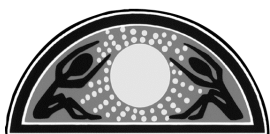




Coming Together: The journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

June 2012

IKANBALA.



SNAICC

Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

SNAICC acknowledges the significant time and expertise that service integration leaders have contributed through their participation in interviews that inform this report. SNAICC appreciates their support.

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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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1. Introduction

Building from the recent SNAICC literature review on *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*,¹ this paper applies an initial understanding of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to current experiences in integrated service design, development and delivery. It draws significantly on the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery and integration leaders. In this way, the paper provides a uniquely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on what is necessary for integration that leads to high quality service, and contributes to wellbeing and positive development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

This paper is grounded in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community contexts and the practical needs of communities to address the challenges and disadvantage that their peoples experience. Specifically, it focuses on the integration processes occurring in the development of the 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established under the *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. These Centres were proposed within a framework of management, governance and service systems integration,² and provide a solid context to view and envision aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Whilst service integration aspects described in the paper and accompanying recommendations have broader implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery, they are of particular relevance to the development and operation of the Centres.

Common issues, challenges, and practice ideas from the Centres are presented to inform understanding and open discussion about effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This paper is a starting point and should be read as such, recognising that the Centres are newly developing, this is a complex and new issue, and that there is a limited body of evidence to inform effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. SNAICC invites participation of all stakeholders in ongoing efforts to define and deepen common understanding of what is required for effective service integration in these contexts. SNAICC looks forward to ongoing future collaboration with the Centres in this regard to progress the ideas presented in this paper. The paper also acknowledges that there can be no single model of service integration, as local design to respond to local need is a central tenet of integrated service development. However, common issues experienced and fundamental principles for service development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are ultimately informative of broader structural supports required, as well as providing practical ideas for individual service design.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are targeted to support children's development in the early years of life. A strong body of evidence indicates that later developmental outcomes and social functioning in adulthood are strongly linked to experiences in the early years, and that investments in preventative early

¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

² Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

years programmes have the greatest positive impact over-time and are most cost-effective.³ Service integration seeks to place the child in the context of family and community, ensuring that early years services are connected and collaborate with the range of family and community support services that contribute to a safe, positive and supportive developmental environment for children. It requires a broad service design focus that goes beyond traditional models of early childhood education and care to new ways of collaborative working between the range of health and family support services that contribute to holistic child and family wellbeing.

The aspects of effective service integration that this paper describes are supportive of and informed by broader government frameworks that recognise the importance and value of partnerships for integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They provide guidance for implementation of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* in its strategy to 'implement an integrated approach to service design and delivery across the lifecycle and spectrum of need,'⁴ and reinforce its recognition that, 'in order to provide culturally appropriate responses, strategies developed under the National Framework need to be based on partnerships between Indigenous families and communities, and between Indigenous agencies, mainstream service providers and governments.'⁵ The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)* service delivery principles for services and programs for Indigenous Australians are a specific and significant informant of integration aspects.⁶ Its seven core principles of priority, Indigenous engagement, sustainability, access, integration and accountability, are considered throughout this paper.

Two significant lenses are applied to the analysis of service integration: the lens of genuine and respectful partnerships; and the lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community control. Through these lenses SNAICC identifies building blocks for the development of partnerships for effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These are detailed in relation to each aspect of service integration. The building blocks reflect varied models and ideas for achieving integration in different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts, and are presented as ideas to inform ongoing discussion of what is needed to support and achieve effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

³ Mustard (2005) and Shonkoff & Phillips (2000) in Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1), 1; Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 9; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010); Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1).

⁴ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf

2. Methodology

This paper draws on four key research processes or papers to describe aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The two separate research papers below should be referred to for a broader understanding of the evidence base that informs this paper.

1. A comprehensive review of the literature on integrated child and family service delivery, including a particular focus on approaches to integrating services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This review draws significantly on the evaluation of leading Australian integration initiatives.
SNAICC (2012) Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and Families. Melbourne.
2. Case-study based research which reviews the principles and practices that enable genuine partnership relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream service providers and government. This research is highly relevant to the integration approach, recognising that partnership development is a core aspect of effective service integration.
SNAICC (2012) Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs. Melbourne.
3. Focus interviews with leaders in service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to further interrogate aspects identified in the literature in the context of current Australian integration initiatives. The leaders selected were engaged in the development of the 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established under *the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Leaders were selected to represent on-the-ground realities in the development of five different Children and Family Centres. These included centres in three different Australian states and in urban, regional and remote service development contexts. A discussion paper based on the SNAICC literature review was developed and provided to participants to guide discussions.
4. Perspectives shared and expressed by leaders in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and other expert contributors to the *National Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum* held in Melbourne on 31 May 2012. These were captured through participation and recording by SNAICC researchers at the conference and notes made available by conference organisers.

The methodology focuses on identifying, within each of these sources, the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations on effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the design and delivery of integrated services and supports their right to self-determination. The need for an approach grounded in self-determination is detailed in section 5 below and reinforced throughout the paper.

3. The context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres

The 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are a key initiative of all Australian Governments to achieve service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Centres provide an opportunity to implement the *NIRA* service delivery principles for services and programs to Indigenous Australians, including the integration principle. This principle calls for greater levels of collaboration between all levels of government and between services in developing responses that are sensitive to local contexts.⁷ The initiative was specifically identified as a priority action under the *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, which described the overarching vision for integrating services within the Centres:

'The Children and Family Centres will provide a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs, and include child care, early learning and parent and family support services. The operations of the Children and Family Centre will be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems. Community engagement with the Children and Family Centres is integral to their successful implementation.'⁸

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* adopts a public health model and aims to integrate services 'across the lifecycle and spectrum of need.'⁹ It seeks to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect through a primary focus on preventative supports for all children and families.¹⁰ This approach is based on the assumption that 'by providing the right services at the right time vulnerable families can be supported, child abuse and neglect can be prevented, and the effects of trauma and harm can be reduced.'¹¹ The *Framework* identifies the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as a major initiative to expand service access and a key strategy to achieve outcome 5, that 'Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.'¹²

As a highly significant and targeted initiative to address disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through integrated service delivery, these new Centres provide a solid context to view and envision aspects of effective integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They also present as a critical context to ensure that the significant investment of funds, and efforts by government and communities, to achieve service integration, lead to the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families over time.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are all in early stages of service development, with only three centres having commenced operating out of purpose built premises as of June 2012, and a number of services having established initial

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁹ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. 18. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid. 12.

¹¹ Ibid. 17.

¹² Ibid.

operations in temporary locations. With individual state and territory governments taking responsibility for the rollout of the Centres, significant diversity in the service frameworks, governance structures, and implementation timelines have emerged. That diversity is reflected throughout this paper. Table 1 below provides an overview of Centre locations.

Table 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre Locations

State/territory	Centre locations	
Australian Capital Territory	1. West Belconnen	
New South Wales	2. Campbelltown	7. Brewarrina
	3. Blacktown	8. Gunnedah
	4. Blacktown (Mt Druitt)	9. Lightning Ridge
	5. Ballina	10. Nowra (Shoalhaven)
	6. Toronto	
Northern Territory	11. Yuendumu	14. Palmerston
	12. Maningrida	15. Ngukurr
	13. Gunbalanya	
Queensland	16. Mornington Island	21. Ipswich
	17. Doomadgee	22. Mackay
	18. Mount Isa	23. Rockhampton
	19. Mareeba	24. Marsden/Logan
	20. Cairns	25. Palm Island
South Australia	26. Ceduna	28. Christies
	27. Whyalla	Beach/Noarlunga
		29. Pukatja
Tasmania	30. Geeveston	31. Bridgewater
Victoria	32. Whittlesea	33. Bairnsdale
Western Australia	34. Halls Creek	37. Roebourne
	35. Fitzroy Crossing	38. Swan Region
	36. Kununurra	

4. The lens of genuine and respectful partnerships

The analysis of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children draws significantly on a partnership framework. Unsurprisingly, as integration is defined as the endpoint on a continuum of increasing collaboration,¹³ partnerships are integral to any integration initiative. They are a cross-cutting consideration as well as a distinct aspect of service integration requiring specific attention.

The literature on integrated service delivery identifies that effective integration requires collaboration and partnerships at different levels including whole of government, regional

¹³ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). 3; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 2; Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March. 132; Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 57.

and local service development, management and coordination.¹⁴ This paper focuses particularly on regional and local level partnerships, while addressing the frameworks and structural support required from higher levels of government to enable those partnerships.

The key relationships most strongly identified from the literature and by service integration leaders as requiring attention for effective integration are:

1. Partnerships between service providers with responsibility for managing or coordinating an integrated service and the government funding body. Depending on local circumstances this may include or extend to partnerships with local government or non-government organisations in temporary auspice roles for a new service.
2. Partnerships between local service providers and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
3. Partnerships between different local service providers, either in consortiums or networks for the development, management and coordination of integrated centres or systems; and as agencies working together in the delivery of an integrated service.

This paper interrogates the challenges in fostering, developing and maintaining these partnership relationships throughout the process of integration and in ongoing integrated service delivery. The direct relationship between government funding bodies and communities also impacts integration processes, especially in the early stages of community consultation to define service specifications prior to tender to a local service provider. However, integration leaders more commonly describe this relationship in terms of its impact on the other three relationships described above, and hence it is analysed through that impact, rather than directly.

The partnership framework used to analyse these relationships is based on the principles for the development of respectful and genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, mainstream service providers and government identified in previous SNAICC research.¹⁵ These principles are described in the specific focus on partnerships as a core aspect of service integration in section 7.2 below. By applying this framework to the understanding of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is possible to identify concrete and practical stages in the development of partnerships that support the integration process. These stages are detailed in the 'partnership building blocks' tables in section 7 and collated in the table in section 8 that tracks partnership development across the processes of integrated service design, development, management, operation, and long-term planning.

5. The lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community control

Throughout this paper there is a focus on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community participation, building community capacity for leadership and governance, and establishing community-control of integrated services, either initially or in

¹⁴ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17, 15-16.

¹⁵ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 19.

line with local capacity development. This issue is addressed specifically here because it is consistent with the original concept of the Children and Family Centres and because of its significance to ensuring that integrated services are accessible, appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community-control of integrated services is one of the fundamental aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.¹⁶

SNAICC has noted with concern a lack of clear and consistent federal direction in the support and establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled governance structures for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. The priority to address this issue is informed by the principle of self-determination, government policy frameworks and national and international best practice.

By virtue of their right to self-determination, article 3 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 (UNDRIP)*, to which Australia is a signatory, prescribes that, 'Indigenous peoples have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'¹⁷ The *UNDRIP* contains more than 20 provisions affirming Indigenous peoples' right to participate in public decision-making that impacts Indigenous peoples, and a recent report of the Expert Mechanism on the Right of Indigenous Peoples concluded that Indigenous peoples 'have the right to make independent decisions in all matters relating to their internal and local affairs, and to effectively influence external decision-making affecting them if they choose to participate in such processes.'¹⁸ Having regard to the significant focus on providing early childhood education and care services within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres, the specific rights in article 14 of the *UNDRIP* also apply: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.'¹⁹

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC)* provides further guidance on the requirement for Indigenous participation in decision-making that impacts Indigenous children's rights.²⁰ The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child described in its general comment 11 that the principle of the best interests of the child in article 3 of the *CRC* should be considered in relation to collective cultural rights of Indigenous peoples.²¹ As a result the Committee concluded that, 'As regards legislation, policies and programmes that

¹⁶ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

¹⁷ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007), Article 3.

¹⁸ *Final Report of the study of indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making*, Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 17 August 2011, A/HRC/18/42, Retrieved 15 June 2012 from: http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=a%2Fhrc%2F18%2F42&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ohchr.org%2Fenglish%2Fbodies%2Fhrcouncil%2Fdocs%2F18sessi%2F18-HRC-18-42_en.pdf&ei=WYbqTu2jOoGtiQePzPWJBw&usg=AFQjCNE0XmJlTieJSwWNeuRxi74qvTlw&sig2=BFLj563Ik-6Fa0HodcQF0w&cad=rja. 23.

¹⁹ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007), Article 14.

²⁰ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25 (1989)

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 11, Indigenous Children and their Rights under the Convention*, 2009, CRC/C/GC/11, 12 February 2009, 31.

affect indigenous children in general, the indigenous community should be consulted and given an opportunity to participate in the process on how the best interests of indigenous children in general can be decided in a culturally sensitive way. Such consultations should, to the extent possible, include meaningful participation of indigenous children.²² Given the priority for addressing broader health and wellbeing of children through integrated services, the Committee's comments on Indigenous children's rights to health are also relevant. The Committee concluded that in achieving ease of access to health care services for Indigenous children, health services 'should to the extent possible be community based and planned and administered in cooperation with the peoples concerned.'

The relevance of self-determination to service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is further reinforced by strong international evidence that the best outcomes in community well-being and development for Indigenous peoples are achieved where those peoples have control over their own lives and are empowered to respond to and address the problems facing their own communities.²³ Numerous reports and inquiries in Australia have consistently confirmed a lack of robust community governance and meaningful Indigenous community participation as major contributors to past failures of Government policy and highlighted the need to build capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.²⁴ A recent report of the Australian National Audit Office further highlighted that building the role and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is not only important for effective service delivery, but an important policy objective in its own right in so far as it promotes local governance, leadership and economic participation, building social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁵

It is important to note that in this context community-control does not mean entirely separate or isolated service delivery by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This paper highlights the critical role of government and culturally competent mainstream service providers in service delivery and service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This role requires the development of respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and the priority for community-control described here interacts strongly with the partnership lens described in section 4 above. There is no universal definition of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service in Australian public policy. However, the definition of a community-controlled health service developed by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) provides clear guidance:

²² Ibid.

²³ Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Retrieved 15 July 2012 from: <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview>

²⁴ See for example: NSW Ombudsman (2011) *Addressing Indigenous Disadvantage: the need to do things differently*. Sydney, NSW Ombudsman, 4; R Wild and P Anderson (2007) *Little Children are Sacred*, Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Northern Territory Government. 142-143; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing.

²⁵ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing. 17.

'An Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service is:

- An incorporated Aboriginal organisation
- Initiated by a local Aboriginal community
- Based in a local Aboriginal community
- Governed by an Aboriginal body which is elected by the local Aboriginal community
- Delivering a holistic and culturally appropriate health service to the Community which controls it.²⁶

Two integration leaders provide useful descriptions of what community-control means in their context:

'When we talk community-control we're not trying to say we want it and we don't want to share it. We want self-determination. If we're truly going to be well people we have to be self-determining. Everybody needs that agency and we don't have it.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service provider

*'[They] should be the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business...We choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do...the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to [them] when they're ready for that.'*²⁷

Mainstream service provider

SNAICC notes positively that a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres have been tendered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, or have a clearly identified future goal to transition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community management. Many centres are also significantly informed and directed by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference groups. Some centres further have a designated role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation in the delivery of the early childhood education and care component of service delivery. National leadership and commitment across all governments is required to ensure that building capacity for and enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance for the Centres is pursued consistently. With adequate support, resourcing and the development of long-term partnerships for the continued success of these Centres, they have the potential to become genuine sites for self-determination, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are empowered to support and improve outcomes for their own children and families.

6. Alignment with the literature

SNAICC has identified, based primarily on a review of the literature and refined through the focus interviews, the following core aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families:

²⁶ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Retrieved 14 June 2012 from: <http://www.naccho.org.au/definitions/communitycont.html>

²⁷ Refers specifically to the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre in: SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. Appendix A. 99.

1. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach.
2. Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.
3. Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
4. Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

The matrix on the following pages shows the alignment between these core aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and core general aspects of effective integrated services for children and families identified in the SNAICC literature review.²⁸ These core aspects are further elaborated in section 7 below.

²⁸ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

Table 2 – Matrix: Aligning core general aspects of service integration from the literature with core aspects of effective integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Torres Strait Islander Engagement and Partnership						
General Context		Shared Vision	Community-based and owned design and delivery	Assessment and consideration of community strengths, needs and service gaps	Leadership and facilitation	Genuine partnerships
Integration Specific Aspects						
An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach	Genuine consultation to identify local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations. Flexible frameworks and service contracts to enable local service design that reflects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations.	Clearly identified and valued roles in service design and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Adequate and genuine, ongoing community consultation, and input into service development. Flexible government frameworks enable innovative community-based service design.	Service integration actively considers and incorporates existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, skills and knowledge in service design and development. Adequate time for genuine community consultation to identify community needs, capacity, priorities and service gaps.	Clearly identified and valued leadership roles in service governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, including in local service coordination committees and governance bodies of integrated service centres.	Clearly identified and valued roles in service design, delivery and governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, including in local service coordination committees and governance bodies of integrated service centres. Recognition of existing community capacity, cultural knowledge and strengths by government and mainstream service providers.	
Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities	Shared aim to improve long-term wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives in service partnerships. Adequate time for relationship building to build common understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, mainstream service providers and government.	Openness to working differently, recognising that mainstream approaches are frequently not the most effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Commitment to self-determination from all parties involved in service development and delivery. Trust in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop and deliver services for their peoples.	Range of services work together to respond holistically to community needs, and evolve as required. Partnerships seek to address service duplication, and coordinate to develop seamless access and referral pathways. Through partnerships, service integration compliments and builds capacity for existing quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.	Adequately resourced and funded coordination and facilitation roles support process elements integral to partnership development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations have leading roles in facilitating and coordinating service design and delivery partnerships.	Long-term relationships based on trust are fostered. All partners show respect for cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country. All partners demonstrate commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	

General Integration Context Specific Aspects	Shared Vision	Community-based and owned design and delivery	Assessment and consideration of community strengths, needs and service gaps	Leadership and facilitation	Genuine partnerships
Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families	Shared aim to provide holistic support that addresses the specific physical, social, emotional and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Flexible government frameworks enable vision tailored to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and priorities.	Adequate and effective consultation and community-based governance promote community ownership and acceptance. This contributes to increased engagement of families. Access to services through trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is maintained and their role and community engagement expertise is valued.	Service design considers and addresses local service access barriers. Cultural competence for staff and culturally appropriate service approaches inform service and workforce development. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and skills development is a priority.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in service design contributes to appropriately targeted and culturally appropriate service development. Elders and community leaders promote broad community engagement with integrated service centres. Whole of community representation in governance and workforce represent a commitment to neutral, whole of community services.	Valued service delivery roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations contribute to culturally appropriate services. Partnerships contribute to mutual capacity building for culturally appropriate, targeted and quality service provision by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream service providers.
Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities	Aim to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity. All partners in integrated service development have and demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving long-term wellbeing outcomes for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	Adequate and ongoing consultation promotes lasting community ownership of services. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in governance promotes long-term commitment to community wellbeing. Planning for sustainable funding and long-term land tenure ensures ongoing community ownership, and enables long-term community planning.	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity development needs are included in service design. Training and workforce development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is central.	Service integration builds local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity, contributing to local governance, leadership and economic participation. There is a specific focus on building skills for community members to serve on the boards of management of integrated services. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in governance promotes long-term commitment to community wellbeing.	Long-term relationships based on trust promote self-determination. Partnerships contribute to mutual capacity building for culturally appropriate and quality service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Mainstream organisations and government pursue supported handover of service leadership and control to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

7. Integration in practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

This section unpacks what service integration means and requires for quality and accessible service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It addresses each of the four core aspects of service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families that are identified in section 6 above. It provides:

- An explanation of what effective integration requires within each core aspect.
- Identification of partnership building blocks for effective integration that are arrived at by applying the partnership lens described in section 4 above to each core aspect.
- Practice examples that are drawn primarily from the experiences and perspectives of integration leaders involved in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. These are not all practices that have been implemented fully, but incorporate the vision of integration leaders in describing what is required for effective integration in their communities.
- Significant challenges in achieving effective integration, with a particular focus on challenges experienced in the early development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

There is significant overlap in the practices and partnership building blocks that support achievement of each of the integration aspects described in this section. This is not unexpected or undesirable as many effective practices in service integration can contribute to multiple service development objectives.

Concluding each section an analysis examines key issues emerging and the broader structural response and support required from government bodies with responsibility for implementing service integration initiatives. Recommendations address particularly measures that can support the current and future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Unless otherwise referenced, quotes included in this section were provided by service integration leaders who participated in the focus interviews.

7.1 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach actively considers existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, skills and knowledge in the design of integrated services. Adequate time is allocated to consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that local needs, capacity, priorities and service gaps are identified. Consultation is clearly defined, with clear process, roles and responsibilities, to ensure that consultation is genuine, responsive to community needs and aspirations and includes all relevant stakeholders.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations have clearly identified, valued and leading roles in service design, delivery and governance, including in local service

coordination committees and the governance bodies of integrated service centres. Government frameworks and service contracts are flexible to enable locally driven service design that is responsive to local needs and reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations. Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are consulted and included in integration processes and the establishment of new integrated service centres.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has identified key principles for effective and genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As consultation is the bedrock of a community strengths-based approach to the design, development and delivery of integrated services, these principles are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Principles for effective and genuine consultation²⁹

<p>Initial considerations: enter in good faith with a view to long-term working relationships; recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; be aware that consultation is time and resource intensive; be aware of and address existing misinformation and misunderstandings; recognise, understand, acknowledge and respond sensitively to existing alienation from government and government processes.</p>
<p>Effective engagement: involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the outset; acknowledge historical involvement of participants with the issues; ensure effected communities control the timeframe; include all relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, interests and organisations; provide a mechanism to obtain agreement with communities over the process and desired outcome of any proposed measure; understand and respect local dispute resolution and decision-making processes; mutually agreed process utilising local knowledge is necessary for sustainable outcomes and participants must be informed of how their input will be included in decision-making; ensure consultation is structured to achieve quality input, address barriers to participation, and build skills and understanding for participants; protect privacy and confidentiality; and agree with communities on how feedback will be provided and communities kept informed.</p>
<p>Information and transparency: be clear about outcomes sought, risks, costs, benefits and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of the proposed measure; be transparent and have clear parameters, avoiding creating unrealistic community expectations; notice of measures should be given sufficiently in advance for the community to reach informed consent or arrive at considered points of difference; provide full information regarding the parameters of the consultation including what options are being considered.</p>
<p>Implementation, monitoring and evaluation: provide feedback as agreed; explain likely timeframes for implementation; accurately collect and record data during consultations; consider specific, timebound and verifiable benchmarks and indicators to measure progress; notify community when outcomes are announced; evaluate the quality and effectiveness of consultation; appoint an independent observer; establish processes for review of decision-making; publish, evaluate and continually improve</p>

²⁹ Summarised from: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

consultation processes; be approachable, contactable and meet commitments; remember that consent is not valid if obtained through coercion or manipulation and requires that communities are provided with all relevant information.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to interrogate all aspects of genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation. For a fuller understanding of a principled approach, reference should be had to the comprehensive description in Appendix 3 of the *Native Title Report 2009*.³⁰ The broad scope of these principles is indicative of the significant time and effort required to undertake genuine and effective consultation for service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

³⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

Partnership building blocks

Table 4 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based service integration. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: support for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and workforce development; inclusion and capacity building for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services; and defining roles and responsibilities for undertaking genuine consultation.

Table 4 - Partnership building blocks: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Government tender processes for contracts to manage integrated services reflect the importance of local and trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service leadership and delivery. • Initial government consultations are aligned with accepted principles for effective and genuine consultation,³¹ and ensure that initial service specifications enable service providers to respond to community needs, priorities and expectations. • Service providers are included in planning, conducting and responding to ongoing community consultation, recognising that they have responsibility for management, development and delivery of the service. Funders and auspice organisations do not conduct separate consultation processes that may create community expectation in conflict 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing genuine consultation by the service provider through community reference groups enables ongoing community participation in the design and delivery of services, including through meaningful representative decision-making roles. • Integrated service providers have local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of governance to ensure that local needs, priorities and aspirations inform ongoing development and operations. In this way the service provider is an integral part of and directed by the community. The service provider and community are inherently connected, rather than distinct stakeholders • Service providers develop local employment and workforce development strategies to engage and build upon existing community strengths, knowledge and skills. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services have identified and valued roles within integrated service systems and centres. Funded integrated service providers develop respectful partnerships with these existing services with a focus on building their capacity and role in integrated service delivery. • Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services lead integration of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, with mainstream services walking alongside to support the needs and aspirations of the organisation and community. • New integrated service centres work in partnership with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to complement their programs, and to support

³¹ See Table 3 above.

with the role of the service provider and respect their role to manage governance responsibilities.		their growth and development.
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Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 5 below that contribute to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach to service integration. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 5 - Practice examples: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach

Broad community consultation Setting up a reference panel of community members so that input is not just from organisations, and <i>'we try to keep our feet on the ground with what the average mum or dad or carer in the community is able to express and drive the direction of the centre'.</i>	Building on existing local service capacity Existing community-controlled early childhood services move their operations into a new integrated service centre and are provided with support to build on their strengths and increase their capacity. Alternatively, new service centres work in partnership to complement strengths of existing early childhood service providers (including Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services)	Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, skills, and community connections Supporting employment and development of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through local hiring policies, training, mentoring and skills transfer: <i>'In terms of the children and family centre we'll always employ and train up if we have to, to employ local Aboriginal people.'</i>	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-control of service design and delivery Integrated service centres are managed and lead by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations in respectful partnership with mainstream service providers, government, and other local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.
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<p>Local service provider perspectives</p> <p>A community reference panel is made up of a balance of service providers and other local community people to ensure that the expectations of individual community members are balanced with realities of service delivery constraints and responsibilities. This does not displace the need for a strong independent voice, genuine consultation and decision-making roles for community members, and community-controlled service providers.</p>	<p>Whole of community ownership</p> <p>Whole of community ownership is promoted, rather than ownership by a single organisation. A new service centre is viewed by the whole community as an opportunity to bring existing services together and to build on existing service capacity to address identified gaps. The centre is viewed and used as a community resource for a variety of community events and meetings.</p>	<p>Range of services to address needs and service gaps</p> <p>The range of service focus areas and service partnerships are based on community identified needs and service gaps. Examples of service types considered important for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include: maternal and child health, including a focus on pregnant women; speech; hearing; child behaviour; disability; nutrition; social support; child learning and care; family violence; and drug and alcohol programs.</p>	<p>Training and workforce development hubs</p> <p>New integrated centres focus on providing a training and workforce development site and resource for the whole community. This focus addresses workforce capacity gaps for all existing community services.</p>
<p>Clear roles and responsibilities for consultation processes</p> <p>Ongoing community consultation processes are clearly defined and conducted in partnership between funding bodies and service providers. The role of community in informing service design and development is defined in relation to the role of the service provider in delivering services and responding to community needs and expectations.</p>	<p>Community vision established through a community reference group</p> <p>Community reference groups develop a clear vision for the future development of an integrated centre, reflecting the needs and priorities of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local service providers.</p>		

Significant challenges

The following challenges for realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based integration were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- Where an integrated centre is directly operated or auspiced by a government or mainstream agency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities may not receive appropriate recognition and acknowledgement for taking leading roles in service development and community engagement.
'Where is the acknowledgement that Aboriginal people did this. This has become the meeting place for the community and it wasn't the government who got people here and got this up and running.'

This issue can be exacerbated where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities do not have organisational control of and land tenure for a service centre and where there is no future plan to enable this. It contributes to concerns that a centre may not have or maintain a focus on the unique service and community development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over the long-term.

- Problems arise where a new integrated service centre is established without proper assessment of its impact on existing service centres. This has been a significant concern in the establishment of the new Children and Family Centres, where some have been viewed as a threat to existing Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and an initial failure on the part of government to recognise and build on the existing strengths of these services. While some Centres have made positive progress in establishing partnerships and ensuring services complement and build capacity for MACS services, a failure to include them or consider their role in the initial plan for and development of the new Centres remains a concern. The relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and MACS require significant further attention.

'The way government has set us up with the MACS it looks like we're the big kid on the street who's going to squash all the MACS. I don't want that. We need to work in partnership with them. The ways we're working are not new ways, they're the MACS ways.'

- Significant issues arise in community consultation processes when there is a lack of clearly defined roles for the different primary actors, namely, funding bodies, service providers leading or facilitating service integration, and local communities. The expectations of community need to be balanced with the responsibilities and limitations of service delivery organisations through consultation that is conducted by them or in partnership with the funding body. Community consultation processes conducted by funding bodies that do not include service providers can undermine their capacity to meet community expectations, which may be unrealistic.

'From that time on there has been extensive consultation about almost anything and everything, to the point where sometimes it feels like you can't move...The boundaries are not clear. In any consultation process there needs to be some

understanding up front about what's possible and what's not possible and what's consultation and what's information.'

- In some communities there is a shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with adequate skills and qualifications to fill the necessary roles within an integrated service. While local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have strengths in cultural knowledge, community connection and awareness of community needs, they may lack the technical skills, or in some cases, basic literacy skills needed to undertake various roles in child and family service provision. The absence of adequate community workforce development or existing strategies to achieve this is a challenge that especially confronts remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Community expectations for immediate local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment can conflict with the need for employment of professionals from outside the community to ensure workers are adequately qualified in the short-term. An approach that brings in outside professionals needs to be supported by a local workforce development strategy, including training and mentoring for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and skills transfer from outside professionals.
'By the end of the three years we would like to see the project staffed by Aboriginal people who are either local or prepared to be local and also skilling up those people in the meantime. We are creating the employment pathways and the training and mentoring that will ensure that at the end of that period there will be people in place who do have the necessary qualifications and skills.'

Conclusion and Recommendations

Foundational relationships between service providers, government funders, auspice organisations and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations present a recurring challenge identified by integration leaders in the development of integrated services for children and families. Two key aspects impact an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths based approach: the nature, extent and effectiveness of community consultation undertaken by funders, auspice bodies and service providers; and the partnership, and definition of roles and responsibilities, for planning, conducting and responding to consultation between those parties. Attention is needed to ensure that consultation is aligned with principles of effective and genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that stakeholder partnerships are established to support their implementation.

R1 The principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission³² is included within all future service agreements for integrated service design, development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Service contracts clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including government funding bodies, in the consultation process.

R2 All government funding bodies for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres take measures to ensure ongoing consultation for design,

³² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

development and delivery is aligned with the principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission.³³

Integration leaders identify where existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services have been given little consideration in the initial placement and frameworks for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. Significant efforts by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres to build partnerships with existing services and ensure that new Centres complement and contribute to the development and capacity of existing services has been a positive development in some communities. Attention is needed to these relationships to ensure the 'big brother' effect of new and strongly resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres does not displace, but rather builds on and complements the strengths of existing services. Promising approaches to these relationships include:

- utilising new centres as training and development sites that increase overall early childhood workforce capacity for the benefit of all community ECEC services.
- partnering with existing ECEC services to move or extend services to a new centre, where this is appropriate for the goals and geographical focus of the service; and
- long-term planning to build capacity and handover control of an integrated service centre to an existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled provider.

R3 State governments include in future service contracts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres requirements to develop partnerships with a view to complementing, strengthening and building capacity of existing community-controlled ECEC services.

R4 In the review of the budget-based funding (BBF) model, the Australian Government strongly considers the relationship between new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and existing BBF services, and ensures equity of funding for continued survival and growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled ECEC services.

Pursuing local employment strategies remains a challenge in communities where local employment is hampered by the lack of formal qualifications held by people in the community. This also creates additional challenges of having to attract and accommodate outside professionals. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres have experienced significant challenges achieving this in remote communities where there are housing shortages. Service integration leaders commonly identify that local workforce development is key to ensuring that integrated services draw on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths of cultural knowledge and understanding and in caring for their own children and families, by up-skilling local people in key child and family service qualification areas.

Such an approach is consistent with that recommended by the Productivity Commission in its 2011 report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*. The report identified the variety of challenges that ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.³⁴ It recognised the need for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia, 356-358.

‘high levels of cultural competency’, ‘special skills and qualities to work with disadvantaged children’, and local language skills in some remote locations.³⁵ The report concluded for these reasons that, ‘increased employment of Indigenous workers is a critical factor in the delivery of services for Indigenous children.’³⁶

R5 That the Australian Government, together with state and territory governments take immediate steps to implement Recommendation 14.4 of the Productivity Commission report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*:
‘As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce.’

R6 That new integrated service sites for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including the new Children and Family Centres, be funded and utilised for development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service local workforce capacity through strategies including provision of onsite training, partnerships with education and training institutes and the provision of technology-based learning environments for remote and distance learning.

7.2 Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

Service integration aims to bring together different service types and service delivery agencies to enable children and families to access a range of services that respond holistically to their needs. Achieving this level of coordination requires increasing levels of inter-agency and inter-disciplinary collaboration, which relies on the development of effective partnerships. Genuine partnerships that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities require attention to the principles that underpin respectful partnership relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts, including:³⁷

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

³⁵ Ibid, 359.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 19.

Partnerships that enable effective coordination of services for integrated delivery require: adequate time for relationship development; joint service planning and development; inter-agency information sharing and support; and the development of coordinated referral systems. Flexible government frameworks and funding arrangements that provide time and space for these processes to be developed in partnership are critical. In particular, service integration can benefit from funded partnership facilitation and coordination roles. Promising approaches have included NGO facilitators acting as intermediaries between smaller service providers and government funders, and independent project officers employed by integrated service centres or systems to support partnership processes. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts, facilitators require a high degree of cultural competence and understanding of the partnership principles described above.

Partnership building blocks

Table 6 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of genuine partnership development between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government, that contribute to effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: support and resourcing for process elements of partnership development; inclusion of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in partnerships for integration; processes that support ongoing community participation in service development; and respectful relationships that contribute to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

Table 6 - Partnership building blocks: Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tender processes that enable service development and delivery by non-local and/or non-Indigenous service providers include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnerships with local community-controlled organisations with a view to capacity development and long-term control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. Service contracts clearly define roles and responsibilities in service design and development to avoid conflict between roles of funding bodies, auspice organisations and service providers. Funding bodies recognise the importance of funding and enabling partnership development processes at the local level, which can be time and resource intensive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated services take measures to ensure that they are neutral sites for service provision to the whole community, rather than reflecting or continuing existing community divisions. Measures to achieve this include those relating to representation on boards of governance, transparent employment and workforce development strategies, independence of integration managers, coordinators and facilitators, and inclusive and transparent community consultation processes. Integrated service organisations are directed by the priorities and aspirations of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through broadly representative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of management. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appropriate facilitation and coordination roles are established and undertaken by lead agencies to support and enable partnership processes. Strong participation in local service provider networks (eg. early childhood, family support, and child and family health networks) contributes to relationship development and shared planning for collaborative work. Service providers negotiate and develop agreements (formal and informal) for new ways of working together within an integrated service centre or system. Agreements address collaboration in areas such as: referral systems, sharing space and resources, integrated staff teams; and client access and engagement strategies. Mainstream service providers participating in

<p>Participation in service provider partnerships in funded, incentivised and facilitated to ensure that services can and do engage with the processes of relationship development required for effective service integration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Tender processes and service contracts require high standards of cultural competence for lead agencies and integration facilitators. They require understanding of principles for genuine and respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts. Government funding bodies develop and provide incentives for a range of service providers to participate in collaboration for service integration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated service organisations establish community reference groups to provide ongoing input into the development and delivery of integrated services. 	<p>integrated service centres establish genuine and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in pursuit of mutual capacity benefits for service delivery to the community. Mainstream providers recognise the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in contributing to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and walk alongside them to support their role in the community.</p>
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Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 7 below that contribute to the development of genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government for service integration. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 7 – Practice examples: Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

<p>Opening up partnership possibilities A centre manager invites local service organisations to visit the site and talk about possibilities of working from a shared site.</p>	<p>Promoting broad use of an integrated service centre Allowing local services to use or hire parts of an integrated service centre to run trainings so that they become comfortable and familiar with the venue.</p>	<p>Capacity building for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services Mainstream partner organisations provide support for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services to build capacity in key identified gap areas, eg. in early childhood qualifications and workforce development.</p>	<p>Capacity building for transfer of resources and control to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services Partnering with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services (eg. MACS centres) with a view to building their capacity for integrated service delivery so that they could take over the running of the centre in the future.</p>
<p>Centre manager as integration coordinator / facilitator The role of an integrated centre manager is to coordinate existing services so that they work differently together: <i>'We don't just want to move deckchairs on the titanic, we would like to see an expansion of services or an improvement on how they're done. Otherwise the hospital would just send their allied staff down here; we'd end up with the same allied health service being offered but no net gain to the community.'</i></p>	<p>New service centre as host/facilitator for service networks A new integrated service centre hosts and/or facilitates local service networks, eg. early learning, family support and child and family health networks, and encourages them to consider possibilities for working together in the centre. The centre manager listens to what these existing networks know is needed for children and families in the community and brings new resources for integration around them to support them in working together.</p>	<p>Cultural awareness and understanding as a base for partnerships Common cultural awareness training for services working in an integrated centre ensures a level of common ground in terms of cultural competence and provides an important base for respectful partnerships: <i>'For medical staff employed by department of health or other organisations, or anyone else who comes on site to offer programs, it would be good to know that they have had the opportunity and have been exposed to that cultural awareness training... we can remove any blockages to engaging with Aboriginal staff so bridging that gap.'</i></p>	<p>Attention to relationships that build on the strengths of existing services New integrated services work with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services, to ensure they complement, support and build up valued community child care services, rather than duplicating or displacing them. <i>'They've been able to see it as and we've been able to make it an extension of resources for them. Being able to provide programmes and look at programs they haven't been able to look at because of a lack of skilled staff.'</i></p>

<p>Commitment to work together leaving behind past differences</p> <p>Looking forward and celebrating successes together in a new integrated centre rather than focussing on past turf wars, with no individual organisation taking credit for what happens in the new centre.</p>	<p>Cultural competence for service providers and staff</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have control over who comes into and works in an integrated centre, to ensure that the community is comfortable with them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations provide cultural awareness training and apply cultural competence standards for service providers using an integrated centre.</p>	<p>Reduced administrative burden through shared resources and spaces</p> <p>Reducing administrative burden for service providers provides an incentive for them to relocate or extend services to a new centre. This is done, for example, by providing appropriate facilities, set-up, pack-up, basic food and reducing transport provision requirements through service delivery in a centralised site that community members regularly access.</p>	<p>Local governance and relationships with local community and services</p> <p>Board members are local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with strong local community and service provider connections and so are able to play a strong role in facilitating local service partnerships.</p>
<p>Clear agreements define roles and responsibilities</p> <p>Service contracts and formal agreements for integrated service delivery clearly delineate roles and responsibilities in service design, development and delivery.</p> <p><i>‘One of the things we’re struggling with is that the funding body has been incredibly vague about it all... The bottom line of all of that is it impedes the capacity of the organisation to deliver an integrated service and work well with the community.’</i></p>	<p>An integrated centre as a site, catalyst and facilitator of local partnerships</p> <p>Relationships between agencies for the development of a new integrated centre have a carry-over effect in building service coordination and relationships throughout the community. As a result of collaboration for development of an integrated centre, services take initiative to develop stronger alliances, partnerships and formal agreements in all aspects of their work. The centre is seen as a site and catalyst for partnership development and actively supports partnerships throughout the community.</p>	<p>Project officer support for partnership facilitation</p> <p>Centres commonly identify a lack of focus and support for processes of partnership development and the need to dedicate resources and time to building collaborative relationships between service providers.</p> <p><i>‘The family connector is a community person who knows how to work with the community, but project management is a different skillset that they lack and that’s so crucial...A project officer could support negotiation between the service providers in developing the programs.’</i></p>	<p>Accommodation facilities enable engagement by visiting specialists</p> <p>One Centre has undertaken construction of specialist accommodation through using a portion of its centre construction budget. This has a key role in attracting specialist services to regional and remote communities with accommodation shortages.</p> <p><i>‘We’re in the process of purchasing a duplex which has been a drawcard for the specialists because there are huge accommodation issues here’</i></p>

Significant challenges

The following challenges for realising genuine partnerships for integration were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- ‘Turf wars’ can be a barrier to integrated service partnerships as organisations seek to protect their individual sources of funding and roles in the community. Integration leaders recognise fears that sharing resources may lead to losing funding, or that the contributions of individual services to collaborative efforts may be under-valued or under-recognised, and individual organisations will be unable to report adequately to funders.
- Integration leaders commonly identify that a lack of support and resources for the development of family service partnerships is resulting in limiting the service development focus of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres to more traditional models of early childhood education and care. Some Centres lack a clear and strongly resourced role to facilitate and build local partnership to ensure a range of services collaborate and respond holistically to child and family needs.
‘The manager is concentrating on building those partnerships, but meanwhile the centre is falling apart because you’re trying to manage your workers too, including very strong dynamics and personalities in a small community where everyone knows everyone’s history and it becomes very difficult.’
- In remote communities that do not have regular allied health services it is difficult to maintain momentum in terms of developing partnerships and new ways of working when services and specialists only visit, for example, every 2-4 weeks. One approach has been to encourage more regular visits by service providers that can be motivated by increased capacity to engage families because of the facilities of a new integrated centre that the community is comfortable attending. This can be particularly effective for service providers that are accustomed to poor attendance at appointments and frustrated by an inability to engage with families.
- Existing workload demands do not necessarily enable organisations and professionals to participate in partnership processes necessary for effective service integration. Unless participation in partnership building activities is funded, incentivised and facilitated, new integrated services can struggle to engage the professionals and services in the community that are needed to enable integration.
‘Everyone already has their existing workload and is already very busy and so to draw them into considering new opportunities or different ways of doing things there’s always a human factor involved when people are already busy and they don’t go looking for additional workload.’
- Where funding bodies and local service providers do not work in partnership in their relationship with communities, service providers can feel ‘wedged’ between the funder and the community, unable to meet community expectations created by a

funder, or unable to meet service contract requirements while responding effectively to community needs and expectations.

'A point to make about this is that the regional funding body are actually implementing a program that has been set up in a way that makes it incredibly difficult for the service provider. It's not difficult for the community or the funding body, because it's all care and no responsibility. But from a service provider's perspective, a small Aboriginal organisation, trying to do the right thing and put particular governance structures in place and administrative systems in place and do it all properly from the beginning, and fighting a battle about, no, we just want the program offered tomorrow.'

- Where mainstream non-government or government service providers are funded for the coordination and/or delivery of integrated services, genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities are dependent on the commitment and cultural competence of those organisations. In the absence of clear guidelines or contract requirements for their inclusion in integrated services, the important roles of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in service design, development and delivery may go unrealised. This threatens the appropriateness and effectiveness of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and can alienate elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The initial partnership between the service provider, lead agency or facilitator of an integrated service and the government funding body is critical to effective service integration, recognising that this relationship will impact significantly on all other relationships. Integration leaders identify a number of significant points of challenge in these relationships including: direct relationships between the funder and community contributing to unrealistic expectations of the provider; unrealistic timeframes for service development reducing the capacity of service providers to meet contract requirements and/or undertake adequate relationship building and consultation with the community and other service providers; vague service contracts and service development frameworks creating uncertainty in provider planning and requiring adjustment when funders 'change the goal posts'; uncertainty about future funding, proposed funding models and long-term support not enabling the service provider to plan long-term and gain community trust.

While many of these challenges are addressed in relation to the other integration aspects in this paper, they highlight more generally the need for clear definition of roles and responsibilities in the partnership between the funder and service provider throughout the process of integration. This definition of roles must be addressed strongly in tender processes and service contracts, but also fostered and maintained through ongoing partnership development and exchange of relevant information. This is not to suggest the imposition of inflexible frameworks for service development, but rather that where role boundaries are blurred, the capacity of local service providers to facilitate flexible local service design is reduced, as they can find themselves wedged between the expectations of government and the expectations of community without adequate input into the processes and contract requirements that create and define those expectations. A partnership within which the funding body empowers a community service provider, or integration 'lead agency' to undertake local design and development of integration initiatives, through a well resourced and clearly defined role to do so, is aligned with good practice 'place-based'

service integration approaches identified in the SNAICC literature review. The critical aspect of realistic timeframe development must take account of local realities that impact on timeframes. These include the significant amount of time required to develop trust with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and the specific logistical challenges in rural and remote locations.

R7 Tender processes and service contracts provide clear and flexible frameworks for integrated service delivery and clearly define stakeholder roles for consultation, design, development and delivery of integrated services. Service contracts provide both scope and requirement to define these relationships further according to local needs and circumstances, and to develop timeframes that are realistic for service development in each local context.

Role definition and scope for staff with leadership responsibility for the development of integrated services emerges as a significant issue that relates more fundamentally to the resourcing and processes required to undertake effective service integration. In the context of the Children and Family Centres this is highlighted clearly in the role of the centre manager which has emerged in some sites, with broad ranging responsibility encompassing, for example, oversight of centre construction, maintenance and ongoing use, early childhood education and care service management, and workforce development, as well as having responsibility for leading the approach to integration and facilitating the necessary partnerships between local child and family service providers. This multiple function leadership role can result in stretching capacity and an insufficient focus on partnerships for effective service integration. This was apparent amongst integration leaders who, despite being optimistic about the prospects for local partnership development, either expressed that this was work they needed 'to find the time for' or bring a greater focus to, or spoke more significantly about the centre building development and early childhood services than the broader relationships needed for child and family service integration. A number of integration leaders specifically identified the need for project officer support to facilitate collaboration between service providers. Some also described that insufficient resourcing for developing family service relationship was shifting or limiting the service development focus to early childhood education and care, rather than integrated and holistic service provision.

From SNAICC's perspective this lack of attention to partnership processes needed to enable an integrated approach is one of the most significant gaps in the frameworks and service contracts that are driving the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. The SNAICC literature review,³⁸ as well as the previous SNAICC policy review of respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts,³⁹ have identified some leading evidence-based approaches to service coordination and facilitation in these contexts. These include: the employment of a project officer within an integrated service centre or system to facilitate and support partnership processes; non-government 'lead agencies' with strong community connections and acceptance acting as intermediaries between government and smaller or local services; strongly funded roles within lead agencies for service integration initiatives to lead service coordination and

³⁸ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

³⁹ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 41-49, 74-76.

facilitation; funded facilitation roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead approaches to service partnerships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families; and high standards of cultural competence and awareness of respectful partnership principles for organisations and individuals in facilitating roles. Taking account of these promising practices, SNAICC makes the following recommendations for partnership facilitation to provide an adequate platform for local service partnership development for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

R8 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments directs specific funding for a high level project officer position within each Children and Family Centre to support and facilitate partnership development, management and ongoing evaluation for the delivery of integrated child and family services within the centres.

and;

R9 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments funds and supports the employment of an integrated service delivery partnership facilitator in each state or territory to support partnership development within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. This role should be positioned within and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies in the family support, child welfare and/or health field, with a funded national support and resourcing role provided by SNAICC. The role should provide intensive support for initial partnership development over 2 years, with ongoing national oversight provided by SNAICC beyond this period.

7.3 Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Service design, including, but not limited to physical design, must establish service entry and access points that take account of the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes consideration of issues such as poverty, geographical location and remoteness, culturally appropriate service provision and service mistrust that has emerged from histories of mistreatment by government and mainstream service providers. Promising service design practices that provides accessible entry points to integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families include: providing soft entry points in informal, familiar and non-threatening environments; outreach to families to build initial trust and encourage participation; providing transport to sites where integrated services are provided; operating out of multiple sites, especially in remote areas with spread-out populations; and maintaining traditional service entry points through established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that families know and trust.

The important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations play in service delivery that is culturally appropriate, safe, and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families must be recognised. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are provided with a choice of accessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and culturally appropriate mainstream services requires significant investment in supporting and building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as well as cultural competence development for mainstream service providers. A genuine partnership

approach, as described above, has the potential to support both these outcomes while increasing collaboration between agencies for holistic and integrated service provision.

Recognising the significant disadvantage that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience, service approaches must further address the need to respond to immediate and pressing needs. Families experiencing poverty and crisis may not be in a position to prioritise early childhood education and care, and holistic responses to family support needs are essential if an integrated approach to early childhood education and care is to engage these families.

Partnership building blocks

Table 8 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect the targeting of integrated services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: establishing high standards for cultural competence in service delivery; valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and skills for culturally appropriate service design and delivery; and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and leadership in appropriate targeting of services to respond to community needs and priorities.

Table 8 – Partnership building blocks: Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funding bodies include local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and community in the process of building design for an integrated service centre to ensure that it is a culturally appropriate, welcoming and safe space for the community, and an effective space for use by local service delivery agencies. Service contracts for management of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families include high cultural competence standards. Service contracts require the development of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement strategies, including through respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. The strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing community consultation conducted by the service provider ensures that services remains relevant and responsive to community needs and aspirations. A permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference group has genuine input into service development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of management for integrated centres and systems provide an avenue for ongoing community input into service development to ensure the service is relevant and appropriately targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Elders and community members provide input and support for cultural awareness training programs for non-local and mainstream service providers and staff. Participation of mainstream service providers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over who delivers services within an integrated centre to ensure high standards of cultural competence and that the community is comfortable with service providers and staff. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are engaged to provide local cultural awareness training for all service providers engaged in an integrated service centre or system. Mainstream service agencies engage in ongoing processes of cultural competence development in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to ensure that their practice is appropriate, safe and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

<p>Islander peoples and organisations in culturally competent service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are recognised as key criteria in the consideration and award of tenders for integrated services. As a result, there is a focus on selection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, or consortiums that include them significantly and pursue local capacity building for the transfer of service leadership and control to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p>	<p>in partnerships for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service integration contributes to broader organisational cultural competence and community acceptance for mainstream providers. These capacity increases enable mainstream service providers to engage appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members outside of targeted integration sites.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integrated service providers actively seek out and establish service partnerships with a range of local service providers that have a role in responding to priority needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including, for example, housing, health, welfare, education, family support and child protection service providers. All service providers establish protocols and collaborative working methods to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to facilitate and support families to access other necessary mainstream services outside of integrated centres.
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Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 9 below that contribute to targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 9 – Practice examples: Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

<p>Addressing practical service use barriers</p> <p>Providing an informal crèche service on site so that caring for children is not a barrier to parents accessing health and other support services, or to parents accompanying individual children from large families to appointments.</p>	<p>Providing informal environments for relationship building and primary service delivery</p> <p>Organising family fun days at an integrated service site, so that service professionals can interact with families in an informal environment eg. community health services conducting nutritional cooking classes.</p>	<p>Creating culturally safe, comfortable and welcoming physical spaces</p> <p><i>‘The feedback coming back from the medical people was that they didn’t just want consultation rooms looking the same as the hospital, they’ve asked me for lounge suites which I’ve got on order, bean bags, cushions, toys, we want to look for music and paintings to hang on the wall and things like that to make it a comfortable place to come.’</i></p>	<p>Family engagement provides incentive for agencies to offer services at an integrated centre</p> <p>Mainstream service providers are incentivised to make use of and participate in a new service centre because it is designed to be a comfortable and welcoming place and overcomes challenges they have previously had engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, for example, at medical facilities.</p>
<p>Creating culturally safe, comfortable and welcoming physical spaces</p> <p>Developing integrated service centres with outdoor spaces that people are comfortable spending time in and where professionals can interact with families in informal outdoor environments.</p>	<p>A more suitable space for allied health workers visiting remote communities</p> <p>A family friendly centre with ample space for professionals to operate provides a much more suitable place for engaging families, rather than allied health workers being ‘jammed for space’ at a hospital that many families won’t go to. This also encourages allied health workers to visit remote communities more regularly.</p>	<p>Spaces that break down connections between medical services and child protection intervention fears</p> <p>Not making consulting rooms in an integrated centre look like medical facilities, so that they are not associated with common fears that attending medical facilities will lead to children being taken away.</p>	<p>Informal trust and relationship building encourages access</p> <p>Informal interactions between professionals and families at the centre builds trust and encourages attendance at future appointments whether they be in the centre or elsewhere.</p>

<p>Developing cultural competency</p> <p>Common cultural awareness training for services working in an integrated centre contributes to a shared commitment to developing cultural competency. Culturally appropriate services are more successful in engaging families and achieving positive outcomes.</p>	<p>Practical facilities for families</p> <p>Offering practical facilities for families that they may not have at home to encourage access and use, at the same time as responding to practical family needs, eg. laundry facilities.</p>	<p>Common ground for the whole community</p> <p>Establishing a centre as 'neutral turf' for rival groups and ensuring that they are equally represented in the make-up of the centre so that it becomes common ground for pursuing community wellbeing.</p>	<p>Community owns and uses the space and feels comfortable there</p> <p>An integrated service centre is used as a community meeting place used by the whole community for different group meetings and events. People are comfortable accessing the centre because they feel that it is 'their place.'</p>
<p>Creating culturally appropriate spaces that are designed to meet the needs of the community</p> <p>Local community members inform the building design for an integrated centre so that it is laid out to be an inviting and welcoming place for community members to come to, with spaces that are effective for meeting community needs.</p>	<p>Providing transport assistance</p> <p>Providing a bus service in regional or remote locations can assist to ensure families from outlying areas can get to the site of an integrated centre. In one urban community providing transport for children is seen to discourage parent engagement. The requirement for transport provision is based strongly on local circumstances and needs in terms of existing transport infrastructure. Integrated sites also create opportunities to share transport resources between services.</p>	<p>Family connector roles</p> <p>Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with strong community connection and trust are employed to work one-on-one with families to facilitate their engagement with an integrated centre and support their connection with mainstream services in the community. This role provides a resource to mainstream service providers assisting them to address service access barriers.</p>	<p>Recognising where access gains are not service duplication.</p> <p>A Centre manager was challenged that bringing child health workers into the Centre was duplicating a service that already had premises to operate from. The manager asserted that gains in access for community members clearly built on service delivery capacity: <i>'They were doing the immunisation at the hospital, the community wasn't accessing it, so this is an opportunity to access those families. To me, I saw that as building on and not duplicating.'</i></p>
<p>Using an integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service centre as a stepping stone to mainstream community services and training programs.</p> <p>One Centre is working with a local TAFE college to develop a workforce re-entry training program as an add-on to their young Mum's group. The Centre seeks to empower the women to access further opportunities in the community that they wouldn't have previously. The TAFE college works with the Centre to ensure that the training is appropriate for the women. <i>'If the girls feel happy here, then they're quite happy to bring the course to us. But for me, I'd like to see those girls step out into the community and feel confident about accessing mainstream services and that's what it's all about.'</i></p>	<p>Ensuring service providers and professionals are acceptable to the community</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over standards of cultural competence and community acceptability for working in an integrated service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. <i>'They were running a Triple P program when I arrived here, and knowing that it was part of our project brief, I enrolled in it to identify whether that presenter was going to be appropriate or not for the community...it was about a lot of conversation, finding out if people knew her, had dealt with her before, how she is perceived in the community... We will use a similar process for others running programs in the Centre.'</i></p>		

<p>Centre based primary service provision enables relationship development for referral to specialised services</p> <p>Conducting health checks in comfortable and informal Centre-based environments can build relationships between professionals and families to encourage attendance at appointments to address issues within mainstream and specialised services at health facilities outside of an integrated Centre.</p>	<p>Holistic approaches ensure follow-up support for families with identified needs</p> <p>Responding to multiple family needs within a single integrated service creates over-site and accountability to ensure family needs are followed-up rather than families having one-off appointments with individual providers. <i>'It won't just be that our mob go and access the service, and off they go, but the Centre will be ensuring that they get follow up.'</i></p>	
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Significant Challenges

The following challenges for developing targeted services that promote family access and engagement were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- The absence of guaranteed and ongoing funding for new integrated centres creates pressure to pursue self-sustainability. Some leaders in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres identify that a self-sustaining funding model for integrated service delivery at the Centres is unachievable while maintaining costs at a level that will encourage and enable access to ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This creates concern that Centres will increasingly need to accommodate higher fee paying families and lose their focus on targeted service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This may have further impacts on engagement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, for example, community groups being unable to use the centre for meetings and events because of the need to charge usage fees, reducing community ownership of and engagement with the centre.
- Setting up new informal interaction environments between service professionals and families creates challenges for reporting requirements of these services, which are based on formal consultations. Integration leaders identify a need for new ways of working in integrated service centres to be recognised within the operating frameworks and funding agreements for a wide range of child and family service providers.
- A lack of qualified local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff creates an immediate challenge for employing local staff with local cultural knowledge and skills that are important to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Workforce development is a necessary focus for centres, including providing training and support to develop existing staff and community members. Services commonly recognise the need to employ outside the community for quality in the beginning while seeking to develop local skills and qualifications for longer-term local employment. Ensuring staff from outside the community have or develop the necessary cultural competence to form trusting relationships with families and local staff is a further challenge.
- Fears within the community that interaction with medical services may lead to children being taken away require significant attention to making sure families feel safe and comfortable in an integrated centre, rather than feeling threatened by the involvement of health services. These fears can also emerge in the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and non-Indigenous service providers and government, based on histories of mistreatment and negative experiences, where the community perceives that the centre is not an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled space. Significant time and effort is required to build trust between mainstream service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The SNAICC literature review strongly identifies the importance of appropriately targeted services to enable access, engagement and quality service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, alongside the importance of choice for families between accessing quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and quality and culturally competent mainstream services.⁴⁰ Significant capacity gaps and inadequate investment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled and focussed service sectors inform the priority focus required for development of targeted approaches.

The importance of the new Children and Family Centres as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targeted services to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is indicated by their inclusion as a priority initiative within government strategies for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including within the *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* and to support key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focussed objectives within the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*. A significant concern amongst integration leaders is that challenges in establishing a sustainable service model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience poverty and are unable to meet high service costs, will threaten a sustained focus on delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Centres. This concern is addressed more fully in relation to sustainability aspects of integrated service development in section 7.4 below.

Recognising the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations in delivering services that are culturally appropriate, welcoming, safe and appropriately targeted to support their own communities, integration processes require a focus on the inclusion and leadership of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the design, development and delivery of integrated services. Promising approaches to ensuring this level of participation include: the award of tenders for integrated service development to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with capacity to manage and implement an integrated approach; short-term time-limited auspice arrangements whereby a mainstream service or non-local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation supports the early development of an integrated service, capacity growth for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation, and hands over service control in line with capacity growth; and partnerships and consortiums that include local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in a leading role, or build their capacity to lead in the future. The involvement of mainstream service providers in respectful partnerships for service integration can further have significant impacts on their own capacity development in areas of cultural competence, community trust and acceptance, and understanding needs and priorities of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

R10 In the development of new integrated services targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, priority is given in the tender process to the selection of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with adequate organisational capacity to manage the service. Where current local capacity is inadequate, priority is given to consortiums that include respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support their growth and development. The award of integrated service contracts to non-Indigenous and non-

⁴⁰ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne. 43-47.

local service providers includes time-limited requirements to develop local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and transfer service leadership and control in line with capacity growth.

It is important to recognise that in any fully integrated child and family service site or system, practical considerations dictate that it is not possible for all necessary services to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, or for all staff within an integrated service site or system to be local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is thus a significant need to develop the capacity of mainstream service providers and non-Indigenous or non-local staff to work in culturally competent ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is important to note that this is not an alternate approach to local capacity development, which must occur concurrently in order to achieve other important goals and aspects of service integration described in this paper. Further, recognising that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choose not to use targeted services, mainstream providers have potential, through their engagement in targeted service integration, to develop organisation-wide cultural competence and community acceptance that increases their capacity to deliver services to the community outside of targeted sites.

R11 High standards of cultural competence are included within service contracts for organisations for the delivery or coordination of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.⁴¹ These standards include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnership relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

R12 Funding for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families includes provision for cultural awareness training for mainstream, non-Indigenous and non-local professionals to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are endorsed by the local community to provide such training.

7.4 Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Sustainable service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families requires long-term and sustainable investment. There is a danger that short-term approaches will add to mistrust built through the many failed and unfinished programs and undelivered promises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The significant time required for genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities means that programmes cannot be rushed into place and program development and setup should take considerable time. This recognises that long-term change requires long-term commitment from all stakeholders, and that this can only be achieved where programs are supported and owned by local communities.

For sustainable change, there is a need to build local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity, contributing to local governance, leadership and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Within a

⁴¹ For a full review of relevant cultural competence standards, refer to: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne; SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne.

framework of place-based service design and development, this approach has the potential to contribute to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, enabling communities to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

However, to achieve this potential, planning for sustainable funding and security of land tenure must be addressed to ensure services are directed by the community for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on an ongoing basis, and not vulnerable to changes in government and policy directions. Community ownership ensures that people with a long-term stake in the wellbeing of the community drive the commitment to sustainable outcomes. Long-term security and stability empowers and enables the community to undertake long-term planning for improving child and family wellbeing. To promote community ownership and sustainable outcomes, government and mainstream organisations pursue the handover of service control to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations while supporting organisational and community capacity development for integrated service delivery.

Partnership building blocks

Table 10 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect a commitment to sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: long-term modelling and support for achieving financial sustainability; achieving capacity and systems for good governance and financial management; maintaining a long-term focus on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wellbeing; and building local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community capacity to facilitate sustainable community ownership and leadership of integrated services.

Table 10 – Partnership building blocks: Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Funders negotiate with service providers to ensure realistic service development timeframes based on local contexts to ensure a new integrated service centre can consult adequately and develop relationships to build community trust and ownership. Realistic timeframes allow service development promises to the community to be kept by service providers. Funding bodies develop long-term models for service sustainability in partnership with local service-providers, taking account of local needs and the specific challenges and costs of integrated service delivery targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Funding bodies make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery. Government is up- 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government and service providers undertake genuine and ongoing community consultation to develop trust and ensure continuing community input, and ownership of integrated services. Community leaders support the development of new integrated centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community land, and encourage whole of community participation and engagement for their success. Community reference groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of governance ensure ongoing input into integrated services by local people with long-term commitment to local community wellbeing and development. Service providers ensure that a centre remains open to use by community groups and people, enabling the local Aboriginal and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mainstream agencies walk alongside, support and contribute to capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to build local leadership and transfer resources and integrated service management responsibilities to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. All service providers undertake joint visioning, and detailed planning for collaboration, shared roles, referral systems and new ways of working in an integrated service or centre. The development of genuine and formalised partnerships represents a commitment to working together differently rather than simply sharing a work site. Partnerships between service delivery agencies are long-term and ongoing, rather than only for time-limited projects and activities. Agreements are formalised to

<p>front and transparent about future funding arrangements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service providers pursue good governance and financial management to make the best and sustainable use of government funding. • In initial scoping and tender processes for the building of new integrated centres, funding bodies prioritise building new centres on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. • Government hands over control of government land to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to use long-term for the development and delivery of integrated services. 	<p>Torres Strait Islander community to develop a strong sense that an integrated service centre is 'their place.'</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Service providers maintain a service model that provides service to a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that the centre is recognised and trusted as a specific, targeted and ongoing service for the benefit of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. • Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres. 	<p>ensure partnerships are integrated into organisational structures and culture and continue when there are changes in staff or leadership.</p>
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Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 11 below that contribute to sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 11 – Practice examples: Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

<p>Promoting free or low-cost use of facilities rather than excluding those that cannot pay</p> <p>Focus on promoting community use of and engagement with a centre, rather than applying usage fees that discourage community use, engagement and ownership (based on trust that government funding will be renewed and a lack of pressure to become self-sustainable in a short time-period).</p>	<p>Creating an integrated training hub to build local workforce capacity</p> <p>Using an integrated service centre as a training centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and service staff members. Encouraging trainers to travel to regional areas to use the centre facilities. This enables local staff to become qualified while not having to leave the community and take time out of work and family life. Providing technology resources for training over the internet and by video link-up.</p>	<p>Long-term agreements and land tenure</p> <p>Long-term leases and long-term agreements to ensure that a centre is controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families contribute to stability and self-determination. This enables long-term planning for long-term improvements in child and family wellbeing. In this way, government demonstrates trust that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will make good of an integrated service centre for the good of their children and families.</p>	<p>Good governance and financial management</p> <p>Integrated centres focus on the establishment of good governance and financial management that contributes to ongoing stability and self-sustainability in the long-term. <i>‘Although they [governance and financial management] are not the glamorous parts of this whole process, they are the parts that will in fact bring all this undone if they’re not done properly.’</i></p>
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<p>Long-term planning in partnership between all stakeholders</p> <p>Long-term planning for the future happens between all parties engaged with the centre, including funders, service providers, service delivery partners and community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in establishing a long-term vision and planning for its achievement. <i>‘One thing that is integral to my understanding of sustainability is that we have at the very outset realistic expectations about what is achievable in the short term and then clear steps and pathways to long-term sustainability.’</i></p>	<p>Planning for integrated ways of working, not just ad-hoc single site service delivery</p> <p>Planning recognises that strong agreements and processes need to be established for working in new and integrated ways. In this way a long-term change to service delivery can be achieved for the community rather than an ad-hoc coming together of services.</p>	<p>Adequate time and funding for establishment with self-sustainability as a long-term goal</p> <p>Recognition from funding bodies that self-sustainability is a longer-term goal, taking particular account of the extensive time needed for genuine community consultation and service development, as well as logistical challenges in early development. Realistic service establishment timeframes are negotiated with local communities and service providers, taking account of the time needed for genuine consultation, as well as the logistical challenges for remote services.</p>	<p>Government service contracts clearly define roles, responsibilities and program goals.</p> <p>Clear guidelines and expectations are provided to inform the approach to integration for service providers and communities. These are flexible frameworks, but nonetheless clearly define roles, responsibilities and program goals. <i>‘There are several models of what the new way of doing things is and no one knows which one is being implemented... at the moment there is certainly a difference between the way that the federal government and this state government wants to operate. So the expectations there are already blurred.’</i></p>
<p>Mainstream agencies support capacity and transfer service control</p> <p>Mainstream service providers work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to support their development and negotiate detailed and time-limited plans for transfer of service management and control to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. <i>‘[they] should be the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business... We choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do... the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to [them] when they’re ready for that.’⁴²</i></p>	<p>Integrated service centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land</p> <p>Integrated centres are built on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community organisations, or land is handed back to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for use for integrated child and family services.</p>	<p>Governance training for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</p> <p>Training is provided by government and/or auspice organisations for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to develop necessary skills for serving on the boards of management for new integrated service centres.</p>	

⁴² Refers specifically to the development of the Bainsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre in: SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. Appendix A. 99.

Significant challenges

The following challenges for developing sustainable integrated services were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- In the case of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres there is a lack of guaranteed government service funding beyond 2014, as well as an absence of clear information about what funding model is envisioned for the Centres beyond the current funding period. This impacts significantly on the capacity of services to engage in long-term planning and contributes to fears that targeted service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families will not be sustained, due to pressures to generate income. Where integrated service providers act immediately to generate income, community trust can be threatened, as one integration leader describes:
'My concern was because there is no guarantee of funding after 2014 I had to pursue a fee for service by organizations using the premises. That was like a bucket of cold water over everyone's head and they just sort of turned away in disgust and said no, why would we bother? So we backtracked really fast on that... and in consultation with senior government bureaucrats I was saying, what is the likelihood that we can apply for funding and at least get even a reduced subsidy in three years and the general response was no one really expects...[the Centre]...to be self supporting financially by the end of that time and that took the pressure off me to head toward that outcome and I was pleased then to go back to organizations and go, look, don't worry about fee for service, don't worry about anything at all just come and make use of the property and lets start making some good things happen.'
- Within some communities, the absence of a clear plan for sustainability, alongside an absence of service ownership and security of land tenure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities contributes to a common concern that services may fail to address community needs in the long-term. Some integration leaders fear that the services are being set-up to fail and that when they do, blame will be placed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and services may transition to mainstream managements and delivery as a result. The absence of long-term commitments, secure funding and secure agreements to the contrary contribute to a lack of trust by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities that new integrated services will be supported by government to be sustainable.
'We have a good partnership with the people that we know, but just because we have that doesn't mean it's a structural change and that it's long term and sustainable. They're good people, but we're on good will. We get what we want as long as we agree with them, and as soon as we don't agree with them we don't get what we want. That's what we don't want anymore.'
'Feeling stressed. Very stressed. The viability and the ongoing commitment. Where does it go to?...It worries me. I feel that this is the last opportunity for us to get our business right. Because if this fails I think it'll be back to the old ways. Being controlled.'

- Unrealistic timeframes for initial consultation, service design and development, and building construction, mean that service providers cannot meet contract requirements while responding to the needs and expectations of the community. This leads to pressure to find interim services and establish interim operations in the short-term which detracts from the 'real work' of developing a quality service for the long-term benefit of the community, and establishing the necessary community trust and ownership. As unspent funding does not carry-over, this contributes to shortfalls and lesser funding as consultation and service development delay construction, recruitment and operation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As was learnt in the evaluation of the Communities for Children initiative, a four-year funding period is insufficient to undertake effective consultation and develop trusting relationships to achieve integrated service delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴³ A short funding period and lack of information and certainty about future funding hinders the development of integrated services, long-term relationships, and establishing trust in the community. A lack of effective sustainability planning and guaranteed security threatens the current and future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

The concern about funding sustainability beyond 2014 was amongst the most commonly and strongly raised issues by service integration leaders both in focus interviews and at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. For the vast majority of centres that are in only early stages of service development and/or building construction, the entire and remaining funding period is very short. Many service providers have had as little as 2-3 years of guaranteed funding from the time services were tendered, despite strong evidence that this period is grossly inadequate for the development of new integrated initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴⁴ This creates immediate developmental challenges as Centres are unable to adequately plan for the future, and confidently develop long-term service partnerships.

R13 The Australian Government in cooperation with state governments undertakes financial modelling to determine how Centres can operate financially, while maintaining a focus on service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families for at least the next 20 years. The Government shares modelling openly, develops a plan to support sustainable service delivery, and negotiates with individual Centres around how local circumstances impact the funding model.

R14 The Australian Government, as a matter of urgency, makes a significant financial commitment to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres beyond 2014, to allay immediate and ongoing stability concerns that are restricting Centre development and future planning.

R15 That in implementing recommendations 13 and 14 above, proper regard is had to both the funding model for early childhood education and care services, as well as adequate funding to support the processes of partnership development for

⁴³ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

collaboration in the delivery of family support services, and the need to implement recommendations 8 and 9 above.

A significant number of Centres have made important early progress towards supporting long-term community ownership and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Promising practices have included: tendering of services to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with capacity to lead and manage service integration; temporary auspice arrangements supporting the establishment of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; tender to partnerships and consortiums with a clear plan for mainstream partners to build local capacity and transfer services to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management; and identified roles within an integrated Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in early childhood education and care, with a plan for increasing their capacity for integrated service management. However, not all governments and all regions have a clearly identified commitment to developing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership for the Centres. Recognising the importance local leadership in building community capacity, and contributing to self-determination and social capital for communities, a more consistent approach is required.

R16 That the next service contracts for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include specific requirements for funded services to develop capacity building strategies for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership of the Centre, including a plan to transfer responsibility for management of all Centres to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with capacity development.

8. Building blocks for partnerships for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Table 12 below brings together the analysis of partnerships for effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It tracks partnerships for integration across processes of early service design and development; ongoing operation and management; and outcomes and long-term planning. The weighting of partnership building blocks to early design and development reflects the importance of this stage both for the current early development phase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and in general as the foundation for effective integration.

Table 12 – Building blocks of partnerships for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

Service provider / funder / auspice / government partnerships		Service provider / community partnerships		Between service provider partnerships			
EARLY SERVICE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT <i>Including: tender process; service design; establishing governance structures; building design and construction; initial partnership development</i>	Tender processes prioritise inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in service design, development, delivery.	Service contracts require mainstream agencies to develop respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.	Realistic service development timeframes tailored to local contexts enable service providers to meet contract requirements and maintain community trust by meeting community expectations that timeframes create.	Service contracts require mainstream services to develop genuine and respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation for service design and development.	Service contracts clearly define roles in community consultation, service design and development, to avoid conflict in roles of funding bodies, auspice organisations and service providers.	Participation in service provider partnerships is funded and facilitated to ensure services can and do engage with processes of relationship development required for integration, for example, through the development of project officer roles to support partnership processes.	Tender processes include high standards of cultural competence for integration lead agencies and facilitators, including understanding of principles for genuine and respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service contexts.
	Government and service providers undertake genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, allowing adequate time to identify community needs and priorities.	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment priority and workforce development strategies create opportunities for community development and participation in service delivery.	Integrated services take measures to ensure that they are established and maintained as neutral sites for service provision to the whole community, rather than reflecting or continuing existing community divisions.	Funding bodies include local communities in the process of building design for an integrated centre to ensure that it is a culturally appropriate, welcoming and safe space for the community, and effective for use by local service providers.			
	New integrated centres work in partnership with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to include, complement and build on their skills and knowledge, rather than duplicating or replacing.	Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services have leading roles in service design and development in partnership with other local service providers.	New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are supported by mainstream service providers to develop capacity and lead new integrated services.	Relevant local service providers participate in local reference groups that are broadly representative of the community and inform service design and development.	Lead agencies for integration initiative prioritise facilitation and coordination of service partnerships in service design. Service providers negotiate and develop agreements (formal and informal) for new ways of working together within an integrated service.	Strong participation in local service provider networks (eg. early childhood, family support, and child and family health networks) contributes to relationship development and shared planning for collaborative work.	Integrated service providers actively seek out and establish service partnerships with a range of local service providers that have a role in responding to priority needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
SERVICE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT <i>Including: ongoing service development & management; ongoing partnerships & community engagement; service delivery; client access and engagement.</i>	Service providers participate in the design and conduct of ongoing community consultations in partnership with funding bodies. Genuine consultation balances community expectations and service provider responsibilities.	Ongoing funded partnership facilitation roles ensure continuing attention to and management of the relationships required for effective integration.	Service contracts for management of integrated services require high standards of cultural competence and the development of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement strategies				

	Service staffing by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members contributes to appropriateness and community support and acceptance.	Boards of governance made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members ensure that local needs, priorities and aspirations inform ongoing development and operations.	Permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference groups have genuine input into service development ensuring relevance to community needs and aspirations.	Elders and community members provide input and support for cultural awareness training programs for non-local and mainstream service providers and staff.			
	Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services have clearly identified and valued roles in a new integrated centre or system, in partnership with other local service providers.	Mainstream service providers establish and maintain long-term and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and walk alongside them to support their role in the community.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over who delivers services within an integrated centre to ensure that the community is comfortable with service providers and staff.	Mainstream services engage in ongoing processes of cultural competence development in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure that their practice is appropriate, safe and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families			
OUTCOMES, LONG-TERM PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY <i>Including: sustainable funding models; building community and service capacity; land tenure; formal agreements; evaluation</i>	Genuine community consultation, and realistic timeframes that enable service providers to meet community expectations contribute to community trust and ownership of integrated services	Funding bodies develop long-term models for service sustainability in partnership with local service-providers, taking account of local needs and the specific challenges and costs of integrated service delivery targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Funding bodies make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery. Government is up-front and transparent about future funding arrangements	Service providers pursue good governance and financial management to make the best and sustainable use of government funding.	In initial scoping and tender processes for the building of new integrated centres, funding bodies prioritise building new centres on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.	Government hands over control of government land to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to use long-term for the development and delivery of integrated services.	
	Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres.	Participation of mainstream service providers in partnerships for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service integration contributes to broader organisational cultural competence and community acceptance for mainstream providers, increasing capacity to engage families.	Community leaders support the development of new integrated centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community land, and encourage whole of community participation and engagement for their success.	Community reference groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of governance ensure ongoing input into integrated services by local people with long-term commitment to local community well-being and development.	Service providers ensure that a centre remains open to use by community groups and people, enabling the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to develop a strong sense that an integrated service centre is 'their place.'	Service providers maintain a service model that provides service to a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that the centre is recognised and trusted as a specific, targeted and ongoing service for the benefit of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.	
	Mainstream service providers plan to build local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and handover leadership and control of targeted services to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of management.	Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres.	All service providers undertake joint visioning and detailed planning for collaboration, shared roles, referral systems and new ways of working in an integrated service or centre. Long-term partnerships for integrated service delivery are formalised.				

9. Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre service development leaders commonly identify that the new Centres are viewed positively by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They are seen as a significant opportunity to: increase coordination of services; increase relevant, effective and quality service provision; promote greater access to services; build local organisation and workforce capacity; and improve the lives of children and families in the communities. While most remain optimistic that they can achieve these goals, significant challenges have met the early development of the Centres. These challenges could be addressed, in part, through better understanding of and commitment to effective service integration by all partners.

The experiences shared by integration leaders highlight that the new Centres are strongly engaged in developing and implementing strategies that promote each of the four core aspects of service integration addressed. Indeed, many have taken great strides towards effective integration through innovative and principled practice. The practice examples for pursuing effective integration present as a patchwork of different strategies in different contexts. Though this creates challenges from a policy development perspective, the patchwork itself is neither surprising nor undesirable as new integrated ways of working develop locally to respond to local needs. This occurs as integration frameworks and theory interact with on-the-ground realities in individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is well recognised that a one size fits all approach cannot be employed in integration initiatives.

This paper has introduced some key initial learnings from these processes. SNAICC considers that points of commonality and challenges in service development and delivery practice are informative at this set up phase for all stakeholders. This enables us to learn from local issues about what further is needed in the structural architecture, government frameworks, funding models and practical support for the development of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Most significantly these learnings point to the importance of **genuine and respectful partnerships in the foundational relationships for the development of integrated service centres between government funding bodies and local service providers**. Reflection on experiences shared by Centre leaders highlights that it is the absence of important partnership principles at work in those relationships that is presenting the greatest challenges for effective service integration thus far. This is represented for example by:

- a lack of funding security and adequate modelling for financial sustainability beyond 2014 that threatens community-trust, and disempowers service providers in planning for pursuing long-term community wellbeing;
- inadequate funding and resourcing for service partnership development processes that restricts the development of local service partnerships required for services that are integrated to respond holistically to child and family needs;
- a lack of clarity for some Centres around roles and responsibilities in service development that undermines service provider roles in developing trusting relationships with communities and other providers.

Another core issue that has emerged through this research is the need for a **consistent, required and ongoing focus within the Centres on the development of genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations**. This is essential to promote community ownership and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as to draw and build upon existing community strengths for quality and culturally appropriate integrated service delivery.

For the long-term and sustainable change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities sought through the Federal Government initiative to establish the Children and Family Centres, service integration must pursue broader goals of community capacity building and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A primary focus on harnessing or developing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community governance is a necessary aspect to achieve this goal. There is a clear requirement for:

- a principled alignment of consultation processes with recognised principles for genuine and effective consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- consistent commitment to building local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, governance and workforce capacity for integrated services;
- recognition and inclusion of pre-existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers in the design and delivery of new integrated services.

The promising practices and challenges described in this paper present ideas for consideration and further development by integration leaders and organisations engaged in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. They are a starting point for a continued process of learning about and developing good practice in service integration adapted to diverse local contexts.

The challenges identified do, however, call for a more immediate government response to ensure important structural supports are put in place so that the foundations of the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres support processes for effective and sustainable integration. Recommendations for addressing priority structural support and resourcing needs are included throughout the paper and collated in section 10 below.

This is a critical moment to ensure adequate support and sustainable resourcing for the future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as integrated services. Continued commitment from all stakeholders can ensure that they realise their potential to become and remain effective integrated children and family services, providing quality and accessible services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

10. Summary of Recommendations

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach.

R1 The principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission⁴⁵ is included within all future service

⁴⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

agreements for integrated service design, development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Service contracts clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including government funding bodies, in the consultation process.

R2 All government funding bodies for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres take measures to ensure ongoing consultation for design, development and delivery is aligned with the principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission.⁴⁶

R3 State governments include in future service contracts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres requirements to develop partnerships with a view to complementing, strengthening and building capacity of existing community-controlled ECEC services.

R4 In the review of the budget-based funding (BBF) model, the Australian Government strongly considers the relationship between new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and existing BBF services, and ensures equity of funding for continued survival and growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled ECEC services.

R5 That the Australian Government, together with state and territory governments take immediate steps to implement Recommendation 14.4 of the Productivity Commission report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*:
'As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce.'

R6 That new integrated service sites for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including the new Children and Family Centres, be funded and utilised for development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service local workforce capacity through strategies including provision of onsite training, partnerships with education and training institutes and the provision of technology-based learning environments for remote and distance learning.

Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

R7 Tender processes and service contracts provide clear and flexible frameworks for integrated service delivery and clearly define stakeholder roles for consultation, design, development and delivery of integrated services. Service contracts provide both scope and requirement to define these relationships further according to local needs and circumstances, and to develop timeframes that are realistic for service development in each local context.

R8 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments directs specific funding for a high level project officer position within

⁴⁶ Ibid.

each Children and Family Centre to support and facilitate partnership development, management and ongoing evaluation for the delivery of integrated child and family services within the centres.

R9 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments funds and supports the employment of an integrated service delivery partnership facilitator in each state or territory to support partnership development within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. This role should be positioned within and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies in the family support, child welfare and/or health field, with a funded national support and resourcing role provided by SNAICC. The role should provide intensive support for initial partnership development over 2 years, with ongoing national oversight provided by SNAICC beyond this period.

Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

R10 In the development of new integrated services targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, priority is given in the tender process to the selection of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with adequate organisational capacity to manage the service. Where current local capacity is inadequate, priority is given to consortiums that include respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support their growth and development. The award of integrated service contracts to non-Indigenous and non-local service providers includes time-limited requirements to develop local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and transfer service leadership and control in line with capacity growth.

R11 High standards of cultural competence are included within service contracts for organisations for the delivery or coordination of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.⁴⁷ These standards include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnership relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

R12 Funding for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families includes provision for cultural awareness training for mainstream, non-Indigenous and non-local professionals to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are endorsed by the local community to provide such training.

Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

R13 The Australian Government in cooperation with state governments undertakes financial modelling to determine how Centres can operate financially, while maintaining a focus on service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families for at least the next 20 years. The Government shares modelling

⁴⁷ For a full review of relevant cultural competence standards, refer to: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne; SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne.

openly, develops a plan to support sustainable service delivery, and negotiates with individual Centres around how local circumstances impact the funding model.

R14 The Australian Government, as a matter of urgency, makes a significant financial commitment to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres beyond 2014, to allay immediate and ongoing stability concerns that are restricting Centre development and future planning.

R15 That in implementing recommendations 13 and 14 above, proper regard is had to both the funding model for early childhood education and care services, as well as adequate funding to support the processes of partnership development for collaboration in the delivery of family support services, and the need to implement recommendations 8 and 9 above.

R16 That the next service contracts for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include specific requirements for funded services to develop capacity building strategies for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership of the Centre, including a plan to transfer responsibility for management of all Centres to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with capacity development.

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