

9 October 2023

## **Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership**

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### **Meeting Four Outcomes**

The Early Childhood Care and Development Partnership (the Partnership) came together for its fourth meeting on Gadigal Country in Eora (Sydney) on 9 October 2023.

The meeting opened with a Welcome to Country by local Gadigal man, Craig Madden representing the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC).

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC - National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and Kylie Crane, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Youth Group, Commonwealth Department of Education, and attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and representatives from all Australian governments. A full list of attendees is located below.

### **PARTNERSHIP YEAR ONE PRIORITIES**

At this meeting, parties noted the active status of the Partnership's six Year 1 priorities and progressed the actions detailed below. The Partnership's priorities respond to the needs and asks from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and communities, and do not represent formal government commitments until they have progressed through Closing the Gap governance and/or are reflected in the policy commitments of individual governments.

#### **Priority 1: Commission research to develop funding model options for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) that deliver Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including integrated early years services**

- SNAICC and Deloitte Access Economics as the project delivery team presented on the project's interim paper proposed principles for a needs-based funding model that supports ACCOs that deliver ECEC to deliver holistic, community-centred, flexible, and integrated early years services.
- Feedback from the Partnership included the importance of jurisdictional context in state and Commonwealth funding models and consideration of how funding from other sectors, like health, contribute to the funding landscape for services and families.
- The draft final report will be provided to the Partnership in December 2023.

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### Priority 2: Increasing the base entitlement of 30 hours per week of subsidised ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–5

- Dandolo partners as the project delivery team presented the interim findings of the Systematic Evidence Review into optimal hours of ECEC required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- The findings showed that, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, accessing more hours of early learning results in better outcomes across a range of developmental domains, both in terms of increased duration (number of years spent in early learning) as well as increased hours in early learning.
- The evidence also highlighted that early learning needs to be high quality to deliver substantial and sustained benefits to children, in particular for children experiencing disadvantage.
- Parties will consider the written findings of this research out of session, with the Partnership to further discuss the next steps for progressing this priority at Meeting Five.

### Priority 3: Commission research and evidence development on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led models of family support to prevent entry into out-of-home care

- The Partnership heard from Priority 3 Working Group members on discussions to date and considered a draft project proposal to commission an evidence guidance framework that enables government to better understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and apply this to policy design, funding decisions and evaluation.
- The framework is also intended to support ACCOs and practitioners with practical guidance and ways to measure what their services are achieving for their communities.
- Working Group members highlighted the opportunity to align Priority 3 with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support (Centre). SNAICC is currently scoping the design of the Centre, which will be established in 2024.

### Priority 4: Progress a cross sector project to identify the collaborative efforts required to break down siloes and address social determinants of tertiary systems intervention for children and families

- The Partnership received updates from co-chairs on the outcomes of the initial Priority 4 Working Group meeting, which included discussion on related work under the *Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-26* (Safe and Supported) and national reforms in the disability sector.

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- The Partnership noted the working group’s proposed direction to progress a place-based approach that focuses on how to best integrate services at the local level while considering ways that government can better connect sectors at the system level.

### Priority 5: Establishment of a fully empowered and legislated National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner

- Priority 5 is being progressed out-of-session by SNAICC and the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) and Department of Education, through existing governance frameworks provided by Safe and Supported and the Partnership.
- The Partnership heard from co-chairs and DSS on the first workshop held on 11 September 2023, which focused on exploring how to strengthen government accountability and elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.
- At this workshop, there was consensus that there is a need for increased accountability for all governments and sector to uphold the rights and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children wherever they live.

### Priority 6: Oversee and require regular reports on progress to implement the outcomes and recommendations of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* review

- The Partnership heard updates from DSS on the expanding footprint of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* report and how its funding reform recommendations are being progressed and considered by Commonwealth and state governments.
- The Partnership also heard from South Australia on its work to consider how the report findings can be applied within their jurisdiction as they strengthen and build the capacity of their ACCO sector.
- This work is occurring as DSS develops implementation reporting mechanisms and develops common principles for distribution to Commonwealth agencies, which will be tabled at future meetings of the Partnership.

### **JURISDICTIONAL UPDATES ON PRIORITY REFORMS IN ACTION**

The Partnership heard from members on the implementation of Priority Reforms in the early childhood care and development sector under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The Partnership agreed the intent of these standing updates is to facilitate two-way learning between ECPP parties through:

- providing line of sight for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members on how government initiatives are being implemented in each jurisdiction, as well as promoting cross-jurisdictional learnings and collaboration; and

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- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members bringing the voices of communities and community-controlled organisations to the Partnership to inform future funding decisions and policy development undertaken by jurisdictions.

### **DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE JOINT COUNCIL ON CLOSING THE GAP (JOINT COUNCIL)**

The Partnership discussed the process and timeframe for the Partnership to make recommendations to Joint Council in 2024 as well as the possible areas of focus for recommendations. The Partnership will continue to refine its development of draft recommendations at the next Partnership meeting in early 2024.

### **ENGAGEMENT WITH PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

At Meeting Four, the Partnership continued its engagement with the Productivity Commission and its Inquiry into the ECEC system. The Partnership welcomed Commissioner Lisa Gropp and Associate Commissioner Deborah Brennan to listen to the Partnership's early discussions on the needs of ACCOs in the early years sector and First Nations children's access to ECEC. The Commissioners also shared high-level themes of the Commission's consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to date. This engagement reflects the objective of the Partnership to drive community-led outcomes on Closing the Gap.

### **WORKING BETTER TOGETHER**

The Partnership agreed the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) be granted with 'Partner' status to the Partnership to enable greater collaboration and information sharing with other Policy Partnerships and across the Closing the Gap governance fora. The Deputy Chief Executive Officer of NIAA will be invited to attend future Partnership meetings.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The Partnership will meet again in early 2024 and will continue to progress its Year 1 priorities, consider the Partnership's annual report and three-year strategic plan, and develop draft recommendations to Joint Council.

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## Attendees

Name	Representing
<b>Coalition of Peaks representatives</b>	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donella Mills	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Neville Atkinson	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Talia Avrahamzon (representing Tenille Lamb)	First Peoples Disability Network
<i>Apology from Dan Mitchell</i> (representing Sharron Williams)	Aboriginal Family Support Services
<b>Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives</b>	
Darcy Cavanagh	Independent representative
Paul Gray	Independent representative
Garth Morgan	Independent representative
Joanne Della Bona	Independent representative
<i>Apology from Keara Baker-Storey</i>	Independent representative
<b>Government representatives</b>	
Kylie Crane	Commonwealth Government
Liam Findlay (representing Gillian White)	New South Wales Government
Matthew Lundgren	Victoria Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Caron Irwin	Western Australia Government
Michael Brougham (representing Natalie Atkinson)	South Australia Government
Jodee Wilson	Tasmania Government
Nicole Moore	Australian Capital Territory Government
Gabrielle Brown	Northern Territory Government
<b>Partners</b>	
Muriel Bamblett	SNAICC
Tim Crosier (representing Letitia Hope)	Commonwealth Government
Jayde Ward (representing Brendan Thomas)	New South Wales Government
Simone Corin	Victoria Government
Kate Connors	Queensland Government
Lisa Criddle	Western Australia Government
Shirley Smith	South Australian Government
Vidhya Chelliah	Tasmania Government
Brooke Rigney (representing Chris Simpson)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Agnes McGrath	Northern Territory Government