting a Customer Reference Number or inconsistent spelling of child's name can result in families missing out on CCB. This is inappropriate in service contexts where the primary aim is to engage children and families in supportive ways and potentially to provide an entry point to more formal services. Across Australia, more than 40% of the population is considered to have poor levels of literacy (ABS, 2006). Poor proficiency in English is far higher in communities with low levels of educational attainment and/or in where English is a third or fourth language (as it is in many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities).

The CCB/CCR model has a number of requirements which impact on families and children as well as service providers. In order to be approved for CCB, services must, amongst other things:

- Operate for at least 8 continuous hours per working day for at least 48 weeks per year
- Provide care for at least 8 continuous hours on each working day
- Register with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Agency and participate in the National Quality Standard.

These requirements are based on a 'mainstream' model where most children have at least one parent who is regularly employed and regular, routine attendance at a service is the norm even for children below school age.

Impacts of the transition to CCB funding

Yarrabah (Queensland) transitioned from BBF to CCB funding in 2005. With almost 1,000 children in the community and 130-150 attending the service each day, DEEWR saw CCB as likely to provide a sustainable funding base. In practice, strict eligibility and administrative requirements made it impossible for Yarrabah to claim CCB for many children. For example:

- The names and birthdates of children and/or carers do not always match Centrelink information
- Immunisation have sometimes lapsed or records are missing
- Children have moved between families without this information being passed on to Yarrabah
- Children exceeded their number of 'allowable absence' days and became ineligible for CCB

As a result of its rapid drop in funding, Yarrabah acquired a $300,000 deficit and had to increase its fees further, excluding more families. The number of children attending has dropped to 40-50 (SNAICC, 2012: 19).

At **Yirrkala** in East Arnhem Land, modelling has shown that fees would need to rise from $20 to $143 per day for the service to operate without a deficit. At **Galiwin'ku**, the fee would need to be $108 per day to break even under the CCB model. Fees of this magnitude are not sustainable in these communities.

Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre (CFC) in Thomastown, Victoria, have calculated that if fees were kept at a level that enables the families most in need to attend, the annual deficit would be $500,000. As an Aboriginal Children and Family Centre, this service is required to offer, "a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs (including) ... child care, early learning and parent and family support services." Absent the extra $500,000 each year, Bubup will need to cut back on staff or programs, both of which will impact negatively on the children and families (SNAICC, 2012: 24).

At **Dala Yaroo** in Bairnsdale, Victoria, the local Gippsland community is seeking to develop 'a unique model of integrated service delivery'. The service is built around a multipurpose community facility focusing on early learning but addressing a wide range of children's and families' needs.

Currently parents attending the kindergarten and playgroup do not pay any fees and the Board and Management are exploring options to keep fees low. However, analysis of the CCB model shows that fees would need to be in the order of $50 per day (before CCB) and that a subsidy of almost $1.4 million over the first three years (($4.8 million over 10 years) would be required to keep fees low, even assuming growth in all elements of the program (CCC, 2013).

Although CCB and CCR are inappropriate as core funding mechanism for BBFs and ACFCs, they may in some circumstances be an appropriate way to fund the 'child care' component of services. Whether this is the case will depend on local circumstances, the range of services provided, the extent to which parents are engaged in the labour market (and indeed, whether there is a labour market for parents to engage in) and other factors relating to the community and the service. The quantum of funding involved in CCB and CCR is something that SNAICC might wish to consider when advocating for new models and funding benchmarks for the BBFs and ACFCs. The most significant of these is the level of per child investment that might be reasonable to lobby for, in light of the Commonwealth's current pattern of expenditure.

The 337 BBFs collectively receive approximately $60 million, or around $178,000 per service. By comparison, a 40-place long day care centre in a major city might have an operating budget of $800,000 to $1,000,000 (including parent fees). This provides a useful starting point for a discussion about appropriate and proportionate levels of funding.

As noted above, a family that outlays $15,000 on approved ECEC is eligible for a non means-tested rebate of $7,500 from the Commonwealth. Effectively, the family's private expenditure of $7,500 is matched by an equal amount from the pubic purse, with the result that $15,000 is invested in the child's early education. Almost 17,000 families earning more than $150,000 a year, including 130 millionaire families, were projected to receive the full rebate in 2012 these included about 130 millionaire families (Karvelas, 2012a and 2012b).

Benchmarks for expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC

Maximum CCB for 50 hours per week = approx. $10,000 per year per child. This is a useful benchmark for expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services. Using this formula, a 30-place service would attract $300,000 per year, a 40-place service $400,000 and so on.

Total expenditure on children whose parents claim full CCR is another useful benchmark. Families that outlay $15,000 per year or more on approved ECEC receive full CCR (**$7,500 per year)**. This provides another valuable benchmark for funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services.[3]

Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB) covers the total fees charged for up to 50 hours per week for each child in CCB approved care. It is available to grandparents who receive income support payments (e.g. Newstart, Age Pension) and who provide daily care for their grandchildren.

Preschool (or kindergarten) is free in several States and Territories.

[3] Although families can receive both CCB and CCR for the same child, in reality, no child will receive the *maximum* amount of each payment in a given year. Maximum CCB requires the parent(s) to be working for 50 hours per week and to have family income under about $42,000 (if one child is in approved care). In order to attract maximum CCB, families need to spend $15,000 on approved ECEC per year – and this is not possible for a really low-income family.

State and Territory funding of preschool (kindergarten)

State and Territory governments use a variety of mechanisms to fund preschools.[4] In some jurisdictions, preschool is funded and delivered by government as part of the education system. In these systems, fees are negligible or non-existent, although voluntary contributions may be requested. In other jurisdictions, government subsidises preschool but it is mainly delivered by non-government organisations (Baxter and Hand, 2013: 6).

According to the OECD, direct supply-side investment by governments in ECEC is the most desirable approach to funding. Supply-side funding results in 'more uniform quality and superior coverage of childhood populations than parent subsidy models'. Parent subsidy models are politically attractive for governments, the OECD argues, but are not as effective in delivering results:

> [D]irect public funding of services brings … more effective control, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity and access and participation than consumer subsidy models (OECD, 2006: 114).

Elements of preschool funding could be considered as possible models in relation to the BBFs and ACFCs. In particular, it is important to note that tens of thousands of children receive *free* or virtually free early childhood education regardless of family income. In general, preschool is free in government schools in Western Australia, South Australia, the ACT and NT (Urbis, 2012). In jurisdictions where preschool is free, parents are often encouraged to make a voluntary contribution but not doing so does not result in the child's exclusion, as it does in CCB-funded child care services where parents cannot pay fees.

A note on free vs. low cost provision

In this author's view, services for children and families served by the BBFs and ACFCs should be delivered free to families just as preschool is provided free in four states and territories across Australia. Given the historical treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the depth and persistence of disadvantage experienced by many and the documented benefits that will accrue from participation in high quality ECEC, the case for free service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is compelling. In the model outlined below, however, the possibility of parents making a modest contribution has been retained in order to respect the results of the consultations.

[4] The term 'preschool' is used for sessional early education services in New South Wales, ACT and Northern Territory; 'kindergarten' is used in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania; both terms are used in Queensland and South Australia

Would 'mainstream' funding represent social inclusion?

Would the application of 'mainstream' Commonwealth funding models to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused services be a path to social inclusion?[5] Social inclusion does not mean the imposition of a 'one size fits all' funding model. The following comment by researchers exploring ways to include vulnerable families in antenatal care and early childhood services explains why:

> Inclusive services are easy to reach and use, and work to assist all-comers. They acknowledge people's shared humanity, celebrate diversity and promote acceptance, belonging and participation. Inclusive services also recognize people's different needs and the inequalities in people's level of power and their control over resources, and attempt to counteract these inequalities. In their ideal form, therefore, inclusive services not only ensure they engage all people within their programs, but act as agents for social change, working to overcome deprivation and disadvantage (at times through positive discrimination strategies) to promote social inclusion (Carbonne et al., 2004).

Key messages

1. Providing free early childhood education to children participating in BBFs and ACFCs would extend to them a benefit already enjoyed by tens of thousands of children Australia who access free preschools and kindergartens.

2. An unknown number of children receive free ECEC Commonwealth approved services through Special Child Care Benefit and Grandparent Child Care Benefit.

3. Maximum Child Care Benefit ($10,000 a year) and/or Maximum Child Care Rebate ($7,500 a year) provide useful benchmarks for considering appropriate levels of support for children participating in BBFs and ACFCs.

4. Free services and/or substantial public and private investment in children's early learning is already the norm for many children in this country.

5. Substantial additional investments in the BBF and ACFCs is required in order to bring national investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early education into line with the funding of 'mainstream' services.

[5] Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use 'mainstream' services (Productivity Commission 2013).

5. Towards new program and funding models

The services under discussion have much in common, despite being established with distinct objectives. The BBFs offer flexible, integrated services that are deeply embedded in local communities and designed to meet their needs. Similarly, under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Child Development, the ACFCs are expected to provide 'a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs' including 'child care, early learning and parent and family support services'. They are to 'be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems' and 'community engagement … is integral to their successful implementation' (COAG, 2009c: 4).

The official objective of the BBF program does not adequately reflect the goals and aspirations that underpin BBFs. It is 'to provide access to childcare in communities where mainstream or conventional childcare services are not available or viable, and where there is a need for culturally competent services, in particular Indigenous focused services' (ANAO, 2010: 39). In light of Australia's new policy agenda around ECEC and measures to 'close the gap', it is time to revise the objective. A new program objective should address the following issues:

1. The current objective defines services by what they are *not* (i.e. not 'mainstream', not 'conventional') rather than what they *are*.
2. The BBFs and ACFCs are mainstream services for the communities they serve. They provide far more than 'childcare' and the wording of a revised program objective should recognize this.
3. The focus on 'childcare' is out of step with Australia's current policy emphasis on the integration of education and care.
4. Appropriately resourced high quality early education should be a core offering in all Commonwealth funded ECEC services.
5. The objective implies that 'culturally competent' services are only required outside the mainstream whereas every service in Australia should be 'culturally competent'.

The new objective should recognise that the BBFs and ACFCs are mainstream services for the communities they serve and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to maintain their cultural identity within early childhood settings. The wording below is offered as a suggestion and is not intended to be prescriptive.

Proposed objective
To work with local communities to provide integrated child, family and community centred services that offer flexible supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and remote children and their families. A core offering of all services should be quality early learning for preschool children, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and delivered in a way that is culturally safe, respectful of local traditions and community-controlled.

The objective is intended to complement the funding model outlined below and to respect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family support services. Such diversity is essential if services are truly to respond to local needs. Neither the objective nor the funding models are intended to promote any particular service model, or to prescribe the elements that services should include.

The model is designed to support a range of integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family support services including mobile services that do not operate out of a building or centre. It provides a platform for funding mobile services and playgroups that play a vital role in some remote areas characterised by large distances and low population density. The second would apply to services for rural/remote areas and/or mobile children's services. Like the populations in which they are embedded, these services have diverse needs, and are not amenable to a single 'model'. Due to factors such as their size, location, community context and opening hours they have different needs to centres such as MACS, ACFCs, preschool and long day care centres, and therefore require a different model.

Crucially, the model is not only about funding. Services funded under this umbrella would be required to incorporate and express certain fundamental values in order to operate successfully.

a) **Incorporation of identity and culture**
   The service acknowledges, affirms, incorporates and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture – particularly the culture of the local area – in all that they do. The service incorporates culture on an everyday, incidental basis by focusing on developing children's identity, sense of belonging and pride within their community, family and culture.

b) **Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities**
   The service acknowledges that children's development cannot be viewed in isolation, but is intimately connected with the development, strength and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. The ability of the service to assist in strengthening families and the community through support and capacity development is therefore integral to helping grow up strong children. The focus is also clearly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

c) **Community controlled governance**
   The service governance model supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and ownership, incorporating active participation of and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

d) Strengths based, quality service provision

The service builds on existing family and community strengths and expertise, recognising their unique qualities and context. It uses local cultures and languages to develop children's and families' capacity, confidence and pride. It recognises and values quality within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services – which may look different to quality in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family services.

e) Holistic and responsive to community needs

The service seeks to cater for each child's unique developmental needs as part of an integrated approach to the program. A range of services beyond child care and development programs, including health, family support and capacity building, nutrition and early intervention, are also provided. Programs and approaches are targeted to the specific needs and context of their local community. This involves the capacity to adapt to short-term needs and/or changing community dynamics.

f) Community not service focused

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are about meeting the needs of *all* children in the community. Services do not focus solely on children attending the service but seek to reach all children who may be in need in the community. This is achieved, for example, through outreach, mobile services, and provision of care to children visiting the community. This 'community approach' to child care is consistent with a 'traditional' Indigenous approach. This principle is supported within the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, which states that a key element of a responsive early childhood services is 'active service outreach into the community'.

The service also values and fosters its role as a community development organisation. It works to build a stronger community through nurturing strong, positive local leadership and an enabled and skilled local workforce, encouraging community ownership of and engagement with services, fostering a sense of belonging for families and the community with the service acting as a 'gathering place', and supporting community and family capacity as outlined in (a).

g) Support for learning and information-sharing in and across sectors, and innovation

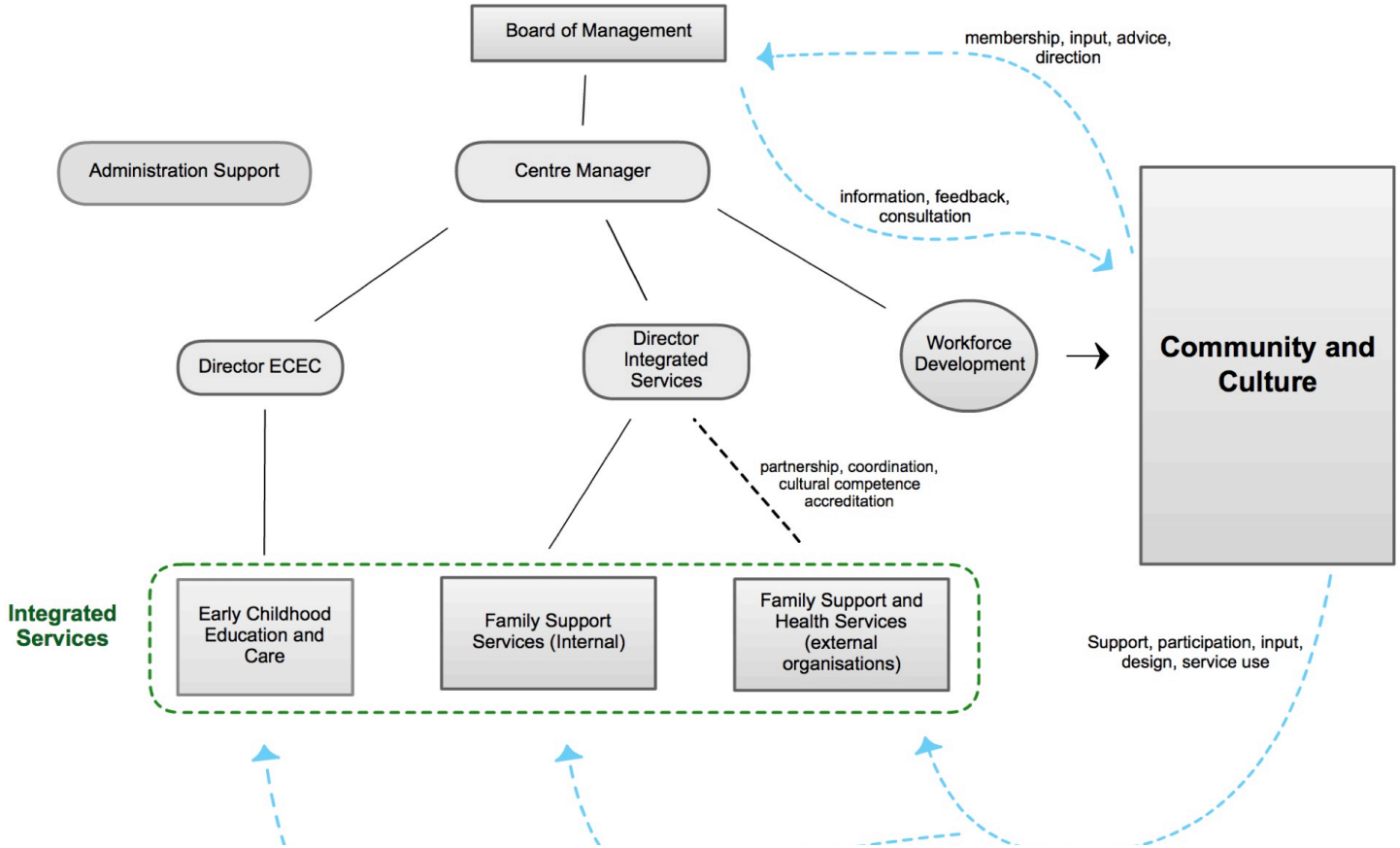
Ongoing learning within an early childhood service means that educators and staff 'become co-learners with children, families and communities, and value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders'. This involves educators working within a cycle of reflection in which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated.

h) Sustainability

Services must be supported by sustainable foundations, encompassing:

i. ***Local workforce development***: service designs enable capacity building for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations. Training and workforce development for local community members are central in ensuring a skilled, qualified, long-term and culturally appropriate workforce who understand the local culture and community.
ii. ***Adequate long term funding***: Planning for sustainable, long-term funding is crucial to ensure ongoing, viable service delivery, community ownership and to facilitate and foster community planning in the long-term. Funding bodies must make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery (and that) Government is up-front and transparent about future funding arrangements.
iii. ***Operational structures and systems that are determined by services and respond to service context****:* To be able to respond to and engage with children and families requires flexibility within funding and administrative arrangements. Flexible frameworks and service contracts to enable local service design that reflects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations, and responds to children and family needs.
iv. ***Ownership or long-term control of land and building****:* Ownership or long-term control (i.e. a minimum 50 year lease) of the land and building from which a service operates is crucial for the stability and sustainability of a service. This supports self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and enables services to design and implement long-term program and service delivery.

MODEL 1: Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood and Family Support Service



Components and associated resources

The components are not intended to limit services to providing particular services, or prevent them from providing other features uniquely designed for their own local context. Instead, it is intended to *illustrate* the components of an effective integrated early childhood service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The components of any particular service would need to be based on the needs identified within the relevant community.

No.	Components	**Resource inputs** for a service operating for 50 weeks p/a, 5 days per week, 8am – 6pm.
1.	Strong, holistic service ➢ Strong governance – community control and community driven ➢ Accountability to community ➢ Long-term financial sustainability ➢ Compliance with relevant laws and funding agreements, and ensuring these are appropriate to community context ➢ Ongoing learning & PD ➢ Capacity building for local staff	Allocation of: ➢ 12 days p/a per staff member funded for professional development, staff wellbeing, strategic service planning (as opposed to weekly) and ongoing learning activities – as well as backfill whilst staff are participating in such events. ➢ Advisory Board (approximately 6-8 members) o Associated costs (i.e. catering, printing) for 3 x community forums p/a o Associated costs (i.e. catering, printing) for 12 x Advisory Board meetings p/a o 2 professional development sessions per year (for approximately 6-8 people) ➢ Rent (nb: this will vary according to each location) ➢ Utilities ➢ Repairs/maintenance and waste disposal ➢ Administrative expenses (including accounting, auditing, advertising, bank fees, staff amenities, Fringe Benefits tax, communications, IT, public liability and professional indemnity, insurance, licensing fees, management costs, office supplies, postage, printing, travel) ➢ Medical/first aid supplies ➢ Centre Manager ➢ Unqualified trainees ➢ Administrative assistant ➢ Director ECEC ➢ Director Integrated Family Services ➢ Bus driver/maintenance worker (as per Component 6)

		➢ Cleaner
2.	Parenting roles and supports and relationships	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker
3.	Information and referrals	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker
4.	Early years learning program (0-5)	➢ Director ECEC ➢ Pedagogical leader (role held either by Director ECEC or additional teacher) ➢ Qualified staff as per ratios, including additional staff (as per Table 2 below) ➢ Higher staff-child ratios (as per Table 2 below) ➢ Resources (art/craft supplies, learning resources, etc.) ➢ Meals (including breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch) (as per Component 7 below)
5.	Culture ➢ Reflects culture and uses language ➢ Embraces local cultural beliefs and practices ➢ Develops systems, processes and programs relevant to local Aboriginal families (including administration, fee setting and collection and management) ➢ Community involved in planning for service	➢ Budgetary allocation for annual sum for service to use on activities related to culture Suggested amount: $20,000 p/a ➢ Advisory Board (as per Component 1) This amount is to be allocated as a lump sum p/a for services to use as appropriate for their context. Recognizing the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, activities services may choose to run with these funds include but are not limited to language/art/craft, music and dance sessions, visits by Elders and/or other community members, NAIDOC, NAICD or other community cultural celebrations, or the purchasing of specific cultural resources
6.	Transition to school	➢ Budgetary allocation p/a to deliver a transition program (including ECEC staff time, excursions to school, provisions for family meetings, etc. of $10,000 p.a. ➢ Family Support Worker
7.	Access ➢ Days and times open to ensure availability when need arises	➢ Service open 50 weeks p/a, 5 days per week, 8am – 6pm ➢ Transport o Purchase/upgrade of 12-49 seat bus (or other vehicle, such as four-wheel drive, as

	➢ Transport service ➢ Affordable to families – access for families is the priority, with fee amount to be negotiated by each service in accordance with their local context and community	needed by local community) o Conversion of vehicle to comply with child safety regulations o Regular maintenance o Depreciation ➢ Bus driver/maintenance worker (as per Component 1) ➢ Set minimum fee of $5 per child per day, with service then given flexibility to determine whether to raise this. ➢ Meals (including breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch) (as per Component 3 above)
8.	Early intervention programs	➢ Budgetary allocation of $10,000 p/a for service to determine how to spend (for example on particular allied health service of importance to the community that cannot be accessed for free) ➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker
9.	Intensive support and care ➢ Extra staff ➢ Provision of food	➢ Low staff ratios – see Table 2 below ➢ Provision within budget for breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch ➢ Cook ➢ Nappies, hygiene supplies, etc.
10.	Outreach and family engagement ➢ To all families with young children in the community, even those whose children do not attend the early education program ➢ To children of prisoners	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker
11.	Family Support services	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker Each community will have unique family support needs, and so this model does not seek to prescribe what family supports should be funded. Component 11 is taken to include, but not be limited to, the provision of services such as: ➢ Family violence

		➢ Family counseling ➢ Maternal care In-home support ➢ Drug & alcohol ➢ Parenting groups for behavioral issues ➢ Play groups ➢ Family workers ➢ Family literacy and numeracy ➢ Support for aunties & grandparents caring for kids
12.	Community development activities	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Director ECEC ➢ Family Support Worker ➢ Budgetary allocation p/a for service to spend as they want (for e.g. NAIDOC, NAICD, community BBQs, etc.).
13.	Health services	➢ Director Integrated Services ➢ Family Support Worker Health services could include, but are not limited to, the following: ➢ Immunization ➢ Screening & development checks ➢ Maternal & infant health ➢ Speech pathology ➢ Occupational therapy
14.	Care ➢ Respite for parents	➢ Allocation of 2 places for 2 half days per week (i.e. one full day in total) for children in need, with no fees charged. As an example of this, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA) has cost-free places for two half-days per week to support two children from the local women's shelter.
15.	Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations	➢ Centre Manager ➢ Director Family Support Services ➢ Director ECEC services ➢ Design/delivery of training sessions for mainstream organisations (remunerated, so does

		not need to be costed)
16.	Workforce development	➢ Centre Manager ➢ Early childhood trainees ➢ Allocated amount for trainees/educators to study for qualifications (including tuition fees, books and resources and back pay to cover staff absence whilst studying)

Remoteness allocation

An allocation for remoteness will be available for services located in areas classified as 'Remote Australia' and 'Very Remote Australia', as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure. The allocation is to cover elements including but not limited to:

- Higher wages and staff costs (i.e. for housing, incentive packages) to be able to provide competitive, appealing packages that compete with government contracts
- Travel time and associated costs to attend training and study
- Higher cost of food, equipment and supplies
- Higher transport costs to reach children in remote communities
- Provision of staff housing.

Staffing

The outline below shows examples of needs for 15, 30, 45 and 70 place services. These examples of service numbers are not intended to define or limit the number of families and children a service may however cater for – they are merely to be used to show an *example* of the staffing needs for different service types for costing purposes. This model recognises and supports the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognises that each community will have different and unique needs from their early childhood service. Note that positions are full-time unless otherwise stated (e.g. 0.5).

Table 1. Staffing for all non-early childhood education and care components

Family numbers are based on the average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility rate of 2.7 children (2011 Census, ABS).

Service size	**15 place (6 families)**	**30 place (12 families)**	**45 place (17 families)**	**70 place (26 families)**
Centre Manager	1	1	1	1
Director Integrated Services	1	1	1	1
Family Support Worker	0.5	1	1.5	2
Cook	0.5	1	1.5	2
Cleaner	0.5	0.7	1	2
Admin. staff	1	1	1.5	2
Bus driver/ maintenance worker	0.5	1	1	2
Vehicle	12 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	23 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	49 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	49 seater and 12 seater (or other vehicles appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)

Table 2. Staffing for Components 4 (Early Years Program) and 6 (Transition to School)

Service size	**15 place**			**30 place**			**45 place**			**70 place**		
Age (months)	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above
No. children	4	5	6	8	10	12	12	20	23	15	25	30
No. Cert III level educators			-	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2
No. Diploma level educators	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	2	1	2	2	2
No. Teachers	-	-	-		1	1		1	1	1	2	2
No. unqualified trainees (not included in ratios)	1			2			3			4		
Director ECEC (not included in ratios)	1			1			1			1		
Additional teacher	1			1			2			2.5		
Additional educator (Diploma level)	-			1			0.5			1		

Fees

In regards to service fees, the fundamental priority must always be access for children and families. Services have raised two considerations:

- Services must not be forced, due to budgetary restrictions, to set their fees at a level that deters or prevents families from accessing the service. Fees must be set by the service itself according to the local context; but
- Having no fees is not an appropriate option for all services. Fees – however small - can be an important part of demonstrating to parents/carers the value of early childhood services, and raising parents'/carers' self-esteem in regards to their role to contribute to their children's development.

The proposed solution is that services raise a proportion of the service budget (say, 5%) with the balance funded by Government. Services could raise funds through a variety of methods including fees, fundraising and provision of in-kind services. If the service were not able to raise the required 5% in a given year, children would not be penalised by closure of the service. The ultimate priority must be to keep services open and to keep children, families and communities connected. The viability of a range of services – not only long day care – needs further exploration.

MODEL 2: Flexible and mobile support for remote and isolated children and families

This model would be appropriate for services that do not necessarily include a 'bricks and mortar' structure, such as mobile playgroups, 'roving preschools' and other services that go *to* children and families rather than operating from fixed premises. Such services require highly flexible funding, which would usually have an early childhood hub or space as a foundation. The hub might be a physical space, a virtual space or even a vehicle, which is used to deliver early childhood services and parenting support. Other services can be aligned with this 'hub', depending on community needs, wishes and context.

Components
The services offered might include any combination of the following programs and features as well as others not listed here:

- Transport
- Nutrition program
- Respite care services
- Family space – for example for families and children to shower, have breakfast etc. before school or work
- Parenting/family support
- Allied health services
- Family/parent educational programs

Fees
Due to the hours they operate (often non-regular hours/days), and the communities they operate in, fees at services such as these can vary from $0-10 dollars per day. Considerable thought therefore needs to be given to the extent to which they can charge fees, or raise finances themselves.

Staffing
Recruiting sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff is a huge challenge for these types of services, particularly those operating in remote areas (which face the additional burden of staff housing). Child-to-educator ratios (both for numbers and for qualification levels) can be challenging, and often impossible, to comply with. To ensure that these centres can remain open, flexibility is essential.

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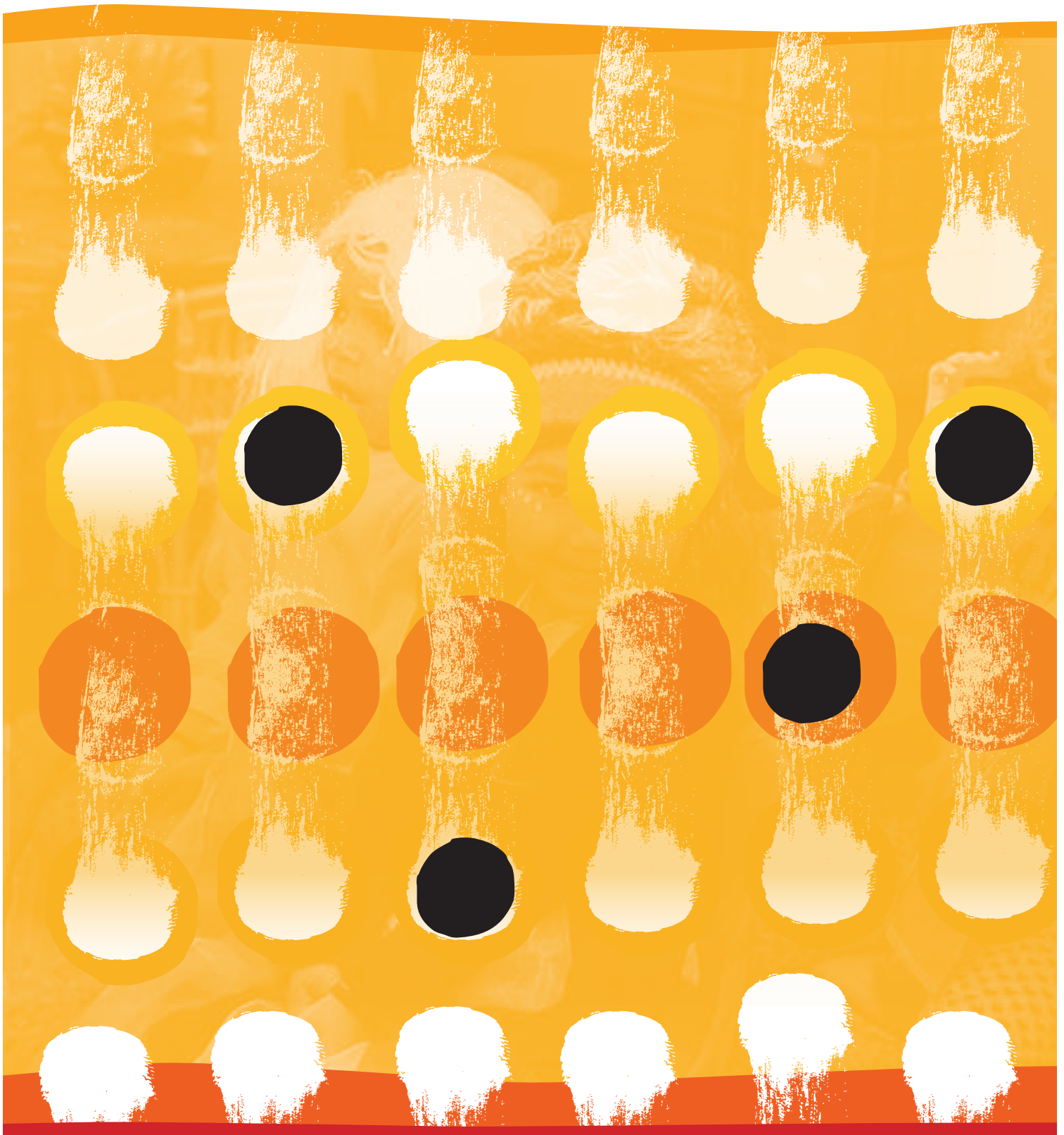

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