



**FINAL REPORT- SNAICC Early Years
Support Evaluation
SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children**

1 April 2025

Deloitte
Access Economics

Contents

Contents	2
Glossary	i
Executive summary	ii
SNAICC Early Years Support	ii
This evaluation	iv
Evaluation findings	vi
1 Introduction	1
1.1 Background	1
1.1.1 National and state priorities	1
1.1.2 Importance of ACCO services	2
1.1.3 Challenges faced by ACCO services	2
1.2 SNAICC Early Years Support	3
1.2.1 Establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support	3
1.2.2 Aim of SNAICC Early Years Support	3
1.3 The evaluation	5
1.3.1 Evaluation principles	6
1.3.2 Evaluation domains	7
1.3.3 Program logic model	8
1.3.4 Data collection	10
1.3.5 Considerations for interpretation of findings	12
1.4 This report	13
1.4.1 Structure of the report	13
2 The implementation journey	14
2.2 Development of the SNAICC Early Years Support	15
2.2.1 Design process	15
2.2.2 Clarity of the program	17
2.2.3 Alignment to service priorities and responsive to service needs	21
2.2.4 Learnings feeding into continual improvement	25
2.3 Establishing jurisdictions	27
2.3.1 Governance	27
2.3.2 National and state models	29
2.3.3 Jurisdictional models	31
2.3.4 Staffing	35
2.4 Building relationships	35
2.4.1 Awareness and understanding	35

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2.4.2 Engagement	38
2.4.3 Trust	40
2.4.4 Wrap around supports and collaboration with other peaks and organisations	42
2.5 Jurisdictional variation	42
2.5.1 New South Wales	42
2.5.2 Victoria	44
2.5.3 Western Australia	44
3 Impact	45
3.1 Service perception of impact	47
3.2 Service design and delivery	49
3.3 Workforce planning and development supports	55
3.4 Back-office support	59
3.5 Service-level advocacy	63
3.6 Sector strength and cohesion	65
3.7 Growing the sector	66
3.8 Unintended impacts	67
4 Conditions for ongoing impact	69
4.1 Key features of SNAICC Early Years Support	70
4.1.1 Design features	70
4.1.2 Supporting conditions	71
4.2 Equitable impact across different contexts	71
4.2.1 Geographical context	71
4.2.2 Service maturity and nature of need	72
4.2.3 Workforce demands, experience and capacity	73
4.3 Cost-effectiveness	73
4.3.1 SNAICC Early Years Support Budget	73
4.3.2 The cost effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support	74
4.3.3 Operating efficiencies	75
5 Future considerations	76
5.1 Positioning SNAICC Early Years Support for success	76
5.1.1 Communication and articulation of SNAICC Early Years Support's offering to services	76
5.1.2 Specialisation of the national team, in combination with local presence	77
5.1.3 Reducing personnel risk as it relates to individual relationships with services	77
5.1.4 Ensuring governance structures are appropriate and utilised effectively	77
5.1.5 Strengthening consistency (where appropriate) and equity in access	78
5.1.6 Consideration of resourcing for SNAICC Early Years Support teams	78
5.1.7 SNAICC Early Years Support should have intentional collaboration and connection with government, peaks or coalitions	78
5.1.8 Opportunities to upskill mainstream services	79
5.1.9 Improving collection and management of quantitative data	79
5.1.10 Monitoring the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support over time	81
5.1.11 While the evidence is still emerging, the potential for SNAICC Early Years Support to expand to other jurisdictions and create a truly national program of support is clear	81
5.2 Conclusion	82

Appendix A : List of services	83
A.1. List of participating services	83
Appendix B : Evaluation Framework	86
B.1. Evaluation questions	86
B.1.1. Evaluation domains	86
B.1.2. Evaluation questions	86
B.1.3. Data matrix	88
Appendix C : 2024 Early Years Service Survey	94
C.1. Demographic questions	94
C.2. Engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support	97
C.3. Impact of SNAICC Early Years Support on services	99
Appendix D : Early Years Service Survey 2024 Questionnaire	102
D.1. 2024 Early Years Service Survey questions	102
Limitation of our work	106
General use restriction	106

Charts

Chart 2.1 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to this service's needs?', 2022-2024.	21
Chart 2.2 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to this service's needs?', 2022-2024, Vic only	22
Chart 2.3 : Top-ranked service priorities for SNAICC Early Years Support to assist with, sorted by highest average percentage of 'essential' or 'high priority' ratings across 2022-2024.	24
Chart 2.4 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: staff at this service are aware of SNAICC Early Years Support?', 2022-2024.	36
Chart 2.5 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: staff at this service are aware of SNAICC Early Years Support?', 2022-2024, Vic only	36
Chart 2.6 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: staff at this service understand SNAICC Early Years Support?', 2022-2024	37
Chart 2.7 : Survey results from the question 'How would you rate the quality of your interaction with SNAICC Early Years Support, this year?'	38
Chart 2.8 : Survey results from the question 'How often has your service interacted with SNAICC Early Years Support, over this year?'	39
Chart 2.9 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support has a good relationship and built trust with this service?'	41
Chart 2.10 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support will provide ongoing benefits to this service in the future?'	41
Chart 3.2 : Number and proportion of survey respondents who expressed that their service benefitted from SNAICC Early Years Support	47
Chart 3.3 : Number and proportion of respondents who expressed that children at their service have benefitted from their engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support	48
Chart 3.4 : Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services'	51
Chart 3.5 Number and proportion of respondents that felt identifying and accessing workforce training opportunities improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support	57
Chart 3.6 : Number and proportion of respondents who expressed the importance of identifying workforce training opportunities	57
Chart 3.7 : Number and proportion of survey respondents who have expressed the level of importance of identifying and accessing funding opportunities, 2022-2024	60
Chart 3.8 : Number and proportion of respondents who have felt identifying and accessing funding opportunities improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support	61
Chart 3.9 : Number and proportion of respondents who felt understanding legislative and policy changes had been improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support	62

Tables

Table 1.1 : Evaluation principles and how they were applied	6
Table 1.2 Overview of service consultations	10
Table 1.3 Overview of survey participation	11
Table 1.4 Overview of non-service semi-structured interviews	12
Table 2.1 : Implementation evaluation domains and questions	15
Table 3.2 : Impact evaluation domains and questions	46

Table 4.1 SNAICC Early Years Support budget forecasts.	73
Table A.1 : Location and remoteness of participating services	83
Table B.1 : Key evaluation domains pertaining to implementation and related questions this evaluation will seek to answer	87
Table B.2 : Key evaluation domains pertaining to outcomes and related questions this evaluation will seek to answer	87
Table B.3 : Evidence and data required to address the evaluation questions	88
Table B.4 : Evidence and data required to address the evaluation questions	91

Figures

Figure i : The Early Years Support program	iii
Figure ii : SNAICC Early Years Support theory of change	iv
Figure iii : SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities	iv
Figure iv : Evidence informing the evaluation (2022-24)	vi
Figure v : A sample of service reflections on their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support	ix
Figure vi : A sample of service reflections on SNAICC Early Years Support's role in fostering relationships	xi
Figure 1.1 SNAICC Early Years Support theory of change	4
Figure 1.2 : Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities	4
Figure 1.3 : SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities	5
Figure 1.4 Program logic model	9
Figure 2.1 : Outputs from the design process	16
Figure 2.2 : Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities	16
Figure 2.3 : SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities	18
Figure 2.4 Photos of the 2024 National Gathering	20
Figure 2.5 A sample of service reflections on the alignment of SNAICC Early Years Support	22
Figure 2.6 : SNAICC Early Years Support governance structure	28
Figure 2.7 : Location and number of services participating in SNAICC Early Years Support	30
Figure 2.8 : SNAICC Early Years Support jurisdictional models for service quality uplift	31
Figure 2.9 : The SNAICC Implementation Model that underpins the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist	32
Figure 2.10 : An example of the SNAICC Early Years Support snapshot provided to a service	33
Figure 3.1 : Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities	46
Figure 3.2 : Example of the SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program framework	51
Figure 3.3 A sample of service reflections on the resources provided by SNAICC Early Years Support	53
Figure 5.1 : Proportion of service contacts by purpose and type	80
Figure 5.2 : Children with high need identifiers and NDIS plans	80
Figure 5.3 : Staff completion of training and job vacancies in services	81

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Deloitte Access Economics acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, sea, and community. The country we live, work and travel on has been loved, celebrated, and cared for over many millennia by the people and their spiritual and physical ownership has never been ceded. We thank them and pay our respects to them, to their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present.

Deloitte Access Economics would like to pay respects to the following groups of people and individuals whose contributions to this project have been significant. Without their contributions, this evaluation would be undoubtedly much less rich, to the detriment of those working to support Aboriginal children and young people, and to sharing best practices and knowledge with Australia's regional and remote communities.

- **Early years services**, who participated in consultations and the surveys. Their observations and feedback contributed to the research and evidence for this evaluation.
- **The SNAICC Early Years Support team**, who facilitated this project and its data collection process.
- **Murawin**, who supported data collection, data analysis and supported cultural integrity throughout the consultation process.

Glossary

Acronym	Full name
ABSEC	AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCC	Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
CCCFR	Community Child Care Fund-Restricted
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
DCJ	Department of Communities and Justice
DE	Department of Education
DGR1	Deductible Gift Recipient Item 1
DSS	Department of Social Services
ECA	Early Childhood Australia
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ELFY	Early Years Learning Framework
HR	Human Resources
IHC	In Home Care
ISP	Inclusion Support Program
IPART	Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
LGA	Local government area
LMS	Learning Management System
MACS	Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NQF	National Quality Framework
NQS	National Quality Standard
NSW	New South Wales
ORIC	Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations
PLM	Program Logic Model
SNAICC	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children
SVA	Social Ventures Australia
SSP	Sector Strengthening Partnership
TAG	Technical Advisory Group
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Australia Inc.
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia

Executive summary

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged by SNAICC – National Voice of our Children (SNAICC) to undertake an independent evaluation of SNAICC Early Years Support (previously known as THRYVE), over its pilot phase from 2022 to 2024.

SNAICC Early Years Support is a community-controlled intermediary program that represents and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services. This support is centred in enabling high-quality and culturally responsive service delivery, which flows through to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities. In line with this, the stated aspiration of SNAICC Early Years Support is: *“to support and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early years services to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible and culturally strong supports for our children, families, and communities.”*

The purpose of this evaluation has been both developmental (to support formative insights to improve and strengthen SNAICC Early Years Support in its establishment) and summative (seeking to isolate and articulate the impact and effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support). The first two years of the evaluation had a greater developmental focus, in line with the establishment and early implementation phase of the program. In the third and final year of the evaluation, this report brings a more summative perspective, providing an overview of the evidence supporting the program’s emerging impact and the conditions that contribute to outcomes being achieved, and examines the implications for the future impact of SNAICC Early Years Support.

SNAICC Early Years Support

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, meaningful engagement with early years services – and the social, developmental, educational, and economic outcomes that stem from this engagement – hinges on the cultural strength and community centredness of the programs delivered. It has long been recognised that the delivery models, community connections and accountability held by ACCOs uniquely positions community controlled services to provide culturally and community responsive services in a manner that extends beyond the scope and quality of mainstream childcare and early learning delivery.

The refreshed *Closing the Gap* agenda highlights a focus on: (1) the national priority to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children engaging with culturally appropriate preschool and those assessed as developmentally on track in all five Australian Early Development census domains, and (2) the acknowledgement of the role that community-controlled organisations must play in realising this ambition.¹

Despite the provision of quality early years services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families being a national priority, and the recognised role of ACCOs in supporting culturally and community centred delivery, many ACCO services encounter significant challenges. These challenges are often operational and systemic, driven by a funding and policy system that does not align with the ACCO service model, and therefore affects their ability to provide high-quality and accessible services.

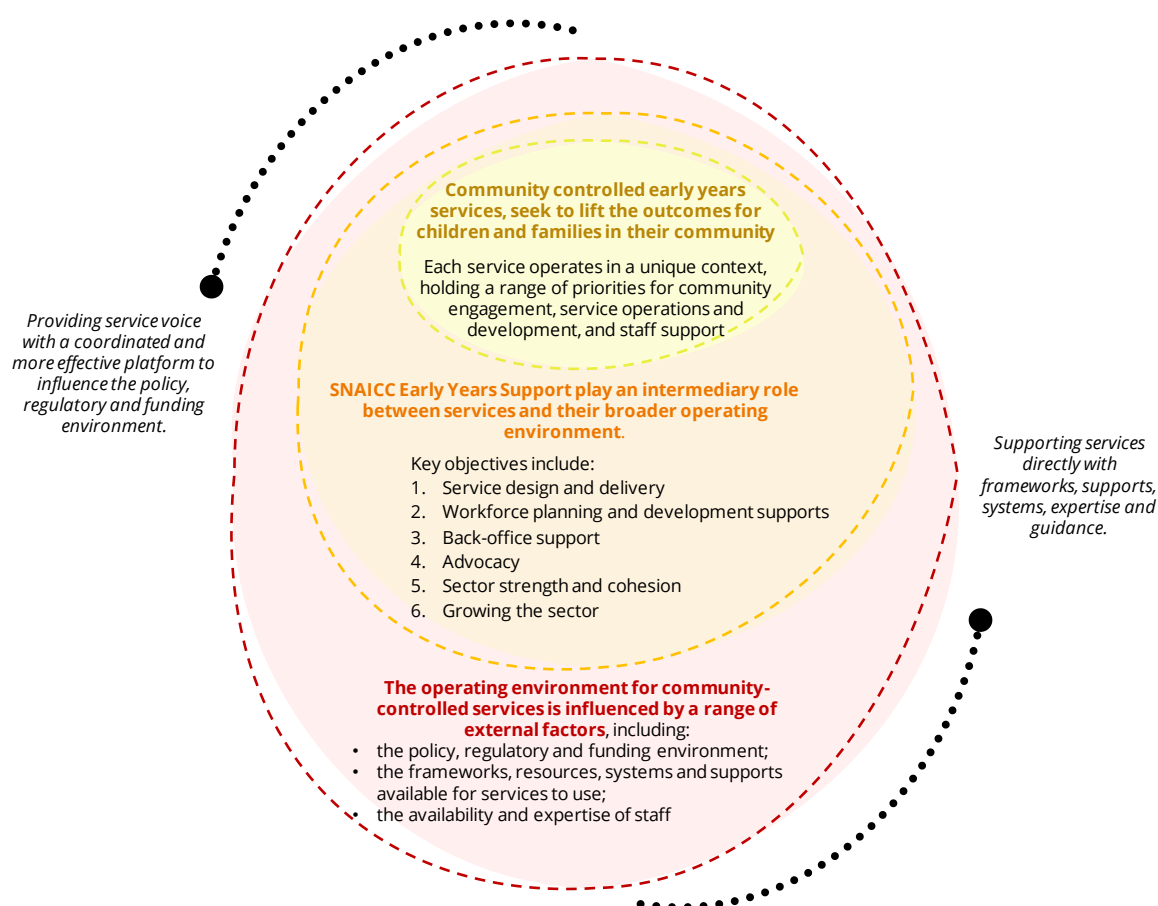
Prior to the introduction of SNAICC Early Years Support, and compounding these challenges, many ACCO early years services were operating in relative isolation. With a dedicated community focus and variable levels of support from State and Commonwealth systems, ACCO early years services have predominately operated independently, focusing on the unique needs of their local communities with limited opportunities or platforms for interaction with other services. Throughout this evaluation, services commonly shared that this sense of isolation exacerbated the challenges faced in their endeavours to support vulnerable children and families and navigate a complex regulatory and funding environment that

¹ Australian Government, *Closing the Gap Report 2024* (2024).

is not built for their needs – services often felt they were ‘doing it alone’ prior to SNAICC Early Years Support.

In recognition of these challenges, in 2020, SNAICC Early Years Support was conceptualised to support “*service delivery organisations to address service, operational and system challenges*”.² Services, and communities, are at the centre of SNAICC Early Years Support (in both practice and governance), and the nature of support delivered is ultimately tied to service needs and constantly evolving. At a high level, SNAICC Early Years Supports works to dual objectives in the provision of responsive service supports and capability building, while simultaneously strengthening the conditions in which services are operating through facilitating a collective and representative voice to inform policy reform. This dynamic relationship is illustrated in Figure i.

Figure i: The Early Years Support program

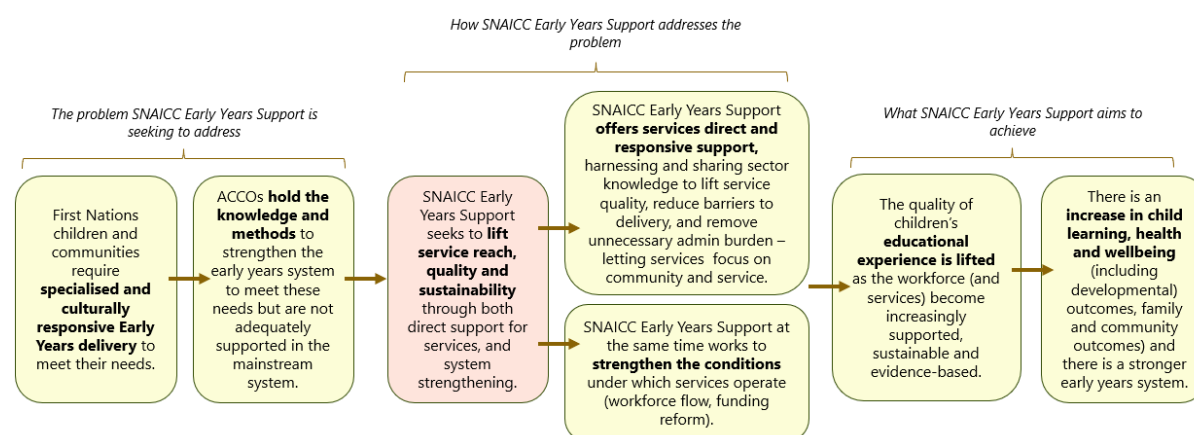


Source: SNAICC Early Years Support documentation, Deloitte Access Economics.

The primary focus of SNAICC Early Years Support is on ACCO early years services, with a particular emphasis on the leadership within these services. Recognising that each ACCO is best placed to respond to the needs and aspirations of their unique community, the implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support implementation initially centred on lifting the capacity and capability of services to meet these needs through a range of culturally responsive and place-based supports. In line with the theory of change below, this flows directly through to improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (see Figure ii).

² SNAICC, SVA Consulting, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to early learning project: joint initiative with SNAICC” (2020).

Figure ii: SNAICC Early Years Support theory of change



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

The strategic priorities of SNAICC Early Years Support in the initial phase of service support, as co-designed with member services, are provided in Figure iii below.

Figure iii: SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support, Getting Started training materials.

This evaluation

This is the third and final year of the evaluation of the SNAICC Early Years Support program. The evaluation has been guided by an evaluation framework developed in partnership with SNAICC Early Years Support and endorsed by NIAA (see Appendix B), focused on dual evaluation streams:

- the **implementation stream** assesses the implementation process and implementation outcomes of SNAICC Early Years Support. This stream explores if SNAICC Early Years Support has been implemented as intended. The evaluation domains examined in the implementation stream include awareness and understanding, alignment and uptake, fidelity and quality, and sustainability.

- the **impact stream** assesses the short, medium and long-term outcomes of SNAICC Early Years Support, in alignment with the program logic model (PLM) and determines whether its objectives have been achieved. The evaluation domains examined in the impact stream include appropriateness; effectiveness, cost-effectiveness, and equity.

To guide the evaluation, Deloitte Access Economics, together with SNAICC, developed evaluation domains and questions which are explored throughout this report (the evaluation questions are detailed in Appendix B and are provided at the start of each findings chapter). While these questions have been central to the evaluation's structure and data collection over the past three years, the way the questions have been considered has evolved as the understanding of the SNAICC Early Years Support, and the way it creates impact, has deepened.

Evaluation principles

At the commencement of the evaluation, it was recognised that long-term evaluations operate in an ever-changing space. This is particularly important in the context of a developmental evaluation, and in accommodating the responsive, place-based nature of SNAICC Early Years Support's design. From the outset, it has been understood and expected that the program aspirations, delivery modes and ways of understanding impact would shift and adapt over the life of the program (and the evaluation).

A set of guiding principles were established at the evaluation's outset to provide structure and direction to the evaluation, providing an anchor for shared decision making in the context of continual adaption:

- the centrality of voice and listening
- cultural leadership
- active learning, active improvement
- place-based, systemic, and systematic
- rigorous and well-substantiated.

These principles, and how they were applied over the life of the evaluation, are detailed in Section 1.3.1.

Importantly, the evaluation benefitted from cultural leadership to inform the design and delivery of the evaluation. The evaluation was co-led by Professor Deen Sanders, a Worimi man, who supported the integration of First Nations knowledge systems and ways of working with traditional Western evaluation constructs. A partnership with Indigenous-led consultancy firm, Murawin, was employed to support consultations with early years services, data analysis and support cultural integrity throughout the consultation process. SNAICC Early Years Support staff provided guidance on stakeholder engagement approaches, ensuring services were contacted through trusted and safe relationships. Collectively, these elements supported the evaluation to be undertaken with cultural integrity, thoughtfulness, and responsiveness.

In line with the principles, the evaluation has played a key role in informing refinements to the implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support throughout the pilot phase. In this context, it is important to recognise that this evaluation is not a standalone addition to SNAICC Early Years Support. Rather, it has formed a central component of the SNAICC Early Years Support story, and aims to – through an independent and rigorous evaluation approach – foster a shared language and understanding of its impact.

Evidence informing the evaluation


The evaluation has employed a mixed-method approach, drawing on a wide range of evidence sources. Most central to the evaluation evidence is service voice, collected through annual surveys, consultations and observations. Annual consultations were also held with a range of government and sector stakeholders, as well as SNAICC Early Years Support teams. The evaluation has also drawn on secondary data, including service level reporting, where available.

Overall, the qualitative data collected or provided over the three years provides comprehensive evidence to the design, implementation and impact of SNAICC Early Years Support as experienced by member services. Close to 80 per cent of all participating services were consulted with over the life of the evaluation.

However, there is more limited secondary outcomes data available to draw on to establish the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support, partially due to the early stage of implementation and partially due to

challenges in service level data availability and access. While significant effort has been made to validate and strengthen the derived findings through data triangulation methods, there are data limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings (see Section 1.3.5).

Figure iv: Evidence informing the evaluation (2022-24)

		
Government	SNAICC Early Years Support	Early years services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completed with the National Indigenous Australians Agency. Completed with the Commonwealth Department of Education. Completed with the NSW Department of Education. Completed with the WA Department of Communities. Completed with the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consulted with the national SNAICC Early Years Support Director Consulted with State SNAICC Early Years Support Director Consulted with State Advisory Committees. Consulted with Social Ventures Australia Consulted with SNAICC Representatives, including the Social Policy and Research Manager, and National Sector Development Manager. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveyed EYS in NSW (30 responses), VIC (29 responses), and WA (9 responses) Consulted with 14 services in NSW Consulted with 13 services in VIC Consulted with 12 services in WA.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Note: Consultations across government, SNAICC Early Years Support and participating ACCO early years services were held annually. An annual ACCO early years service survey was also conducted, the figure above may include duplicate services over multiple years. The figures for early years service engagement on the far right are cumulative over the three years.

Evaluation findings

Implementation

Awareness and understanding

Awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support has continued to build over the course of the Program. In 2024, 89 per cent of survey respondents (including both directors and educators) at least somewhat agreed that staff at their service were aware of SNAICC Early Years Support – with half of respondents “strongly agreeing”. Awareness has tended to be strongest in NSW, which is to be expected given it was the jurisdiction where SNAICC Early Years support has been implemented the longest (operational since 2021, as opposed to 2023 for Victoria and WA).

Over the course of the Program, increased understanding of what SNAICC Early Years Support offers has been achieved primarily through site visits and communications, as well as increased attendance at networking events such as the Leaders Network Meetings, and the State and National Gatherings. While a detailed description of offerings took some time to be developed, in 2024 ‘menu of service’ offerings were shared nationally to support a clearer understanding of the matters and resources services could engage with SNAICC Early Years Support for. This has been complemented by a ‘Getting Started’ introductory module that is now undertaken with new services/service leaders in WA, following successful usage in Victoria since the beginning of the Pilot. This module serves to introduces SNAICC Early Years Support, its role and purpose, and how services can engage (discussed in further detail in Section 2.2.2.1).

Only one eligible service has actively opted out of participation with SNAICC Early Years Support, though SNAICC Early Years Support teams remain in communication with this service. It has been observed that understanding of the offerings and relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support develops over time as service engagement deepens.

While quality of engagement is therefore linked to awareness and understanding, evaluation evidence does not suggest that any services are not participating or missing out on support due to a lack of awareness or understanding.

The evaluation findings relating to the awareness and understanding domain are detailed in Section 2.4.1.

Alignment and uptake

ACCOs have historically experienced variable levels of support from State and Commonwealth systems, leading the sector to rely less on government services and external bodies and instead build local solutions. Developing trusted relationships with early years services, establishing solutions that can integrate into their operations, and developing a service-led program of support was therefore recognised as a significant challenge, requiring time and patience, cultural responsiveness and a careful and collaborative design process.

Within this context, the establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support was understandably met with a level of uncertainty across some services. Throughout the co-design process, a number of services raised their concerns regarding the necessity of a program like SNAICC Early Years Support. These concerns centred around effectively differentiating supports for the unique contexts of ACCOs across various jurisdictions, and the risks of introducing another layer between services and governments, which could potentially redirect resources or hinder opportunities for direct service to government relationships.

The evaluation has observed that SNAICC Early Years Support has navigated and overcome these potential barriers to become a highly trusted, effective and embedded layer within the ACCO early years sector.

Notably, the establishment of trusted and effective working relationships with member services was achieved in a very short period of time, with SNAICC Early Years Support being fully operational across all three jurisdictions for less than two years. The strength of service perspectives on the value of SNAICC Early Years Support is observed through:

- 68 per cent of survey respondents strongly agreed, with a further 21 per cent agreeing, that there was a good relationship and that trust was built.
- 70 per cent of survey respondents classified the quality of their interactions with SNAICC Early Years Support this year as 'great', with a further 20 per cent as 'good'.
- Approximately 85 per cent of services consistently agreed, over the three years of the evaluation, that SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and supports are responsive to their service's needs.
- All survey respondents except one either strongly agreed or agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support would provide ongoing benefits to their service in the future.
- Increasing engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support across the three years, including participation in network events, proactive engagement where assistance is required, and service and leader relationships that are deepening into further areas of service and professional development.

It is also worth noting that SNAICC Early Years Support was one of the first Commonwealth funded programs to be First Nations designed, developed and delivered, with SNAICC provided autonomy and flexibility to drive this process in a manner that was new for Commonwealth service procurement. This autonomy is observed to have been highly instrumental in providing the space and resources for SNAICC Early Years Support to develop a culturally responsive delivery model that strongly aligned with service needs, and build trusted service relationships so quickly.

The evaluation findings relating to the awareness and understanding domain are detailed in Section 2.2.3

Fidelity and quality

SNAICC Early Years Support did take time (longer than originally anticipated) to become fully operational within each jurisdiction. The initial delays in implementation were largely attributed to challenges in staffing and the co-design process taking longer than intended. In reflecting on these delays, both services and sector stakeholders alike shared that the additional time taken to find the right staff, and to build the program of supports alongside services, were critical foundations for building trusted relationships with services – with trust being the cornerstone of SNAICC Early Years Support's success.

In 2024, SNAICC Early Years Support is fully operational and supports 35 services across NSW, Victoria, and WA – with an additional 26 services in NSW through the Sector Strengthening Partnership (detailed in Section 2.5.1).

Reflections from services on the quality of SNAICC Early Years Support offerings have been overwhelmingly positive; however, there has been some level of variability in the nature of engagement across services over the evaluation period.

This is influenced by participating services' geography, maturity and/or establishment, and the strength of their relationship with the SNAICC Early Years Support team. As the program has matured, the SNAICC Early Years Support team has developed increasingly differentiated models of support and modes of engagement to ensure all ACCOs have the opportunity to engage in a way that aligns with their needs and/or priorities. In the third year of the evaluation, there remains a small number of services that have not yet deeply engaged with SNAICC Early Years Support.

There is also a level of variability in SNAICC Early Years Support's implementation journey and outcomes (noting, outcomes are discussed later) across the jurisdictions. NSW has been fully operational since June 2021, with Victoria and WA both becoming fully operational in 2023. Each state operates in accordance with its own priorities (aligned with the co-design process), and as such holds different areas of focus – while retaining opportunities to share resources and expertise nationally. The evaluation findings have sought to identify, wherever possible, the influence of contextual factors such as jurisdictional challenges or differences in program maturity on the understanding and observations of impact.

Sustainability

In considering the early successes of the program, the evaluation has found several design features that have been central to the ways in which SNAICC Early Years Support has developed into a trusted intermediary within the ACCO early years sector. These include:

- a relentless focus on keeping the **needs and voices of ACCOs early years services** at the heart of SNAICC Early Years Support. With a broad remit and a diverse range of opportunities and competing priorities, the program of service delivery has stayed true to the intention of being 'a service for services, designed by services'. The services offered by SNAICC Early Years Support have been directly responsive to the sector and continue to evolve in response to changing needs.
- a recognition that **high quality working relationships (and trust) with early years services** are the primary avenue through which SNAICC Early Years Support can influence change. In this context, the capability and skills of site advisors, time spent with services, and the responsiveness of the SNAICC Early Years Support team have all been key investments in the early years of implementation. As trust deepens, the opportunities for SNAICC Early Years Support to extend into more transformational relationships with services does too, with increased license to support services in areas they may not have identified themselves as a need.
- a delivery program that is built on the **principles of cultural governance, respect and responsiveness**. As a support designed to fill gaps left in the mainstream system, the importance of the strong cultural foundations of SNAICC Early Years Support are not to be understated. The opportunities provided by SNAICC Early Years Support for practice and knowledge sharing, community building and advocacy all work to continue to build the strength of culturally strong early years services.
- **listening, adapting and being responsive to feedback** collected from services, and through evaluation findings. Actively listening, adapting and responding to feedback collected both from early years services but also through evaluation findings are critical in communicating the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support. This ensures that the support provided continues to be aligned with service needs and allows for continuous improvements, ensuring continued relevance and effectiveness.

The evaluation findings relating to the sustainability domain are detailed in Section 4.1.

Impact

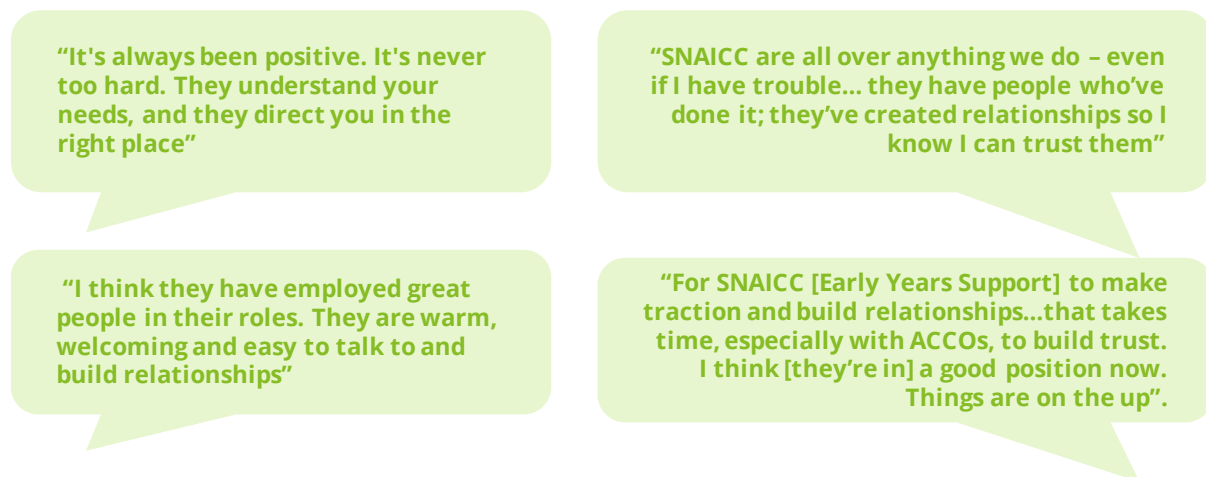
Appropriateness

Services are aware of and engaging with the supports offered by SNAICC Early Years Support in ways that reinforce the value and impact of these supports. In annual evaluation surveys, services have consistently stated that they agree the support they receive is responsive to their needs (85 per cent of respondent services across all three years, further detailed in Section 2.2.3). The highest priorities for the sector have been reported by early years services as:

- understanding legislation and policy changes
- identifying and accessing funding opportunities
- connecting to other services and sharing knowledge
- workforce training opportunities.

A small sample of service reflections on the role that SNAICC Early Years Support plays is provided below.

Figure v: A sample of service reflections on their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support



Source: Deloitte Access Economics consultations.

Effectiveness

Services who responded to the evaluation surveys have consistently endorsed the value of the support received through SNAICC Early Years Support – with over 75 per cent of respondents each year strongly agreeing that their service benefitted from their interactions with the Program. Notably, no more than one service disagreed with this statement in any of the three pilot years.

The majority of services that responded to the 2024 survey (90 per cent) also agreed that children at their service have benefited from SNAICC Early Years Support. This validates the theory of change – through lifting service capability, children and families also stand to benefit – and provides evidence that this uplift is occurring relatively quickly. Section 3.1 provides further detail on the service-level perception of the effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support model.

The tailored and practical supports that SNAICC Early Years Support has provided to ACCOs have enhanced service quality, reduced administrative burden on service leadership and staff, and kept services open and compliant.

SNAICC Early Years Support's activities are contributing to an uplift in service quality, providing a basis for improved outcomes for children and families. Specifically, SNAICC Early Years Support achieves this through a culturally responsive and ACCO specific model of service support and continual quality improvement. The evaluation has observed tailored quality improvement support for participating services, and in recent years, the development of ACCO specific continual improvement practice frameworks, tools and processes (such as the ACCO checklist, snapshots, action plans and leadership programs) to support leaders and teams to reflect, articulate and embed evidence-based improvement strategies in their services. Notably, participating services spoke to the supportive and culturally responsive ways in which these supports have been developed and enacted.

In the 2024 survey, 90 per cent of services agreed, with 80 per cent strongly agreeing, that SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services. One early years' service educator expressed *"[These resources] bring culture into the service... We don't want those kids to forget where they come from because they do come from somewhere. And its special."* The cultural core of SNAICC Early Years support has also found to support non-Indigenous staff working within ACCO early years services with a Service Director commenting, *'SNAICC Early Years Support has been helping me as a non-Indigenous*

person to help me meet my checklist. They also guide me to be culturally safe and help me to know that what I'm doing is actually correct".

At an overarching level, services consistently commented on the responsiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support to assist in times of need. As relationships have deepened, services commented that they were able to call for support with a range of issues – from emergency and immediate support to more strategic concerns. Leaders noted that this both directly supported compliance and service operations, while also providing a sense of connection and community which was important for ongoing sustainability. As one Service Director expressed, *"SNAICC responds to leaders' frustrations and challenges in a confidential and supportive way. They help us with meeting compliance standards."*

While the SNAICC Early Years Support model is primarily concerned with a continual improvement in service impact and sustainability through an ACCO lens of quality and outcomes, the work undertaken with services has also led to a substantial reduction in compliance concerns and improved ratings as measured by the NQS. This reduces pressure on services and service leaders, as well as continuing to support increased understanding and recognition of practice excellence in both the ACCO and mainstream contexts.

Every participating service that has undergone an NQS assessment in the past two years has received the same or an improved rating. This has included numerous services moving from ratings of Working Towards to Meeting, or from Meeting to Exceeding. In addition, eight provisional services in NSW have been supported to undertake the assessment and ratings process and transition to the NQS.

Through providing avenues for practice sharing and development, as well as supporting system improvements in cultural safety (such as the work SNAICC Early Years Support is leading with ACECQA), the confidence and capacity of ACCO services to deliver culturally responsive education is lifting.

Services have found high value in the way in which SNAICC Early Years Support fosters connections with other community-controlled services – strengthening community and shared practice in ways that contribute to a sense of collective purpose, continual improvement, and sector sustainability.

SNAICC Early Years Support fosters connections between services in a variety of ways, including annual jurisdictional Gatherings hosted by the SNAICC Early Years Support team, professional learning and network meetings, early learning conferences, and regular communications such as newsletters. These mechanisms enable services to network and share best practices, thereby enhancing their capabilities, sense of connectedness, culture and shared learning. For instance, the 2024 Gatherings featured multiple 'Spotlight on Deadly Practice' segments presented by various services, showcasing effective and innovative approaches to service delivery. The figure below demonstrates service reflections on the role that SNAICC Early Years Support plays in fostering connections.

Figure vi: A sample of service reflections on SNAICC Early Years Support's role in fostering relationships



Source: Deloitte Access Economics consultations.

Respondents to the early years services survey overwhelmingly indicated that their connection to other services was the most significantly improved aspect of their service in both 2023 and 2024. This trend was observed across all jurisdictions, with 95 per cent of all respondents acknowledging improvement across both years.

SNAICC Early Years Support has invested in the development of the ACCO early years workforce, particularly in strengthening service leadership. This ensures that services have the capabilities and resources needed to deliver culturally strong and high-quality care to children and families.

In NSW, most services have engaged with SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program. This program has been recognised by early years services staff as an important point of connection and relationship for emerging sector leaders, often serving as a "jumping-off point" for services to access additional support.

In Victoria, all services have participated in a comprehensive leadership program, attended various development forums, and engaged in networking events. SNAICC Early Years Support has supported a service to establish a Registered Training Organisations (RTO) by advocating for funding - highlighting the potential for services to play a role in broader workforce development in a culturally supported pathway.

In WA, SNAICC Early Years Support has collaborated with registered training organisations (RTOs) to develop partnerships and work experience pathways. Service leaders have enrolled in leadership training and participated in professional development activities such as trauma-informed training (facilitated by SNAICC Early Years Support).

Through consultation, it was generally found that the quality of this training was commended by services: *"The provided training was immense for our directors. The most informative we've done in a long time. Didn't realise how much they had on them. I recommend to all ACFCs."* – NSW Early Years Service Director.

It is noted that the upskilling and training of staff, as well as staff retention, have been greater priorities for services to receive support. There are factors that are beyond the control of SNAICC Early Years Support which greatly influence staff retention, such as workforce shortages and wages in the ECEC sector. Nevertheless, SNAICC Early Years Support has been seen to be valuable in helping services to upskill and retain staff. SNAICC Early Years Support has also aided services in short-term recruitment, however generating a new and larger workforce has not been as high of a priority.

In line with the jurisdictional approach of the Pilot, alternative approaches have been seen across the three jurisdictions. While leadership training has been well received across all three, the model applied in Victoria

is currently the most developed and could form the basis of a model that could be deployed nationally (aiding the creation of a more nationally consistent approach).

Beyond individual service supports, SNAICC Early Years Support has facilitated a collective and representative ACCO voice to government, underpinning SNAICC's system-level advocacy efforts. The trusted forums and channels for service voice, and greater understanding of ACCO needs and priorities, benefits both services and governments and influences evidence-based policy making.

SNAICC Early Years Support plays a critical role in service-level advocacy, focusing on empowerment, self-determination, and amplifying the voices of the early years services it supports and the ACCO sector more broadly. Through its on-the-ground community connections and a deep understanding of service needs and priorities, it provides an avenue for collective service voice, enabling the ACCO sector to share their needs, experiences, and stories.

This service-level advocacy led by SNAICC Early Years Support differs from the system-level advocacy efforts of SNAICC (i.e., the broader teams outside of SNAICC Early Years Support), which is aimed at influencing larger policy frameworks. However, this collaboration allows SNAICC to channel insights from service-level experiences into its system-level efforts, ensuring service voice is effectively represented in policy review, reform and design. This leads to evidence-informed policy processes, ensuring that government policies are grounded in real experiences and needs of the ACCO sector.

An example of SNAICC Early Years Support facilitating the priorities of services to be more directly heard by governments is when early years service leaders, accompanied by SNAICC Early Years Support teams, travelled to Canberra to share their stories: *"SNAICC opens the door but it's [the services] story. They are the ones who could tell their story and ultimately get that impact. They ordinarily wouldn't be able to do this without SNAICC Early Years Support"* - SNAICC stakeholder.

Beyond this service-level advocacy – as mentioned, which sees SNAICC Early Years Support facilitate direct communication between early years service leaders and staff, SNAICC more broadly, and government, ensuring that their voices are represented in policy discussions. SNAICC Early Years Support supports services to be well-prepared and engaged in these discussions. Services supported by SNAICC Early Years Support have been reported to have a better understanding of critical policy issues and are more willing to participate in key policy consultations or discussions: *"[There is] better understanding among service leaders around policy. In those states with SNAICC Early Years Support there is that capacity built in, they understand the levers and the value in feeding that upwards...that makes it easier to do."* – SNAICC stakeholder.

The nature, representativeness and truthfulness of service voice that is facilitated is directly linked to the cultural safety and responsiveness of the relationships and forums that SNAICC Early Years Support enables. Historically, ACCO services have risked penalties in the mainstream system for raising needs or issues. Over the evaluation period, as the relationship between SNAICC Early Years Support and services has strengthened, services are more comfortable and trusting to raise deeper concerns: *"The first six months was building trust and engaging network leaders as we could and from there service leaders developed an understanding of our services. Once they understood we didn't want anything in return and just wanted to provide advocacy, we got more buy in."* – SNAICC stakeholder.

Similarly, as governments gain trust and familiarity with SNAICC Early Years Support, and the way the program supports connections to and evidence from the ACCO sector, it has also become clear the value the program holds for policy implementation. To date, services and governments alike have valued the role SNAICC Early Years Support in supporting services to access, understand and implement policy changes in a service specific context. Current examples include the role SNAICC Early Years Support is playing in supporting participating ACCOs to engage with the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and educator pay increases.

While much sector expansion work is in initial phases with governments, over the pilot period SNAICC Early Years Support was appointed the role as the Sector Strengthening Partner in NSW which has led to 26 new ACCOs in NSW in 2023, in 2024 there have also been two new services supported in Victoria and one additional service transitioning to an ACCO in NSW. Conversations are underway regarding 10 new ACGC services through partnership with the NSW Department of Communities and Justice. Interest in the supports provided by SNAICC Early Years Support has also been shown by governments in Queensland,

Northern Territory and South Australia, noting the scope for the pilot period was not inclusive of these jurisdictions.

Cost-effectiveness

In recognition of the early stage of implementation, and the fact that the outcomes of SNAICC Early Years Support are only beginning to emerge, its cost-effectiveness is assessed as it relates to: the SNAICC Early Years Support Budget; the effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support and how this translates through to early indications of value for money; comparison to similar initiatives; and consideration to operating efficiencies.

The budget of SNAICC Early Years Support over the life of the pilot is \$10.4 million. In terms of the value provided by SNAICC Early Years Support, though still in the early phases of implementation, the evaluation has found that the program is on-track to the deliver outcomes (as specified in the program logic model, see Section 1.3.3) and a number of these outcomes are already being observed.

The establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support was driven by the unique and substantial operational challenges that ACCO providers face, which are considerably greater than those encountered by mainstream early years services. This need, and the knowledge that through increased ACCO capacity, capability, reach and sustainability Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities stand to significantly benefit, remains unchanged. Indeed, it has been further evidenced through this evaluation. Further, the evaluation has identified additional value in the learnings the mainstream early years sector can take from ACCO delivery in providing holistic and culturally responsive services, learnings which are shared and made increasingly accessible through SNAICC Early Years Support.

To fully grasp the value of SNAICC Early Years Support brings, the counterfactual needs to be considered. How would services obtain support if SNAICC Early Years Support did not exist, what form would this support take and what outcomes would it deliver? The varied, culturally responsive, and tailored nature of supports offered by SNAICC Early Years Support makes a comparison against other programs complex and challenging. Additionally, the unique skillsets and capabilities held by SNAICC Early Years Support teams and staff, including cultural legitimacy and responsiveness, limits the potential that alternative providers could deliver similar services, at scale, with the same effectiveness.

Supporting this, the majority of services noted that SNAICC Early Years Support was the only initiative they were aware of that offered this level and nature of support.

"I think that it is one-of-a-kind. I have never seen this level of support before (in 30 years). I don't think that anyone would be able to duplicate the work that SNAICC Early Support team provide. They have the relationship with services, nationally as well. Why reinvent something that works so well?" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

The unique program that SNAICC Early Years Support presents - the deep network of relationships and the specialist cultural leadership and expertise - leaves few alternatives for achieving the outcomes SNAICC Early Years Support is on track to deliver. As such, considerations of cost effectiveness are most usefully centred in efficiency optimisation, and the ways in which the program can grow in value and efficiency over time.

To achieve efficiency in operation, it is important:

- **To recognise highest value investments:** It is crucial to identify and prioritise investments that will bring the highest value to services. This includes considering factors such as the alignment with service needs, the link to long-term benefits (e.g., children and family outcomes), and the overall resource requirements for each investment.
- **To ensure resources are allocated efficiently:** To achieve maximum cost effectiveness, it is essential to allocate resources efficiently. This involves making informed decisions about how resources are distributed and utilised across different jurisdiction and supports. There is a need to closely monitor and manage resources, to identify scope for inefficiencies or areas where resources may be underutilised or misallocated. This allows for necessary adjustments and reallocation of resources to areas that require greater support or have a higher potential for generating value.

The evaluation outlines a number of future considerations (Section 5) to continue to refine SNAICC Early Years Support to optimise operating efficiency.

Equity

Given the highly tailored and place-based service delivery models employed across the ACCO sector to respond to community need, the evaluation has been concerned from the outset in understanding how the effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support differs for individual services and jurisdictions in alignment with context. This is the lens through which equity is viewed and is explored here,

Consistent with findings from previous years, the context in which a participating service operates can, should and does influence the way they interact with and derive benefit from SNAICC Early Years Support. This includes:

- **Geographical context:** An important aspect of the support that SNAICC Early Years Support aims to offer is based on visiting services face to face, building relationships and creating understanding of service needs. Further, services tend to be in more regional and remote areas compared to the mainstream services. This means that travel distance to remote services can be a barrier.
- **Level of service establishment:** The SNAICC Early Years Support program has been designed to be responsive to service needs and provide the tailored necessary supports for each service. Given the program is more reactive to the acute needs of the service, it can lead to more impact being focused on newer services who have more acute needs, compared to a reduced impact at more established services that require less support. This differentiated impact for established services has continued to be observed over the years.
- **Workforce constraints:** In all jurisdictions, a barrier to the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support is workforce shortages, for both services and for the SNAICC Early Years Support team. In some instances, it's observed that services may not have the capacity to engage with SNAICC Early Years Support, and SNAICC Early Years Support may not have the capacity to support services in alignment with their needs.

Over time as the SNAICC Early Years Support model has matured, and as service needs and engagement barriers have become increasingly understood, the diversity and sophistication of engagement approaches has grown. This has included a greater number of ways for services to engage (i.e., through gatherings, tablets, communities of practices) and the development of services that are increasingly tailored to service maturity and context.

Conclusion

The evaluation has found that SNAICC Early Years Support has been largely implemented as intended. While taking some time to become fully established, services and stakeholders alike have credited the careful co-design process, alongside the recruitment and development of high-quality staff (to which early implementation delays were attributed) as critical in establishing the foundations for trusted service relationships and engagement.

In 2024 SNAICC Early Years Support is providing valued and effective supports for early years services, facilitating an increasingly strong collective voice to inform policy reform and design, and creating spaces and avenues for service connection and community building across the sector. Beyond the benefits to individual services, the knowledge and practice sharing facilitated by SNAICC Early Years Support contributes to a strengthened understanding of recognition of the value of ACCO service delivery models and practice excellence across the whole early learning sector.

While still in the relatively early days of implementation (only now at the end of its pilot phase, and fully operational for less than two years), emerging indications of impact suggest that SNAICC Early Years Support is progressing toward – and in some cases, already delivering – outcomes in accordance with service need and the theory of change. To date, this has been observed with improvements in service quality and sustainability, which flow directly through to benefits for children, families and communities.

The evaluation presents a range of future considerations regarding how SNAICC Early Years Support can continue to be refined as the program matures and considers further expansion. These span communication, governance, personnel management, collaboration, data collection and monitoring.

Notably, beyond program and/or internal refinements, the ongoing impact of SNAICC Early Years Support is closely tied to the broader policy environment and the conditions under which it operates. Given this, as SNAICC Early Years Support transitions from its pilot phase, it will be vital to ensure robust and stable policy foundations – including a clear policy framework and long-term vision for the role of an intermediary body in the ACCO early years sector. This should be considered alongside funding certainty, an effective resource allocation program and the governance arrangements that are required to realise the long-term impact aspirations.

Deloitte Access Economics

1 Introduction

Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged by SNAICC – National Voice of our Children (SNAICC) to conduct an independent evaluation of SNAICC Early Years Support (previously known as THRYVE) from 2022 to 2024. Initially, the evaluation focused on implementation, but its emphasis has, particularly now in its final year, shifted to outcomes.

This report is the final of three annual evaluation reports. It examines the design, implementation, and progress toward outcomes of the SNAICC Early Years Support. The evidence presented in this report comprises 2022, 2023 and 2024 data collection, and considers all three participating jurisdictions: New South Wales (NSW), Victoria (Vic), and Western Australia (WA).

1.1 Background

1.1.1 National and state priorities

The benefits of children and families engaging with quality early years services are widely recognised. These benefits encompass social, developmental, educational, and economic outcomes that are sustained over their lives. At all levels of government, there is an increasing focus on ensuring that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have access to culturally safe early childhood education and care (ECEC), providing them with the best opportunity for developmental outcomes that align with the rest of the nation.

The refreshed *Closing the Gap* agenda highlights a focus on several areas. Including, it prioritises increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children engaging with culturally appropriate preschool and those assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development census. Additionally, it recognises the crucial role that community-controlled organisations must play in realising this ambition. There is also a recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the design and delivery of services that affect them, and that a structural change in the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is needed to close the gap.³

The Productivity Commission inquiry into ECEC highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are under-represented in ECEC services. This under-representation arises due to mainstream services often being unavailable, unaffordable, or lacking culturally safe environments. In the final report, a notable recommendation is made for the establishment of a sustainable funding program for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) early years services, which recognises ACCOs' knowledge and expertise to deliver early childhood priorities of their communities.⁴

Additionally, state governments increasingly recognise the need and the role they play in supporting ACCOs to deliver stronger outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families:

- The WA *Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy* commits the WA government to increasing the proportion of services to Aboriginal people delivered by ACCOs. This strategy acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to engage with services when ACCOs are involved in the planning, designing, and delivering the services.⁵
- NSW Department of Education's *First Steps - Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025* aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ECEC sector. It

³ Australian Government, *Closing the Gap Report 2020* (2020).

⁴ Productivity Commission, *A path to universal early childhood education and care Draft Report* (2023).

⁵ Government of Western Australia, *Whole of Government ACCO Strategy* (2024).
<https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/whole-of-government-acco-strategy>

includes funding to support the sustainability and expansion of ACCOs (with SNAICC Early Years Support appointed the Sector Strengthening Partner).⁶

- Vic's *Marrung – Aboriginal Education Plan 2016-2026* commits the Vic government to ensure young Koorie children are on track in their health, development, and wellbeing, and that the early learning experience for Koorie children sets them up for life. It includes a focus on improving access and participation in early childhood services.⁷

1.1.2 Importance of ACCO services

The Productivity Commission has reported Australia is on track to meet Target 3 of the National Agreement, which is to have 95 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children engaged in early childhood education before 2025. However, progress towards Target 4 (increasing development in all five domains of the AEDC to 55 per cent) has worsened⁸, emphasising that meeting these policy objectives is not just about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families engaging with ECEC services, but the quality and nature of these experiences.

Meaningful engagement with early years services, as well as the improvement of outcomes hinges on the cultural strength and community centredness of the programs delivered. This is further demonstrated through the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – which highlights *“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”*.⁹

ECEC services must be equipped, capable, and accessible to effectively engage with and respond to the unique and complex needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. ACCOs achieve this through employing child-centred and community-led models that deviate from mainstream service delivery to respond to the complex needs of the communities, families and children they support. These models incorporate highly tailored, multidisciplinary and culturally centred approaches – often providing blueprints for community centred practice excellence.

The expertise and models developed within the ACCO early years sector are essential for creating an inclusive and equitable early years system – through strong connections to community, cultural responsiveness, and culturally informed programs. By sharing this knowledge across ACCO services and the early years system more broadly, there is a potential to narrow, or redress, the gap in developmental vulnerability, enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to thrive. Strengthening this system is not only a social responsibility but also an opportunity to shape the future trajectory of Australia.

1.1.3 Challenges faced by ACCO services

While the provision of quality early years services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is recognised as a national priority, and the ACCO model of service delivery recognised as best practice in response to this priority, ACCO services face significant challenges in maintaining sustainable operations. These challenges are often operational and systemic, driven by a funding and policy system that does not align with the service models required by ACCOs, impacting their ability to deliver high-quality and accessible early years programs. The hurdles faced by ACCOs in delivering for their communities are extensive and include:

- Sustainability: challenges in ensuring long-term viability amidst limited resources
- Workforce shortages: struggling to attract and retain qualified staff, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

⁶ Department of Education New South Wales, *First Steps – the NSW Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025* (2021), < <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/making-services-accessible-for-all-children/aboriginal-access/strategy#First2>>

⁷ Department of Education Victoria, *Marrung – Aboriginal Education Plan 2016 – 2026* (2016), < https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/aboriginal/Marrung_Aboriginal_Education_Plan_2016-2026.pdf>

⁸ Productivity Commission, *Closing the Gap Information Repository* (2024).

⁹ United Nations, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007), <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/wp-content/uploads/sites/19/2018/11/UNDRIP_E_web.pdf>

- Geographical constraints: operating in remote and vulnerable communities and recognising differences in community need and expectations.
- Access to expertise: limited availability of specialised knowledge and skills
- Economies of scale: often difficulty achieving cost efficiencies as services operate at a community, rather than aggregate, level.
- Government support: inadequate support for culturally informed service delivery
- Policy representation: lack of representation in key national and/or state policy and decision-making processes.¹⁰

The existing funding and policy environment presents additional difficulties. ACCOs provide far more comprehensive support for their families and children (and often, more complex types of support) than traditional ECEC models, yet they lack a tailored funding framework to support and sustain them. As a result, these services frequently operate under significant resource constraints.

The challenges faced by ACCOs, matched with the policy priority to lift Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family outcomes through a strong ACCO service system, underscore the critical need for tailored and timely supports for these services.

Given their community focus, ACCO early years services have predominately worked independently, focusing on the unique needs of their local communities with limited opportunities or vehicles for interaction with other services. This isolation has meant that valuable insights, lessons learnt over time and effective practices have not historically been shared between ACCOs – including missed opportunities for sharing of resources and approaches that could benefit children and families.

The isolation experienced by ACCO services has exacerbated challenges faced in their endeavours to support vulnerable children and families and navigate a complex regulatory and funding environment that is not built for their needs. Prior to the introduction of SNAICC Early Years Support, services reflected feeling like they were ‘doing it alone’.

1.2 SNAICC Early Years Support

1.2.1 Establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support

In recognition of the challenges highlighted in Section 1.1.3, SNAICC Early Years Support was conceptualised to support “*service delivery organisations to address service, operational and system challenges*”.¹¹ Five options were considered prior to its development, including: (1) standalone funding, (2) centralising service operations, (3) support via existing backbone, (4) centralised backbone, and (5) regional backbone. Following feasibility studies, it was determined the best approach was the establishment of a (series of) backbone organisations connected to a national backbone.

Following this, a co-design process (between SNAICC and early years services) was undertaken to confirm need, service priorities, governance preferences, and direction for the program. Initially, the co-design was completed with NSW, where SNAICC Early Years Support was first operationalised. This is discussed further in Section 2.2.1.

The establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support was, from the outset, known and intended to be different in its governance, approaches, and supports compared with mainstream services – with it being designed, governed, and operated through a First Nations leadership and lens. This was supported through additional autonomy and flexibility provided to SNAICC in the design, development and implementation phases than is typical for a Commonwealth funded program (as articulated by NIAA), to deliberately create the space for a truly First Nations developed response.

1.2.2 Aim of SNAICC Early Years Support

SNAICC Early Years Support is a community-controlled intermediary program that represents and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years services. The aspiration of SNAICC Early Years Support is:

¹⁰ SNAICC, ‘Funding program options for ACCO integrated early years services (2024), < <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/240507-ACCO-Funding-Report.pdf>>

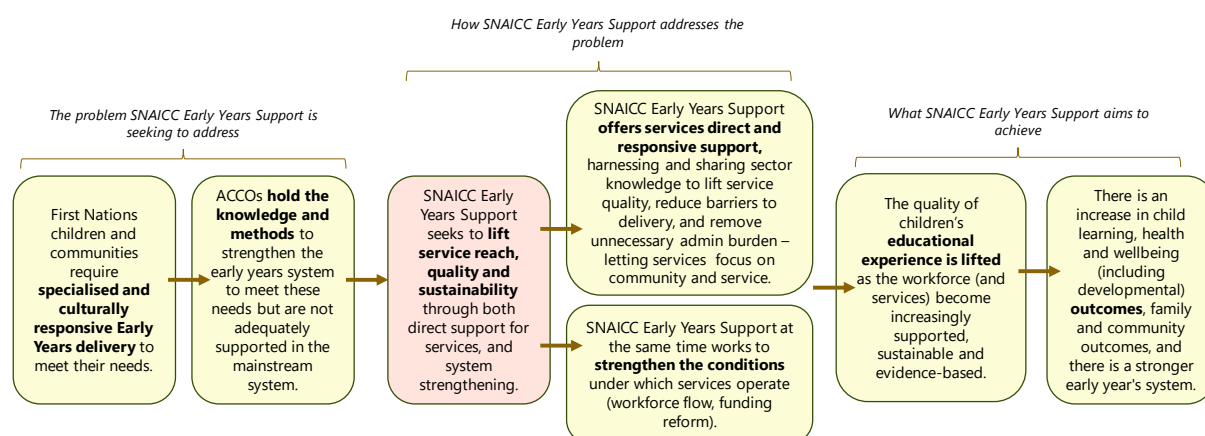
¹¹ SNAICC, SVA Consulting, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to early learning project: joint initiative with SNAICC” (2020).

“to support and represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled EYS to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible and culturally strong supports for our children, families, and communities.”¹²

SNAICC Early Years Support is designed to provide backbone support to the community-controlled ECEC sector by fostering vital connections between services, delivering needs-based and timely support, and amplifying a collective voice to advocate for policy reform.

SNAICC Early Years Support provides assistance to the ACCO sector, through the service leaders, to deliver place-based early years education to children. While the support is directed towards services, the ultimate goal is to benefit children, families, and communities. By undertaking activities that improve access and participation, workforce development, quality delivery, and system cohesion, it is expected that these efforts will lead to outcomes (discussed further in Section 3).

Figure 1.1 SNAICC Early Years Support theory of change



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

The key objectives and activities of SNAICC Early Years Support are outlined in Figure 1.2. These have been informed by the co-design process (Section 2.2.1), the PLM, a workplan (which considered the context, scope, key stakeholders, implementation timeline, and evaluation of the SNAICC Early Years Support).

Figure 1.2: Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities

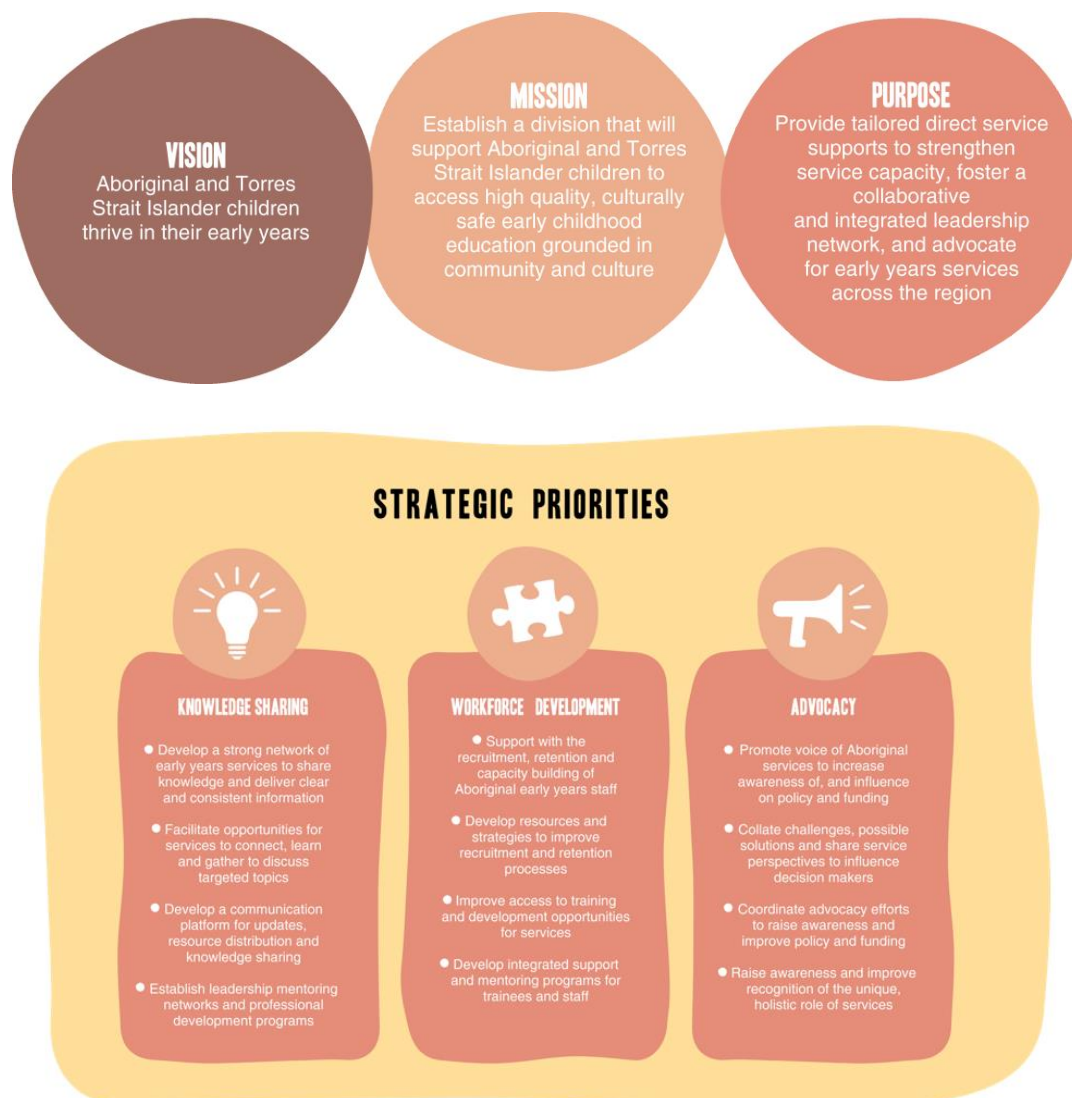


¹² SNAICC, 'SNAICC National Intermediary SNAICC Early Years Support Program Project' (2022), <<https://www.snaicc.org.au/sector-development/thryve-project/>>

Source: Deloitte Access Economics, SNAICC.

SNAICC Early Years Support is also based on the strategic objectives illustrated below in Figure 1.3. These strategic objectives are communicated to services in a newly piloted 'Getting Started' training module, outlined further in Section 2.2.2.1.

Figure 1.3: SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support, Getting Started training materials.

SNAICC Early Years Support, in its 'program' stage (2021 to 2024), involves the establishment of a national body and three state-level bodies in NSW, Vic and WA. SNAICC Early Years Support is discussed further in Section 4.

1.3 The evaluation

As introduced in Section 1.1, Deloitte Access Economics has been engaged by SNAICC – National Voice of our Children (SNAICC) to conduct an evaluation of SNAICC Early Years Support, between 2022 and 2024.

The purpose of the evaluation is both:

- **developmental:** to support formative insights to improve and strengthen SNAICC Early Years Support over time
- **summative:** seeking to isolate and articulate the impact and effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support.

1.3.1 Evaluation principles

At the commencement of the evaluation, it was recognised that long-term evaluations operate in an ever-changing space. This is particularly important in the context of a developmental evaluation, and in accommodating with the responsive, place-based nature of SNAICC Early Years Support's design. From the outset, it has been understood and expected that the program aspirations, delivery modes and ways of understanding impact would shift and adapt over the life of the program (and evaluation).

The developmental evaluation relationship between the SNAICC Early Years Support and Deloitte Access Economics evaluation teams enables these adjustments and shifts to be made in a way that recognises this dynamic environment, while also preserving the structure and longitudinal integrity of the evaluation. In this sense, it is important to note that the evaluation has not been solely an 'add on' to SNAICC Early Years Support, but rather a central component of the development story – contributing to a shared language and understanding about impact and supporting stakeholder decision making.

Importantly, the evaluation benefitted from cultural leadership to inform the design and delivery of the evaluation. The evaluation was co-led by Professor Deen Sanders, a Worimi man, who supported the integration of First Nations knowledge systems and ways of working with traditional Western evaluation constructs. A partnership with Indigenous-led consultancy firm, Murawin, was employed to support consultations with early years services, and sense-making in how service reflections were interpreted and triangulated. SNAICC Early Years Support staff provided guidance on stakeholder engagement approaches, ensuring services were contacted through trusted and safe relationships. Collectively, these elements have supported the evaluation to be undertaken with cultural integrity, thoughtfulness and responsiveness.

A set of agreed evaluation principles were established at the evaluation's outset to provide this structure to the evaluation partnership. These principles, and how they were applied over the life of the evaluation, are provided in the box below.

Table 1.1: Evaluation principles and how they were applied

Key principles	How the principle has been applied throughout the evaluation
The centrality of Voice and Listening: respecting that in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, all processes begin with listening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation sought to provide a multitude of culturally safe and responsive avenues for service and stakeholder voice to contribute to the evaluation, spanning consultation, surveys and interactions at SNAICC Early Years events. Murawin were engaged to ensure the consultation process was undertaken in a culturally strong manner. The evaluation refined the approach to listening overtime, with stakeholder engagement tools and methods modified in response to service and stakeholder feedback. The evaluation made space for the testing and refinement of findings through annual reflection sessions with SNAICC Early Years Support and testing with the sector, ensuring services and stakeholders were provided opportunity to understand how evidence had been interpreted and continue to advice on the way the evaluation defined outcomes, lines of inquiry and findings.
Cultural leadership: Not just as a matter of safety, but as a matter of responsibility and care for shared outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, knowledge, community relationality and connections with Elders has been privileged in evaluation data collection and sense-making. The evaluation has benefited from the leadership of Professor Deen Sanders OAM, a Worimi man and Giparr (cultural leader) in his community. The consultation process was led by Murawin – a First Nations owned and led consultancy.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation has sought to work in close partnership with SNAICC Early Years Support (and through their governance – ACCO services themselves) which has been central in enabling the ACCO early years sector's leadership to inform evaluation methods and approaches.
Active Learning. Active improvement: evidence is shared early and collected in a way that maximises opportunities for continuous improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In line with data sovereignty principles, findings were shared iteratively throughout the evaluation, including through formal reflection sections and play-backs to participating services. Reflection sessions were purposefully designed to support evaluation evidence to inform strategic decision making in relation to SNAICC Early Years Support implementation and forward looking priorities.
Place-based, systemic and systematic: Ensuring analysis method are flexible and systemically responsive to differences in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All data collection instruments, as well as the sampling approach, were constructed in line with realist evaluation approaches and a desire to understand how SNAICC Early Years Support worked across service and place-based contexts. Throughout the evaluation there has been a focus on continuing to use the emerging evidence on what works and for whom, to articulate the SNAICC Early Years Support program with increased precision and nuance.
Rigorous: Ensuring findings are well-substantiated, valid and transferable.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation framework has underpinned all data collection and evaluation activities, ensuring longitudinal integrity and alignment with the evaluation lines of inquiry. A variety of techniques and evidence sources were triangulated to demonstrate effectiveness and impact. Limitations of the evaluation methodology are clearly acknowledged.

1.3.2 Evaluation domains

Evaluation domains and questions define the scope and focus of the evaluation. They are high-level lines of inquiry, which link back to the PLM and define the focus of the evaluation (see the Evaluation Framework in Appendix B). Deloitte Access Economics' evaluation team has worked with SNAICC to develop the evaluation domains and questions in Year 1, with refinement occurring at commencement of Year 2 and Year 3 of the evaluation (this year).





The evaluation domains are grouped according to implementation and impact streams:

- the **implementation stream** assesses the implementation process and implementation outcomes of SNAICC Early Years Support. The evaluation domains and questions about implementation inform decision-making and support early years services (and, by extension, families and children). This stream explores if SNAICC Early Years Support has been implemented as intended
- the **impact stream** assesses the short, medium and long-term outcomes of SNAICC Early Years Support, in alignment with the program logic model (PLM), and determines whether its objectives have been achieved.





The evaluation is structured around eight evaluation domains (see Figure 1.1). Evaluation questions for each domain are outlined in Appendix B.

Figure 1.1: Domains of the evaluation

Implementation domains

-  **Awareness and understanding:** The extent to which prospective users have knowledge and an understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support, its purpose, and role in supporting the delivery of high quality, responsive and accessible services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families across Australia.
-  **Alignment and uptake:** The extent to which services and other stakeholders have been engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support, and strategies are integrated in services to sustain engagement with the intermediary.
-  **Fidelity and quality:** The implementation fidelity of SNAICC Early Years Support and how implementation changes over time to respond to context, insights and feedback.
-  **Sustainability:** The extent to which SNAICC Early Years Support reflects a sustainable and embedded component of the sector going forward.

Impact domains

-  **Appropriateness:** The extent to which the design of the SNAICC Early Years Support is appropriate to meet the needs of services, families and children and potential improvements and refinements that can be made to the intermediary model are understood.
-  **Effectiveness:** The extent to which initiative objectives are being achieved and to what extent broader SNAICC Early Years Support objectives are being achieved.
-  **Cost-effectiveness:** The extent to which the funding and SNAICC Early Years Support model is efficient in producing outcomes and achieving its objectives.
-  **Equity:** The extent to which SNAICC Early Years Support meets the needs and delivers equitable outcomes to services and, by extension, to families and children.

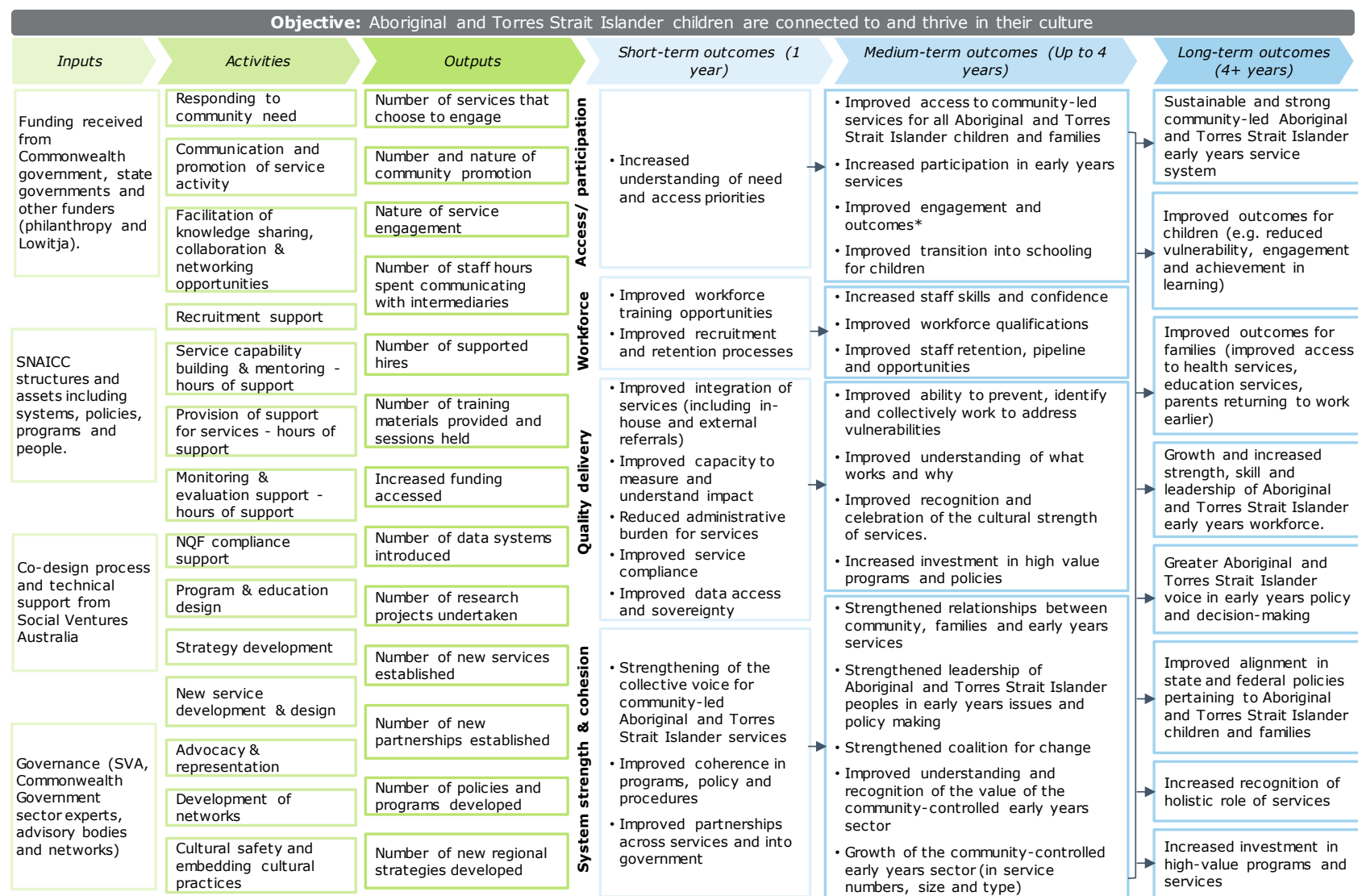
Source: Deloitte Access Economics in collaboration with SNAICC.

1.3.3 Program logic model

A PLM defines a program's expected chain of cause and effect. It articulates the inputs, activities and outputs that will contribute to short-, medium- and long-term outcomes. The PLM was developed by Deloitte Access Economics (with inputs and feedback from SNAICC Early Years Support) in 2022.

The PLM was re-tested and refined annually (in collaboration with SNAICC Early Years Support) to ensure it maintains relevance. Through this process it was determined that the aims and logic largely held true over the life of the program, though service need and priorities, as well as growing understanding of where SNAICC Early Years Support is most effective, resulted in heightened focus in some areas over others.

Figure 1.4 Program logic model



Source: Deloitte Access Economics in collaboration with SNAICC early Years Support.

1.3.4 Data collection

In seeking to respond rigorously and comprehensively to the evaluation questions, the evaluation draws on a range of primary and secondary data sources.

Overall, the qualitative data collected over the three years of the evaluation provides a comprehensive set of evidence informing the design, implementation and impact of SNAICC Early Years Support. However, there is limited secondary data at the service level available to draw on regarding the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support (such as workforce sustainability or capability, practice observations or child level engagement or outcome data). While significant effort has been made to validate and strengthen the derived findings through data triangulation methods, there are data limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings presented in this report (see Section 1.3.5).

1.3.4.1 Primary data collection

As part of the evaluation's annual data collection, three main types of stakeholder activities were undertaken:

- **Consultations** to support the attainment of important insights from key players and stakeholders (services and non-services) in response to the evaluation questions for SNAICC Early Years Support.
- **Surveys** to gather data and insights on SNAICC Early Years Support's implementation and the identification of impacts.
- **Observations** at the state and national Gatherings to understand services experience SNAICC Early Years Support

Service consultations

Across the three years, 28 unique services were consulted with (out of 36 supported by SNAICC Early Years Support. This makes a proportion of 77.7 per cent of services across the three jurisdictions (NSW, WA and Vic). The consultations were conducted with early years' service directors and educators, and were held in-person, where possible. The consultations provided insights into services awareness of SNAICC Early Years Support, their engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support, their observed early impacts of SNAICC Early Years Support, and opportunities for improvement.

In 2023 and 2024, Deloitte Access Economics partnered with Indigenous-led consultancy firm Murawin to conduct consultations with services. This partnership was made to ensure that the consultation process was culturally safe and that all consultations would be led by an Indigenous person.

Table 1.2 Overview of service consultations

	2022	2023	2024
	A total of 15 consultations were held with 9 services.	A total of 28 consultations were held with 17 services.	A total of 17 consultations were held with 13 services.
Early years services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 5 NSW services • 1 Vic service • 3 WA services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6 NSW services • 6 Vic services • 5 WA services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3 NSW services • 6 Vic services • 4 WA services

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Survey

A survey was developed and distributed annually to service leaders and educators. The survey focused on services' awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support, the elements of its implementation that have worked well and led to an impact on the service, and what could be improved.

In 2024 and 2023, the same survey was administered to all jurisdictions, and was fielded over June and July 2023. In 2022, the survey was differentiated between services in NSW (where SNAICC Early Years Support has been fully operational since 2021) and services in WA and VIC (where SNAICC Early Years Support had only recently become operational). The NSW survey was the same as the survey delivered in 2023, whereas in Vic and WA, the survey focused on awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support, including early indications of what is working well (and what could be improved), but also gathered

information related to what the early years services *expected* from SNAICC Early Years Support, given the early implementation stage.

An overview of the survey participation is provided in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3 Overview of survey participation

	2022	2023	2024
	A total of 23 responses were received from 18 services (response rate of 48%).	A total of 25 responses were received from 21 services (response rate of 40%).	A total of 20 responses were received from 17 services (response rate of 27%).
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 13 responses from 12 services¹³ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 responses (10 directors, 1 educator, and 1 other staff member) from 9 services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5 responses (5 directors) from 5 services
Vic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 7 responses from 5 services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 10 responses (3 directors, 2 educators and 5 other staff members) from 8 services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 12 responses (8 directors, 4 educators) from 9 services
WA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 responses from 3 services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 responses (1 director, 2 other staff members) from 3 services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 responses (2 directors, 1 educator) from 3 services

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

In 2022, NSW had the highest response rate of the three jurisdictions. This was believed to have been due to NSW being the only fully operational branch of SNAICC Early Years Support, and therefore having greater engagement. In 2023, Vic saw a significant increase in response rate and largest response rate of all jurisdictions at two-thirds. This is likely to be linked to SNAICC Early Years Support becoming more operational and familiar in Vic – last year, only 3 of 11 responded. In 2024, there was a decrease in the response rate (due to more directors and educators being invited) – however, the total number of responses was broadly consistent with previous years. Further, NSW saw a decrease in the number of services responding to the survey.

Observations

In 2024, SNAICC Early Years Support hosted four ‘Gatherings’ – WA Gathering, NSW Gathering, Vic Gathering, and a National Gathering. Deloitte Access Economics attended and observed three of the gatherings (WA, NSW, and National).

The observations allowed for improved understanding on how services received support from SNAICC Early Years Support, and the impact services have experienced. Additionally, as part of Gatherings Deloitte Access Economics facilitated formal agenda items to allow services to share their perspectives on the evaluation findings and the experience of SNAICC Early Years Support at their services.

Non-service consultations

Across the three years, a total of 32 consultations with non-service stakeholders were led by the evaluation team between June and November 2024. The consultations provided insights into the perspectives of key players and stakeholders (e.g., government, SNAICC, and peak bodies), with a focus on the implementation progress of SNAICC Early Years Support, and potential barriers and enablers to achieving outcomes. The non-service consultations also informed an understanding of the expectations held for SNAICC Early Years across government stakeholders and governance groups.

Table 1.4 provides an overview of the key stakeholders consulted with.

¹³ In the first year of the evaluation, the Early Years Survey did not include a question related to role of the respondent (i.e. whether the respondent was an educator or director).

Table 1.4 Overview of non-service semi-structured interviews

	2022	2023	2024
	A total of 9 consultations were held with SNAICC, government and peak body stakeholders.	A total of 13 consultations were held with SNAICC, government and peak body stakeholders.	A total of 10 consultations were held with SNAICC, government and peak body stakeholders.
SNAICC stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with the National SNAICC Early Years Support 2 consultations with the State SNAICC Early Years Support Directors 2 consultations with SNAICC State Advisory Committees 1 consultation with SNAICC Central 1 consultation with Social Ventures Australia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with the National SNAICC Early Years Support Directors 3 consultations with the State SNAICC Early Years Support Directors 3 consultations with SNAICC State Advisory Committees 1 consultation with SNAICC Central 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with the National SNAICC Early Years Support Directors 2 consultations with the State SNAICC Early Years Support Directors 3 consultations with SNAICC Central
Government and peak body stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with Department of Education (Commonwealth) 1 consultation with NIAA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with Department of Education (Commonwealth) 1 consultation with NIAA 1 consultation with VAEAI 1 consultation with Department of Education (NSW) 1 consultation with Department of Communities (WA) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 consultation with Department of Education (Commonwealth) 1 consultation with NIAA 1 consultation with VAEAI 1 consultation with Department of Education (NSW)

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

1.3.4.2 Secondary data

Observations outlined in the report are also based on the findings from secondary data provided by SNAICC or publicly available information. The secondary data examined in this report included SNAICC Early Years Support program documentation (for example, Quality and Capability workplans, implementation documents, and reporting) and publicly available service quality ratings. However, there was limited service level quantitative data (such as enrolment and participation data) that was made available to the evaluation.

1.3.5 Considerations for interpretation of findings

This report presents findings based on primary and secondary data collected throughout the evaluation. While significant effort has been made to validate and strengthen the derived findings through data triangulation methods, there are a number of data limitations present. These limitations include:

- **Bias in selection of services:** While visiting services face-to-face was the preferred method of consultation, it is important to acknowledge that this decision may have introduced a level of bias into the sample of services who were consulted with. Services that were closer to major cities were more accessible due to easier travel requirements. Services located further away differ systematically from those closer to major cities. For example, they might have more limited access to resources or less frequent engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support. It should be noted that remote and regional services were consulted with virtually and connected with at Gatherings (rather than through face-to-face consultations).

- **No family and community voice:** The theory of change for SNAICC Early Years Support does not closely connect to families and communities and, as a result, they were not consulted with as part of this evaluation (this decision was made in collaboration with SNAICC). Instead, the focus of the evaluation primarily involves service stakeholders, including service leaders, directors and educators, who are expected to experience the changes and outcomes linked to SNAICC Early Years Support. However, it is important to note that children and families are ultimately the beneficiaries of these changes in the long-term.
- **Lack of quantitative data:** There is limited quantitative data available to measure the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support. Therefore, the findings are predominately determined by qualitative data (collected through surveys and consultations). Notably, this report explores future data collection improvements in Section 5.1.8.
- **Low survey response rates:** Over the three years, there were relatively low response rates to the survey (ranging from 27 per cent to 48 per cent completion). Therefore, the findings derived from the survey may not be representative of all the services receiving support from SNAICC Early Years Support. However, wherever possible, survey findings have been triangulated with other data sources, including service voice attained through consultations.
- **Causal outcomes:** Due to the relatively early implementation stages of SNAICC Early Years Support, it is difficult to obtain quantitative causal outcomes of service, family and child outcomes at this stage. This report presents emerging outcomes primarily informed by qualitative data (survey and consultations). Noting that, wherever possible, quantitative measures have been included to demonstrate movement in the relevant indicators.

1.4 This report

1.4.1 Structure of the report

The remainder of this document is set out as follows:

- **Section 2** describes the implementation journey of SNAICC Early Years Support.
- **Section 3** describes the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support.
- **Section 4** describes the SNAICC Early Years Program.
- **Section 5** outlines the implications and conclusion for the evaluation.

Additional detail is provided in the appendices on:

- **Appendix A** outlines the list of participating services
- **Appendix B** provides an overview of the Evaluation Framework
- **Appendix C** includes the full analysis of the 2024 SNAICC Early Years Support Survey

2 The implementation journey

In line with the Implementation domains established in the evaluation framework, this Chapter examines how SNAICC Early Years Support has been implemented over the course of the program.

Overview





Evaluation domain	Key findings
Awareness and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support is strong and has continued to build over the course of the Program. The majority of services have a strong level of awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support. This has increased overtime as there was some service level confusion in what supports could be engaged with in the early years of implementation. Increased understanding has been achieved primarily through site visits and communications, as well as networking events such as the State and National Gatherings. The menu of services and introductory modules developed in 2024 have helped to clarify what member services can expect from SNAICC Early Years Support.
Alignment and uptake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The evaluation has observed that SNAICC Early Years Support has become a highly trusted, effective, and embedded layer within the ACCO early years sector. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 68 per cent of survey respondents strongly agreed, with a further 21 per cent agreeing, that there was a good relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support and that trust was built.
Fidelity and quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> SNAICC Early Years Support did take time (longer than originally anticipated) to become fully operational within each jurisdiction, with delays attributed to challenges in staffing and the co-design process taking longer than intended. The additional time taken to find the right staff, and to build the program of supports alongside services, were critical foundations for building trusted relationships with service Reflections from services on the quality of SNAICC Early Years Support offerings have been overwhelmingly positive; however, there has been some level of variability in the nature of engagement of services observed throughout the evaluation.
Appropriateness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The offerings of SNAICC Early Years Support are aligned with service priorities, and responsive to service needs. The highest priorities for the sector (as reported by early years services) are aligned with SNAICC Early Years Support activities. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understanding legislation and policy changes identifying and accessing funding opportunities connecting to other services and sharing knowledge workforce training opportunities.

This Section explores how SNAICC Early Years Support has been implemented, and whether this has been in line with expectations. It also examines how early years services have engaged with the program. The findings relating to the implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support have been informed by an examination of program documentation, survey data and collated evidence from consultations with SNAICC staff, non-government bodies, government stakeholders and participating services (see Section 1.3.4). This Chapter presents findings that are related to the evaluation questions within the implementation domains of the evaluation framework (see Table 2.1 below).

In general, the implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support has been in line with expectations. Although challenges have been faced along the journey, such as delays to becoming fully operational, a commitment to relationship-building and quality engagement has meant that services have increased their awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support offerings, built trust, and regularly engage. The development and design of the program has been informed by a collaborative process that allows SNAICC Early Years Support to appropriately address the priorities of the sector. The program has evolved to improve its delivery over the course of the Program, reflecting the utilisation of learnings and feedback.

While there is a degree of variation between jurisdictions, and areas in which implementation can continue to be refined, the extent to which the implementation has enabled SNAICC Early Years Support to work towards its objectives demonstrates its value to the ACCO sector.

Table 2.1: Implementation evaluation domains and questions

Implementation domain	Evaluation questions
Awareness and understanding 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Is the purpose of the intermediaries well understood by the sector? 2. To what extent do stakeholders believe in the benefits of the intermediary program?
Alignment and uptake 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. How, and to what extent, are the intermediaries used by services and other stakeholders? 4. How, and to what extent, do the intermediaries respond to local needs and context? 5. Are there any changes that could be made to encourage greater engagement?
Fidelity and quality 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. To what extent are the activities undertaken by the intermediaries in line with intentions? 7. To what extent are the intermediaries embedded and led by the community-controlled service sector? 8. To what extent are learnings feeding into continual improvement?
Appropriateness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. To what extent does the design of the intermediaries reflect the priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years sector?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

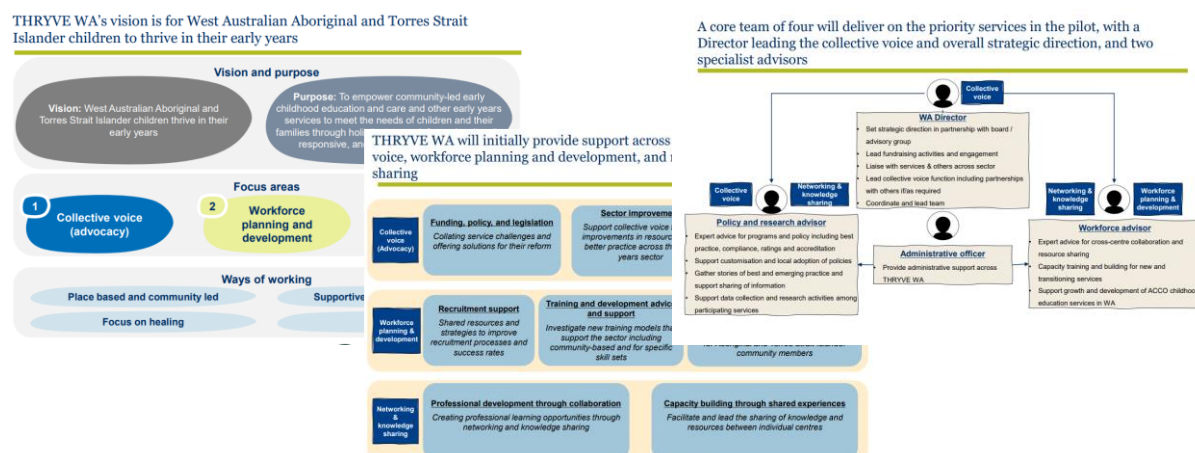
2.2 Development of the SNAICC Early Years Support

2.2.1 Design process

SNAICC Early Years Support's design – including the type of activities and support it provides to the early years services – was informed through a collaborative process between SNAICC Early Years Support and the participating services. In each jurisdiction, two in-person workshops were held, attended by SNAICC and each service within that jurisdiction – in WA, the codesign process was delayed by two months due to

regional wet season (which severely limits travel), and COVID-19 restrictions. The objective of this process was to support the design of a program which places service voice and experience 'at the centre,' and ensure the program can respond to service needs and priorities.

Figure 2.1: Outputs from the design process



Note: At the time of creation of the outputs, SNAICC Early Years Support was named THRYVE.

Source: SNAICC, Social Ventures Australia

The process resulted in three state-specific models, each which sought to articulate the needs, priorities, governance requirements, outcomes, and set the agenda for the early years services and intermediary body within their jurisdiction. In addition to this design process, and as part of the evaluation framework (see Appendix B) a PLM was developed to outline SNAICC Early Years Support's overarching intended objectives for all jurisdictions in the short, medium, and long term – see Section 1.3.3. SNAICC also developed a workplan, which considered the context, scope, key stakeholders, implementation timeline, and evaluation of the SNAICC Early Years Support. The original workplan was subsequently revised in 2023.

As informed by the design process, the PLM and the workplan, SNAICC Early Years Support aims to provide support to early years services – both directly and indirectly – through the objectives described in Figure 2.2. Working together with services to design the program has meant that there is a strong degree of alignment to needs and priorities – this is explored further in Section 2.2.3. SNAICC Early Years Support utilises action plans (in NSW) and the internally-designed ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist (in Vic and WA) to guide their engagement with participating early years services (discussed in further detail in Section 2.3.3).

Figure 2.2: Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, SNAICC.

2.2.2 Clarity of the program

The nature of SNAICC Early Years Support– responsive, place-based, and contextual to jurisdictions – means that establishing specific clarity about the offering faces some challenges, but it is nonetheless essential for services to have a clear understanding of how they can engage with the Program and what supports or resources they can utilise. Internally, having a sense of purpose and clarity is helpful for staff – particularly for a new organisation – and ensures that staff have clear expectations to work towards, have confidence in their role, and understand what success looks like.

As a pilot program, and with the jurisdictional co-design model, a clear and consistent overview of the SNAICC Early Years Support service model and offering took some time to emerge, and has been building over the course of the Program. In 2024, for the first time, clear descriptions of the SNAICC Early Years Support model and offering were made available through a menu of services and introductory modules.

2.2.2.1 Internal clarity

The design of the program was informed by a collaborative process with services in each jurisdiction, as described in Section 2.2.1. Given the place-based nature of the program's design, it was intended that having a level of flexibility was an important feature as the program evolves. As such, over the course of the Program, the level of internal clarity has become more precise, as the program draws on deeper evidence of what services require across different contexts, and in what ways SNAICC Early Years Support teams are best positioned to respond.

In 2022 and 2023, the evaluation reports noted a degree of uncertainty about the intended outcomes of the program, and a need to balance responsive with clear and consistent intent nationally and across each participating jurisdiction. A lack of clarity in the nature of service delivery potentially posed a risk that roles and responsibilities would be ambiguous, and staff may not be provided the level of guidance required to effectively deliver their role – including leveraging of learnings across states.

To address this uncertainty, there has been development in the consistency among national and state-based plans and expectations that have enhanced role clarity and allowed for a more consistent approach to monitor progress.

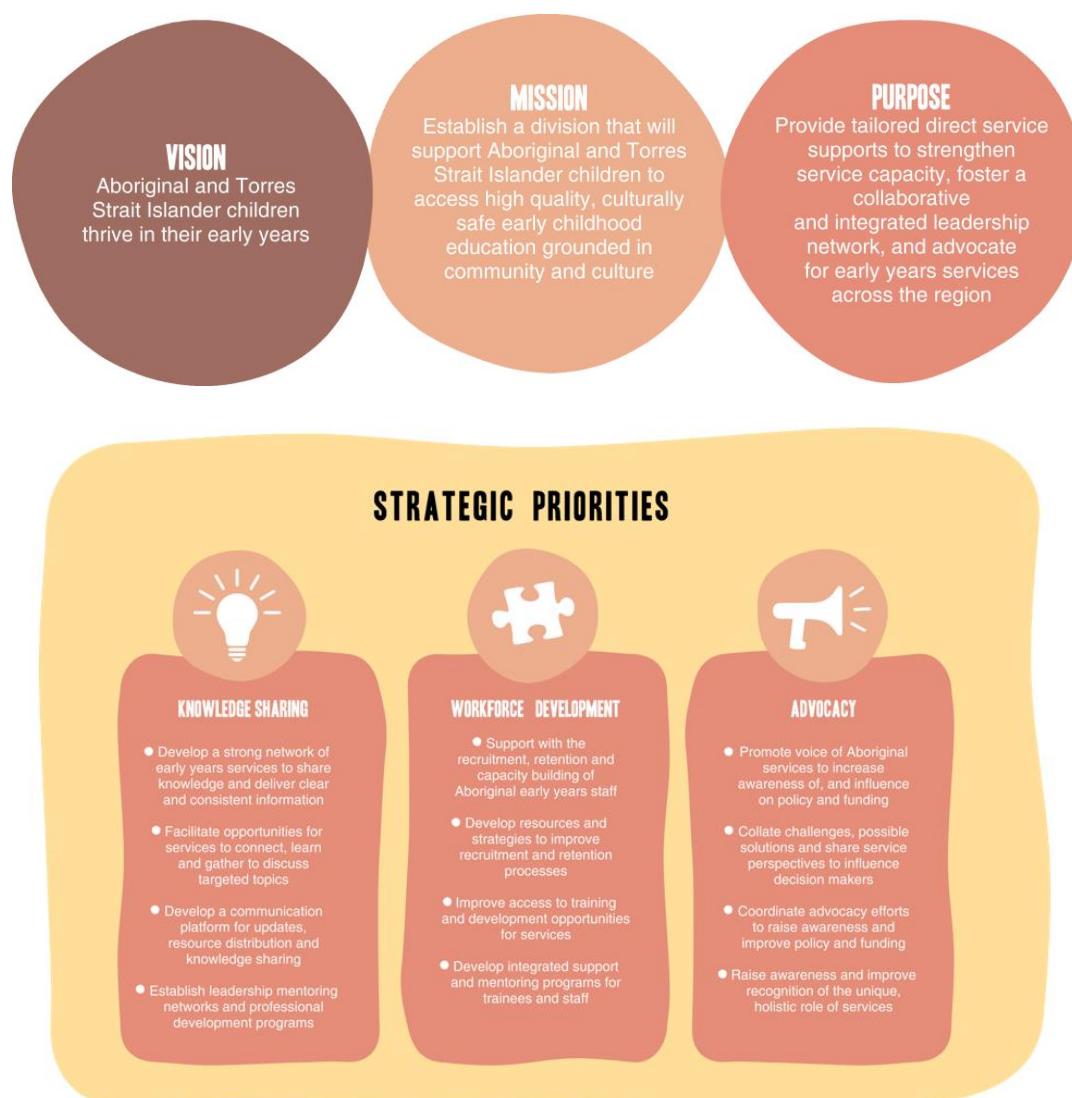
“There was an establishment phase from 2021 until at least [2023], in terms of finessing and fine tweaking our own tools, getting clear on our action plans, mapping out deliverables, revisiting them at reporting times, recruiting staff, relationship building...now, I think we’ve moved into [the next] phase” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

“There’s a lot of evolution [over the course of the Program]. [But, by now] there’s a lot of synergies and consistency...we’re in a place where we’re having conversations about that and building consistency between the states” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

SNAICC Early Years Support Vic has utilised an introductory ‘Getting Started’ module for new services, which helps to build clarity around the design and purpose of SNAICC Early Years Support. As of 2024 this module has begun to be used in WA, following its success in Vic – and as clarity and team cohesion has been built in WA. It includes information such as:

- The ‘why’ and ‘what’ of SNAICC Early Years Support
- What SNAICC Early Years Support offers to services
- Key aspects of the SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program
- The SNAICC implementation model that informs the ACCO service checklist (see Section 2.3.3)
- Strategic priorities for SNAICC Early Years Support, as well as vision, mission statement, and purpose (shown below in)

Figure 2.3: SNAICC Early Years Support service priorities



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support, Getting Started training materials

While this module is still being piloted, it is anticipated to help increase internal clarity of SNAICC Early Years Support.

2.2.2.2 Clarity to external stakeholders

Clarity of the SNAICC Early Years Support to external stakeholders – such as government, and jurisdictional peak bodies – has also increased over the course of the Program. This has been accomplished through ongoing communication and collaboration between SNAICC Early Years Support and these stakeholders, as well as attendance and participation at events hosted by SNAICC Early Years Support, such as the National Gathering.

“[We] receive a lot of information about how it’s going...we meet regularly with SNAICC and have broad conversations around their work. So, they’ve regularly been giving us updates” – Government stakeholder.

SNAICC Early Years Support also builds a relationship and understanding with government through its role in providing an avenue for collective voice, enabling the ACCO sector to share their needs, experiences, and stories directly to government, as explored in Section 3.5.

SNAICC Early Years Support can also position itself as an exemplar of quality improvement for mainstream services by establishing clarity with external stakeholders such as government. Increased knowledge of the offerings of SNAICC Early Years Support, as well as the impact generated, can allow SNAICC Early Years

Support to demonstrate the value of the model and potential learnings for mainstream services. This opportunity is discussed in further detail in Section 5.1.8

As governments have gained trust and familiarity with the SNAICC Early Years Support, and the way the program supports connections to and evidence from the ACCO sector, it has also become clear the value the program holds for policy implementation. To date, services and governments alike have valued the role SNAICC Early Years Support in supporting services to access, understand and implement policy changes in a service specific context. As a current example, there is much work underway to ensure ACCOs are appropriately positioned to engage with the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement and educator pay increases.

However, there are still ongoing opportunities for greater clarity to be built with external stakeholders (explored further in Section 5.1.7). One such example is building clarity around SNAICC Early Years Support's role relative to peak bodies in jurisdictions. This may be accomplished through a greater degree of collaboration with jurisdictional peak bodies, which is explored further in Section 2.4.4. Further, the distinction between SNAICC Early Years Support and the broader SNAICC organisation may require greater clarity in policy advocacy activities, to ensure a clear picture of the responsibilities of each (noted in Section 3.5).

"I see the value of the local presence part of the Program, but I struggle to understand the difference between the national SNAICC Early Years Support and SNAICC as a peak. So, between that and the national advocacy, it's hard to understand the difference. I'm sure it's clear from their perspective, but...I think it would be helpful if this initiative was more defined on that front" – Government stakeholder.

2.2.2.3 Communicating to early years services

Over the course of the Program, SNAICC Early Years Support has built a good level of awareness and understanding with participating services as to the objectives and purpose– this is explored in greater detail in Section 2.4.1. Because services were involved in the design process, it is to be expected that they would already have an early understanding of the purpose and model of the Program. While this is true, there has still been growth in the level of clarity of what SNAICC Early Years Support can offer, and what it does for services, in practice.

The level of clarity for early years services has grown over the course of the Program through several means:

- Distributing a 'menu' of offerings to early years services, initially in NSW but later distributed in other jurisdictions
- Communications and newsletters (including weekly bulletins, six-weekly newsletters, and quarterly Director's Updates)
- Conferences and Gatherings (see Box 2.1 below)
- Site visits
- General communication and supports, including through Padlet.

However, there is still scope to continue to increase clarity for early years services, including for those who do not directly interact with SNAICC Early Years Support (such as educators – explored in more detail in Section 2.4.1). In some instances, services may not have clear expectations about what SNAICC Early Years Support can provide, and this can be a barrier to effective engagement.

"I feel we would need a high-level clarity on what SNAICC is and what it can offer, and I think that's where my expectations differ between what SNAICC actually does" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Box 2.1: SNAICC Early Years Support Gatherings

In 2024, there were four SNAICC Early Years Support Gatherings – one for each jurisdiction around the middle of the year, and a National Gathering in October, each typically covering two days. These Gatherings are a relatively new aspect, and provide an opportunity for services to:

- connect and network with both the SNAICC Early Years Support team as well as other services,
- share knowledge,
- enhance their awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support,

- contribute to policy discussions and forums,
- provide feedback and inform continual refinement of SNAICC Early Years Support offering and priorities.

Figure 2.4 Photos of the 2024 National Gathering



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support

SNAICC Early Years Support financially supported services to send two members of staff to attend the Gatherings, to encourage wide participation.

The agendas for these Gatherings included presentations from services (Deadly Practice Spotlights), external organisations, and SNAICC Early Years Support staff; workshops covering topics such as assessment and rating and the Cultural Safety Framework; informal table yarns between services and various stakeholders; and feedback sessions on matters such as communication channels with SNAICC Early Years Support.

The Gatherings provided a culturally strong and safe space where services were encouraged to share knowledge and practice openly and in a supported environment. It was observed that young service leaders and educators were confident, in this space, to present publicly. This was achieved through the effective facilitation and leadership of the SNAICC Early Years Support team - who fostered an environment centred in cultural respect, inclusivity and support.

The Gatherings were very well received, with many consultees commenting on the benefits of connection and learning, as well as feeling encouraged to engage with SNAICC Early Years Support to a greater extent. As is noted in Section 2.2.4, the Gatherings were also a mechanism for services to provide feedback on the SNAICC Early Years program, allowing SNAICC Early Years Support to enhance program design based on the collective voice of services. The forums also provided services the opportunity to come together and think about priorities and key issues for the sector, and the role for SNAICC Early Years Support either directly – or through SNAICC, in supporting collective advocacy.

“I think [the Gatherings] are so great. Like we recently went to [the NSW Gathering] and...we were able to meet more people and see more services there. We are able to unlock a lot of info from the speakers – I like that at the Gatherings we get a lot of info about the different things taking place. I enjoy that all the Aboriginal [services] can gather together” – NSW Early Years Service Director.

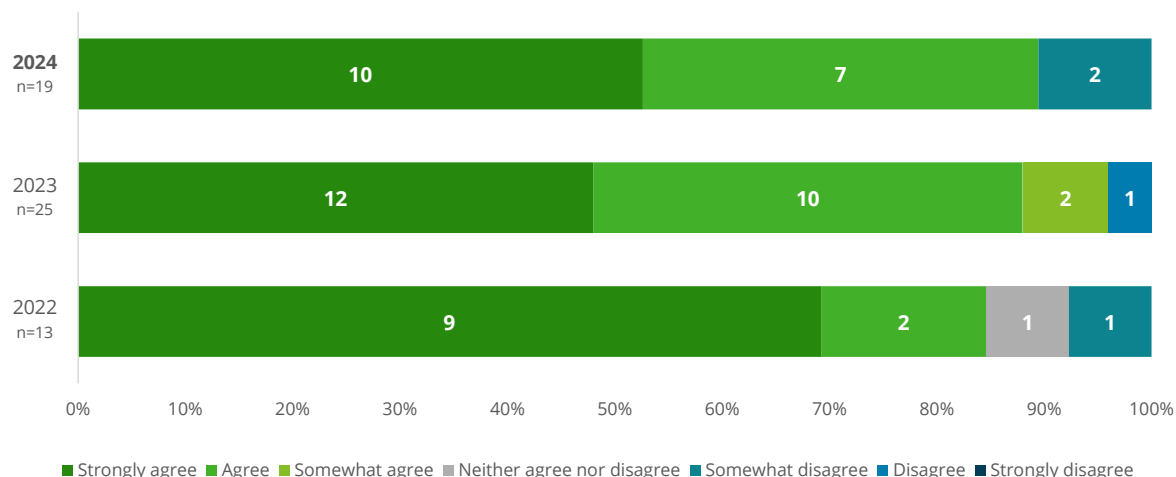
2.2.3 Alignment to service priorities and responsive to service needs

2.2.3.1 Alignment and responsiveness to service needs

SNAICC Early Years Support shows good alignment with service priorities, and responsiveness to service needs. This reflects the importance of an equitable, needs-based approach, as articulated in the objectives.

As shown in Chart 2.1, over half of all respondents in 2024 strongly agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and supports were responsive to their service's needs. This is comparable to 2023, but lower than 2022. Nevertheless, the total proportion that agreed is similar across all three years – around 85 per cent.

Chart 2.1: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to this service's needs?', 2022-2024.



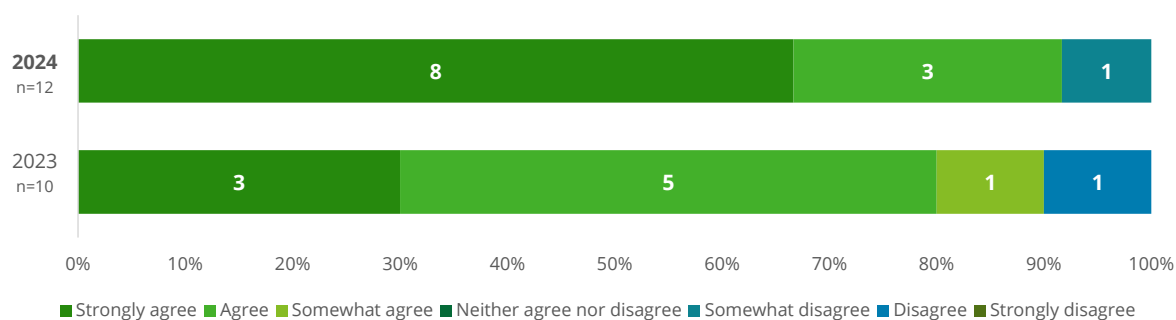
Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

There is also evidence to suggest that positive sentiment towards SNAICC Early Years Support is not solely due to repeat respondents between years – indicating that this view extends beyond the services that have provided feedback in the past. Of the 13 respondents to the 2024 survey that did not respond to the 2023 survey, the overwhelming majority (12 respondents) agreed or strongly agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support was responsive their needs. This supports the notion that SNAICC Early Years Support is widely recognised and valued across a range of services.

Over the three survey years, respondents from NSW tended to indicate the strongest feeling of alignment between SNAICC Early Years Support's offerings and their needs, and this was also true for 2024. This is likely due to it being operational in NSW for the longest time of the three jurisdictions. Victorian respondents also felt that the program was well aligned, and in 2024 saw an increase in the proportion of respondents who strongly agreed, which may reflect the greater degree of operationalisation in 2024 compared to the year prior (see Chart 2.2).

Chart 2.2: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to this service's needs?', 2022-2024, Vic only



Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

This is consistent with consultations, where the majority of consultees agreed that there was a good degree of alignment between SNAICC Early Years Support's offerings and their service's needs, particularly in NSW and Vic. The figure below shows a sample of service reflections on the alignment of SNAICC Early Years Support.

Figure 2.5 A sample of service reflections on the alignment of SNAICC Early Years Support

NSW EYS Directors

"Yep, it's absolutely 100% aligned...that's the only way to answer"

"They're available, they're responsive – they just get it done when we ask for something."

Victoria EYS Directors

"100% [aligned] - it's been a big need for some time. We don't get a lot of early years support, and it's been critical to reach out to SNAICC in those times of need and they've been able to help us"

"[They] have consistently assisted [us] with various needs...[the team] frequently reaches out to offer support, not just responding to requests"

Source: Deloitte Access Economics consultations.

In WA, services tended to feel there was alignment, but not as strongly as other jurisdictions, potentially due to the program being operational for the shortest time of the three jurisdictions. Survey respondents from WA never disagreed that SNAICC Early Years Support was aligned and responsive to their needs in either of the survey years, but sample sizes were small (three respondents in each year).

In consultations, some consultees noted that there was strong alignment to their needs in some aspects, such as in providing resources. However, it was noted that the lower level of operationalisation in WA, combined with a loss of continuity due to the changeover of the state director, made services feel less of a relationship to SNAICC Early Years Support, and therefore a lower level of alignment.

"[Alignment to our needs] is a tricky question...I felt like I had a lot to do with SNAICC, and now I don't because there was the interruption to the leadership in the WA team...it's not a criticism, they're doing the best with what they've got" – WA Early Years Service Director.

Several services in NSW and Victoria also at times reflected that their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support was not clearly adding value. While these services were in the minority, and at the conclusion of evaluation data collection in 2024 the vast majority of services had established productive working relationships with SNAICC Early Years Support, the reflections do highlight the importance of continued investment in highly tailored and service specific responses.

"I feel we haven't gotten a deep relationship with them - I feel sometimes I'm not clear on how they are helping us. Sometimes I feel our service isn't really seen" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

"I don't [think it's aligned]. The services in Victoria are run quite well. I don't think there is enough support in the states where the on the ground support is really needed" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

In relation to the above comment, this service raised that when considering the potential for impact of SNAICC Early Years Support nationally, to be truly responsive to the need of the sector it would be beneficial to be active in jurisdictions where a greater need was perceived (such as the Northern Territory, Queensland or South Australia). This feedback needs to be considered within the context of the pilot, which was limited to the three participating jurisdictions in scope, but is nevertheless a useful forward looking consideration.

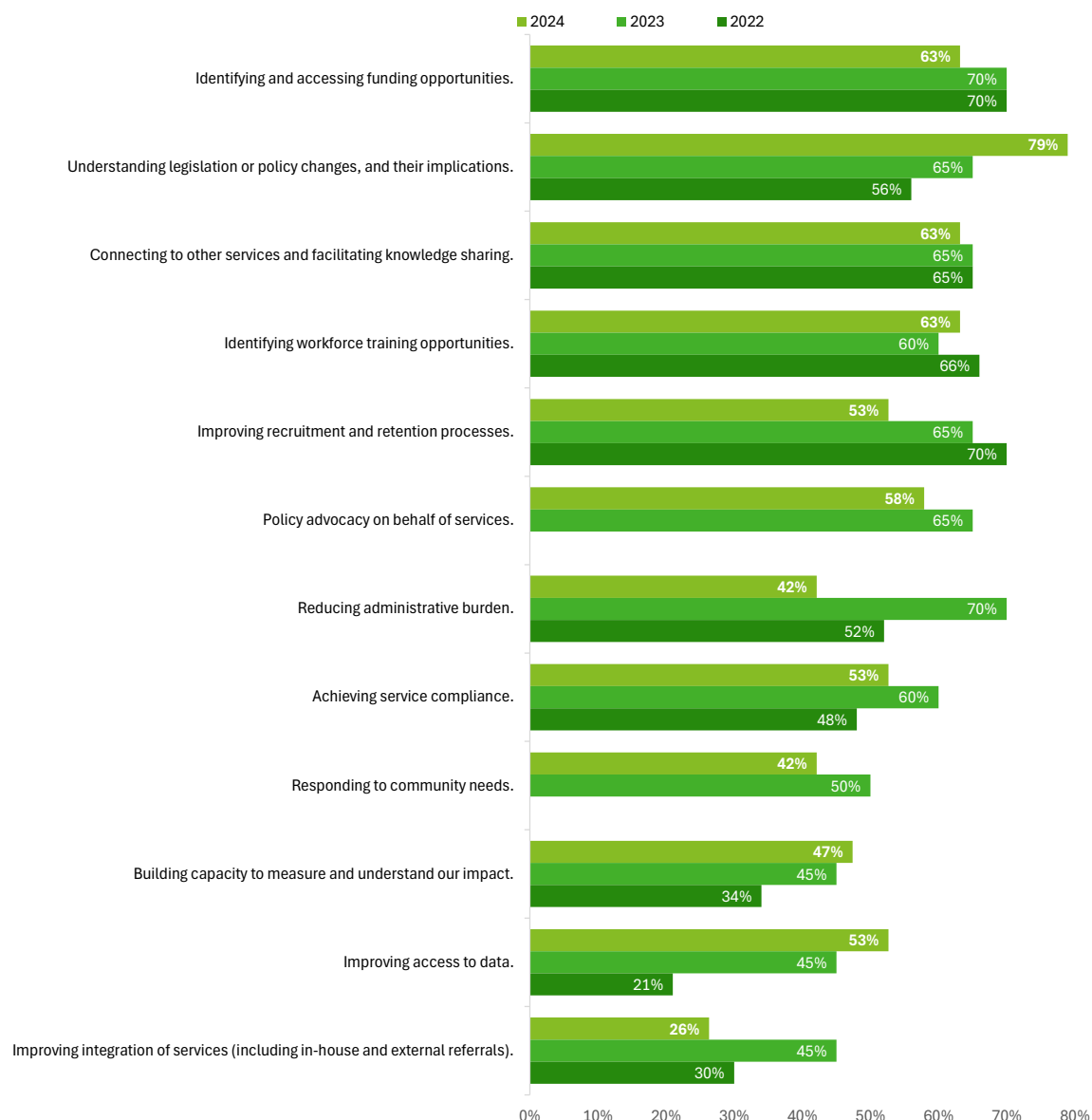
In Vic and WA, SNAICC Early Years Support has implemented the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist (discussed in further detail in Section 2.3.3) as a needs analysis tool. By working to the Checklist, SNAICC Early Years Support can support a more nuanced and detailed understanding of service specific needs and how these change overtime.

Moving forward, it will be important that SNAICC Early Years Support continues to consider how to ensure needs-based, equitable, and responsive support across all services. This is discussed further in Section 5.1.5.

2.2.3.2 Alignment with the priorities of the sector

In general, the top priorities of services are consistent and are in areas where SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to make a positive impact: access to funding, connecting to other services, and workforce training were consistently high in rankings across all three survey years. The ability of the program to offer support in these areas, which are aligned with the program's objectives, indicates the appropriateness in its design, and fidelity in its delivery (impact is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3).

Chart 2.3: Top-ranked service priorities for SNAICC Early Years Support to assist with, sorted by highest average percentage of 'essential' or 'high priority' ratings across 2022-2024.



Note: 'Policy advocacy on behalf of services' and 'responding to community needs' were only included from 2023. A two-year average was taken to rank these.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

Some priorities have seen variance across years – for example, in the 2024 survey, understanding legislative and policy changes was noted as a higher priority than in previous years. This could be partially attributable to a difference in priorities of the sample, but may also reflect greater involvement of SNAICC Early Years Support in policy advocacy, and services becoming more aware and understanding of this. For example, the work of SNAICC regarding the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement, which will involve working with services to build understanding around. Similarly, reducing administrative burden becoming a lower priority in 2024 may reflect services turning to SNAICC Early Years Support for higher-level support such as advocacy.

There are some priority areas which SNAICC Early Years Support will not be able to significantly influence in the short-term – for example, sector-based needs such as workforce shortages. Recruitment and retention falling as a priority across the three years may reflect services understanding the capabilities of SNAICC Early Years Support to a greater extent.

“Some things we can’t fix straight away, like workforce staffing. Things are only now starting to filter and shift in terms of systemic barriers. But in [our jurisdiction] we have [a range of] services and some don’t have issues in workforce and governance. There’s a whole heap of nuances” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

The objective of SNAICC Early Years Support is to give a voice to early years services, and to facilitate service-led decision making. At the same time, SNAICC Early Years Support also exists for services to leverage networks, knowledge, and national perspectives. It is important that the SNAICC Early Years Support program can achieve a balance that facilitates decision making at the service level, while still having the capacity to accomplish its national-level objectives. Realising this will ensure that the program is still responsive to the needs of services, but that services can receive ‘big picture’ guidance and connect with other services, rather than becoming siloed.

This was noted as an area for improvement in the first year of the evaluation, and there has been strong progress in this aspect over the course of the Program. While the program may have initially been more reactive – delivering ‘acute’ support to less-established services – shifting focus towards advocacy and sector-level improvements, especially in NSW, has helped the program to achieve a greater balance. The impact that SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to generate in terms of advocacy is explored in greater detail in Section 3.5.

2.2.4 Learnings feeding into continual improvement

Over the course of the evaluation, the program has evolved in line with evaluation feedback and service feedback.

In terms of evaluation feedback, this has included specific actionable feedback, as well as natural progression and evolution that addressed the future considerations raised in evaluation reports. One such example of specific actionable feedback was the distribution of a ‘menu of supports’ to services to increase awareness and understanding among services. Data management has also improved, with increased record-keeping and reporting being noted.

In 2023, it was also noted that in Vic, there was indication that SNAICC Early Years Support staff had considered the findings the previous year’s evaluation report in the context of their jurisdiction and felt alignment between those findings and their priorities for improvement:

“With the report delivered last year, we had a thorough risk analysis process prior. When that report came out, it sort of reinforced that. It lined up with what we saw being a risk for us.” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

There have also been natural evolutions of the program that align with the considerations raised in evaluation reports. For example, clarity building and balanced decision-making have both improved, as noted in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.2.3 respectively.

The extent to which the program responds to service feedback has also been strong. In consultations, services frequently reported that they felt comfortable to offer feedback, and would do so through casual mechanisms such as during site visits, as well as at events such as SNAICC Early Years Support Gatherings.

“While things are happening, I certainly don’t feel like I couldn’t give feedback. They do a pretty good job at being able to then get that feedback” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

“If there’s anything to be said, I say it. At the end of every conference, we have a feedback form and we are able to then give them some insights” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

For instance, at the NSW Gathering, SNAICC Early Years Support ran a ‘communications review’ where services had the opportunity to provide feedback on communication methods such as newsletters, e-bulletins, and the Director’s Update. This included questions around preferred frequency, whether the content was relevant and interesting, and whether any changes could be made. This is explored in greater detail below in Box 2.2.

This is an example of a structured mechanism for feedback, however there may be a need for a greater number of these formal structured mechanisms for feedback. Although most services did report feeling comfortable to offer feedback casually during site visits, there were a small number who did not feel that

this was always the best place to do so, and noted that sometimes there was not enough time to raise feedback.

"[When asked if there are opportunities for feedback] I think not formally, maybe except at the Gathering" – WA Early Years Service Director.

"I don't feel there's been opportunities for feedback because of how it's so rushed...I feel like it's because when they do come, we aren't able to give anything. It's rushed. It would be good to have visits that aren't as rushed or aren't as [agenda-driven]" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Box 2.2: SNAICC Early Years Support Communications Case Study

Communications form an important part of the SNAICC Early Years Support offering. Through regular and frequent communication, services retain an awareness and understanding of what SNAICC Early Years Support can do, remain engaged, and have the opportunity for dialogue. Over the course of the Program the extent of communications has increased, with 2024 seeing the delivery of bulletins, newsletters, and longer written updates across services in all jurisdictions – alongside face-to-face communications through meetings, conferences, and site visits. This has been aided by the establishment of a centralised communications team, leveraging staff previously working in NSW.

2024 also saw a review of communications undertaken at the NSW Gathering. As part of this review, services had the opportunity to provide feedback on the frequency and content of SNAICC Early Years Support communications. This review showed that services were quite happy with the frequency of communications – the majority of respondents strongly agreed that weekly, six-weekly, and quarterly were appropriate cadences for the e-bulletin, newsletter, and Director's update, respectively.



The majority also strongly agreed that the content was relevant and interesting, although there was a slightly larger spread in these responses. While many respondents did not feel that these communications needed any changes, a small proportion of respondents did indicate so. Given the opportunity to write in suggested changes, most respondents made suggestions around the weekly e-bulletins. These suggestions included having greater focus on educational leaders, and interviews with on the floor educators. Other suggestions also included competitions and giveaways to add novelty and incentivise engagement, as well as highlighting the work of services – *"spotlight on deadly practice"*. This was also suggested to a possible inclusion for the Director's Update. There were no suggestions for changes to the newsletter.

The satisfaction with the level of communications shown is a positive sign for awareness and engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support. SNAICC Early Years Support has also begun to issue national communications (in addition to jurisdictional-specific communications) helping to ensure the model is more unified and consistent. Further, undertaking reviews such as the one above indicate a willingness to be led by service voice and to continually improve the offering based on feedback and learnings.

2.3 Establishing jurisdictions

2.3.1 Governance

Both the SNAICC Early Years Support national body and the three state bodies are operated within SNAICC National Voice for our Children. They are governed by a range of bodies – each with strong service representation to ensure that their voice is central in decision-making. The governance structure forms an important part of SNAICC Early Years Support's responsibilities in responding to national sector priorities (as determined in partnership with NIAA in the Program Funding Agreement), as well as being responsive to service and community needs.

Each of the state SNAICC Early Years Support bodies are led by a Director of the respective jurisdiction, supported by a broader team (currently, there is a shared State Director across Vic and WA). SNAICC Early Years Support is also assisted by a national team (with a national Director and Executive Director of Programs), and including communications, operations, workforce, and policy staff.

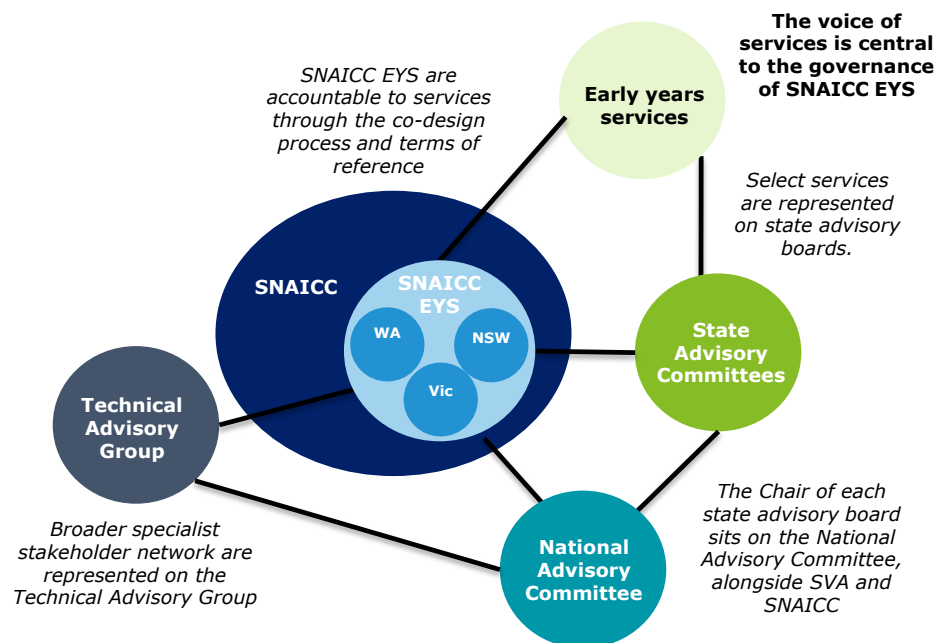
There are seven key interconnected governing bodies:

- **SNAICC** provides oversight and high-level strategic direction for SNAICC Early Years Support. Additionally, the SNAICC Chief Executive Officer (CEO) provides strategic and financial oversight.
- **National SNAICC Early Years Support** is responsible for the national coordination of SNAICC Early Years Support, policy, advocacy, reform, and provides support to each of the state bodies.
- **SNAICC Early Years Support NSW, VIC, and WA** are responsible for developing and delivering state-based programs responding to local early years services and community needs.
- **Early Years Services** are central to the implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support. SNAICC Early Years Support is accountable to early years services through the outputs of the co-design process and terms of reference. Additionally, some early years services are represented on the State and National Advisory Committee.
- **State Advisory Committees** include representatives from early years services, the ECEC sector, and the state SNAICC Early Years Support Director. The Advisory Committees meet regularly – with a nominated cadence – and are responsible for:
 - Involvement in the co-designing process for each state-based program
 - Program and strategic decision-making and advice at the state and territory level
 - Oversee activities of core intermediary teams
- **National Advisory Committee** includes representatives from each State Advisory Committee, SVA and SNAICC Early Years Support. The Committee:
 - Determines strategy and governance
 - Manages risk and opportunities
 - Collectively communicates and promote SNAICC Early Years Support's ambitions and strategy to national stakeholders
 - Seeks external advice and representation required to inform and guide the overall project.
- **Technical Advisory Group** includes representatives that have specialist skills across the ECEC sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. The Technical Advisory Group draws on members' diverse experience and expertise to support effective implementation of SNAICC Early Years Support, and to build a base of support and collaboration.

As part of the design process outlined in Section 2.2.1, the governance structure should ensure that SNAICC Early Years Support is service-led, place-based, and informed by jurisdictional context. The State Advisory Committees are one such means of delivering this, although it should also occur throughout all forms of engagement. Further, there should be access to technical and policy expertise through the Technical Advisory Group.

The governance structure of SNAICC Early Years Support is illustrated below in Figure 2.6.

Figure 2.6: SNAICC Early Years Support governance structure



Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

In general, the governance structure of SNAICC Early Years Support has been perceived by SNAICC Early Years Support staff and services to have worked well. SNAICC Early Years Support is meeting its objectives of being a place-based, jurisdictionally-informed program that responds appropriately to service needs (see Sections 2.2.3 and 2.3.1), and the relationship between national and jurisdictional bodies enables services to have an access point to SNAICC Early Years Support. One particular enabler to the success of the program has been well-received leadership from the national director, which has brought a level of consistency and collaboration. Furthermore, the role of jurisdictional directors, officers and advisers has meant that there is a good level of targeted, on-the-ground support.

"I credit [the national director's] role on focusing on the cohesion and alignment. I think [the national director] has tried to join the dots between SNAICC Early Years Support and the broader SNAICC team" – SNAICC Early Years Support staff member.

"Cohesion has been really important for the delivery and I just attribute it to [the national director's] leadership" – SNAICC Early Years Support staff member.

However, there are some elements of the governance structure that could potentially be improved. Notably, there is a degree of uncertainty around the role and purpose of the State Advisory Committee and the Technical Advisory Group.

The State Advisory Committees were intended as a formal mechanism to ensure that SNAICC Early Years Support would be service-led and accountable to the needs of services. However, there is a degree of uncertainty around its role, especially given that there are other conferences and meetings. They also require a time commitment from participants, without remuneration, which can sometimes compromise the attendance. Without proper attendance and genuine engagement, the State Advisory Committees may not fully meet their intentions. Further, as noted in Section 2.2.4, there are some mechanisms that SNAICC Early Years Support has received and actioned feedback from services, such as the Gatherings – and while there is scope to increase the level of formal feedback pathways, this may suggest that there are other ways to keep SNAICC Early Years Support service-led and accountable to needs. Moving forward, there may be rationale to redefine the State Advisory Committees, or to combine its role into another form.

"If our program evolves, the question will be: is a State Advisory Committee still required? We have the Technical Advisory Group meeting, the early years network meeting – do people just attend them and we get output [from those]?" – SNAICC Early Years Support staff

The Technical Advisory Group faces similar challenges, with stakeholders reporting that the intent was not always clear and that the irregularity of meetings was a barrier to effectiveness.

"The Technical Advisory Group...we tend to reschedule. I don't know if we got a lot of feedback from it. That's something that could be strengthened" – Government stakeholder.

"There have been some Technical Advisory Group meetings that I have found challenging, in terms of intent and focus" – Government stakeholder.

Similarly, there may be rationale to redefine the role of the Technical Advisory Group, and to establish a more regular cadence, to enhance its effectiveness. Given its intended role as a means of providing technical support and expertise, it may also be possible to streamline its role by having in-house specialisation within the National SNAICC Early Years Support team – see Section 2.3.2 below.

Currently, there is a shared State Director across Vic and WA. While this has had some positive outcomes, including greater visibility between jurisdictions, the original design intent of the program was to have a single director per jurisdiction. Moving forward, it will be important to ensure that there that this does not lead to any complications around capacity and visibility.

Overall, the governance structure of SNAICC Early Years Support is still important in ensuring it is suitable in meeting its objectives. However, there is a need to ensure that governance is fit for purpose, and responsive to evaluation and service feedback. Including, considering the role of Technical Advisory Group, the potential to streamline some aspects of the governance objectives, and considering the best forum for service voice.

2.3.2 National and state models

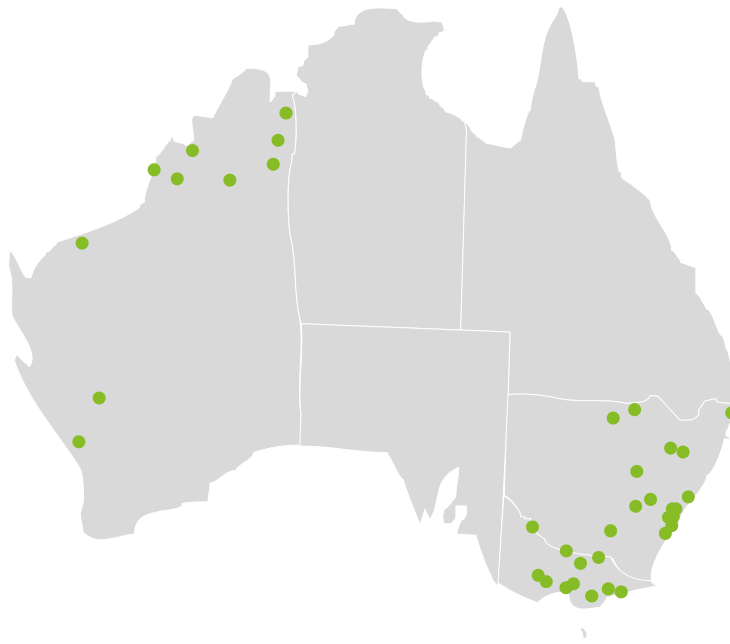
As noted above, SNAICC Early Years Support involves the establishment of a national unit and three state-level bodies in NSW, Vic, and WA. There are:

- 43 services in NSW (26 of which were additional services from the Sector Strengthening Partnership)
- 14 services in Vic
- 9 services in WA

The locations range from metropolitan areas (e.g., Blacktown, NSW) to very remote areas (e.g., Halls Creek, WA). The number of services in NSW was recent expanded significantly by the appointment of SNAICC as a Sector Strengthening Partner (see Figure 2.7 below).¹⁴

¹⁴ It should be noted that the service mix is constantly evolving – SNAICC Early Years Support works with a range of services (such as MACS, ACFCs, and playgroups), and the composition and intensity of support can shift over time. As such, the service numbers presented above can be read conservatively, as they refer to the services that make up the core engagement for SNAICC Early Years Support. An example of a service that SNAICC Early Years Support collaborates with but would not be included in the service counts could be an administrative body for a childcare or playgroup that provides services to Aboriginal children and families.

Figure 2.7: Location and number of services participating in SNAICC Early Years Support



Note: Map does not include the additional 26 services in NSW from the Sector Strengthening Partnership
Source: Deloitte Access Economics, SNAICC.

The current relationship between the national and jurisdictional bodies, as described above, has been strongly beneficial in enabling a service access point to SNAICC Early Years Support within trusted, on-the-ground relationships. These relationships have enabled SNAICC Early Years Support to understand and respond to the needs of services effectively at a collective level.

It has become increasingly apparent over the course of the Program, however, the importance of these place-based relationships being supported by centralised (national) resources. The connection between the national and state SNAICC Early Years Support staff are critical in supporting:

- access to specialist expertise that may sit beyond the realm of individual team members
- consistency, knowledge sharing and continual improvement in the supports offered to services,
- connections between and across services, and the strengthening of collective service voice,
- reducing the personnel risk inherent in a relationship-based program.

While NSW employed a specialist model in the early stages of SNAICC Early Years Support, it was not fully appropriate at this time, as the team was small and relationships with services had not been sufficiently established. Three years on, SNAICC Early Years Support is beginning to develop areas of specialisation (such as the central communications team) – there is scope to continue to do this across more areas of expertise, given the greater headcount and deeper relationships. The scope to do this is acknowledged across all jurisdictions.

“Now that we’ve walked the walk...the nature of contextual delivery is that you’re a jack of all trades...[but] there’s potential to streamline now that we’ve found the key areas that we could consolidate in everyone’s skillset” – Vic SNAICC Early Years Support Director.

It is acknowledged that a degree of jurisdiction-specific knowledge would still be required, and that specialisation should occur where it is logical to do so. Nevertheless, the areas in which specialist teams and resources may be developed centrally include those where the specialist can bring a deep expertise and detailed knowledge on the matter, such as funding, or policy. With SNAICC Early Years Support already developing a central communications team, there may also be scope to provide nationally consistent modes of engagement, where appropriate (such as singular introductory modules or the menu of service offerings).

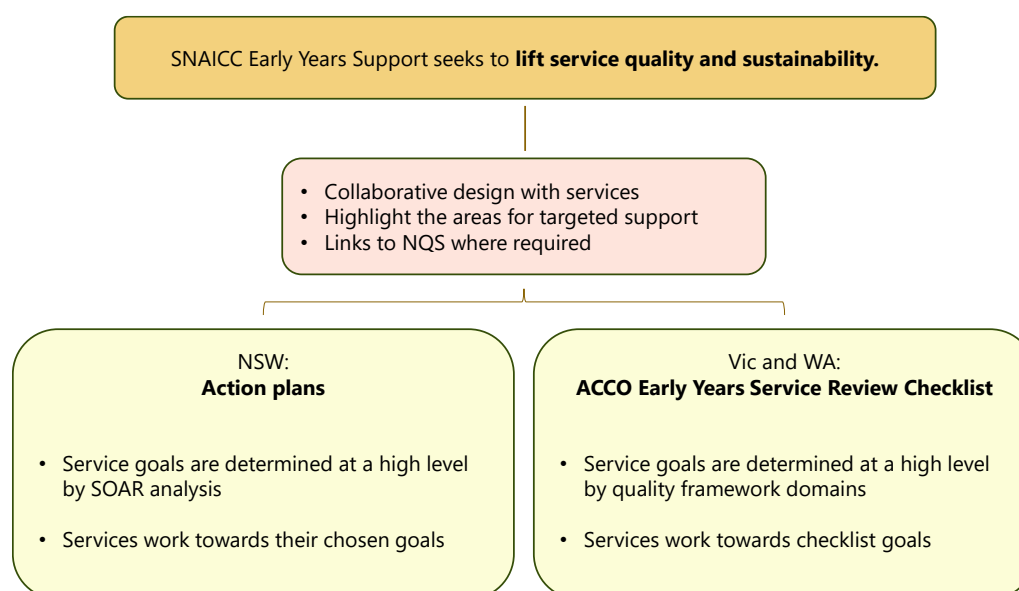
Within jurisdictions, further configurations are developing to ensure the service relationship with regional teams mitigates personnel risk and provides services with access to specialist and diverse expertise, while retaining the trusted relationship program – a “*distribution of trust*”. For example, in NSW while advisers are matched to ‘patches’ of services based on their relationships and to generate the best outcomes, there is consideration of swapping advisers to ensure services know the broader team and have access to a broader range of expertise.

Over the course of 2024, stronger brand identity has been developed, including a suggestion of utilising SNAICC Early Years Support ‘uniforms’ (such as branded shirts), to support team cohesion and to present a more unified position in site visits. This also works to elevate the understanding of services that there is a full team and organisation of support within SNAICC Early Years Support, beyond the relationship with the individual team member.

2.3.3 Jurisdictional models

SNAICC Early Years Support NSW, as the initial operational jurisdiction, has utilised action plans to outline the nature of engagement with services and create improvements in quality. In Vic and WA, the internally-designed ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist is utilised. While both models look to improve quality of services, there are some elements that vary – these are summarised in Figure 2.8 and explained in further detail below.

Figure 2.8: SNAICC Early Years Support jurisdictional models for service quality uplift



Source: Deloitte Access Economics using SNAICC Early Years Support documentation

In NSW action plans are developed collaboratively between SNAICC Early Years Support and the service director and/or manager and stay as a live document accessible to both parties so that the plan can evolve with the ongoing needs of services. They are also informed by ‘SOAR’ analysis (Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, Results – adapted from a SWOT analysis), which each service completes and records. The SOAR is the overarching document which informs the specific actions contained in the action plan.

The action plans are tailored to the specific needs of services, and act as the primary backbone for the type of support that the SNAICC Early Years Support advisor focuses on providing (but it is important to note that this is not the only form of support provided to the service). The action plans start by establishing the goals of the service (as well as a relevant NQS area, if applicable), and then include the agreed actions to be taken to work towards the goal, who will be involved and responsible, the timeframe to accomplish the goal, and the relevant milestones to measure success.

Victoria and WA Early Years Support teams have implemented an ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist as a basis for engaging with services and creating an uplift in quality, rather than action plans. The

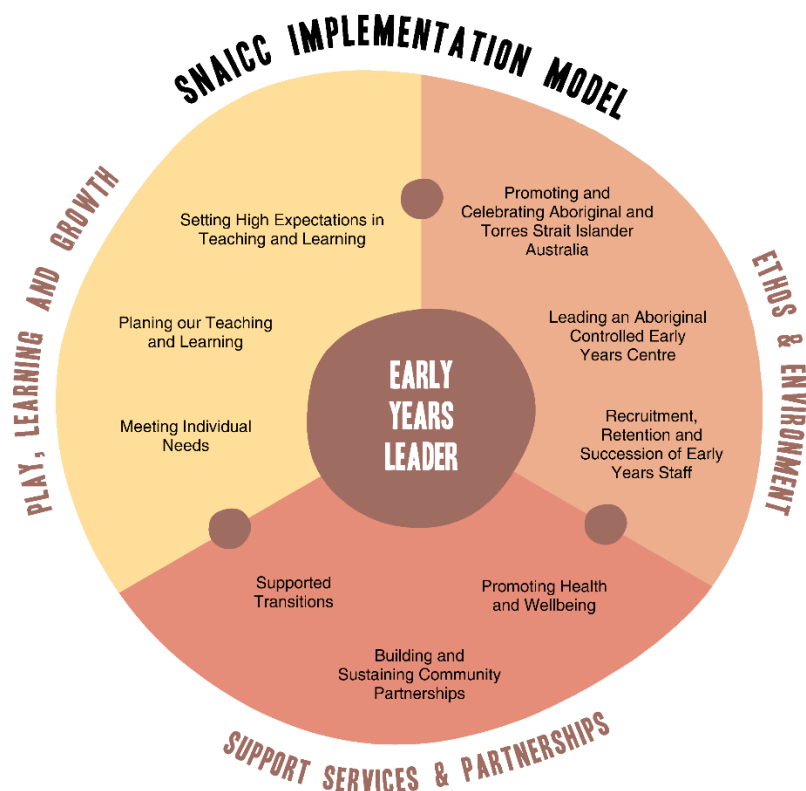
Checklist is an internally-designed tool built around a quality framework that has three key dimensions: ethos and environment; support services and partnerships; and play, learning and growth. There are three more targeted domains contained within each of these, as outlined in Figure 2.9, totalling nine domains. The model is promoted as being a 'whole of centre' approach – that is, strategies for change in a given domain are not isolated to that domain, and instead may require change in multiple domains to implement. An example is presented in the SNAICC Early Years Support service snapshots:

"A strategy to raise centre approach to care and learning will not sit in isolation from the rest of your centre...for example, implementation of such a change may require support to your wellbeing and engagement teams, it may require communication to parents, and alterations to your success measures, data collection and reporting"

The Checklist then contains a series of targeted indicators for each of the nine domains that help services to make actionable changes, if required. These indicators ultimately link to the NQF, and therefore assist services in the NQS Assessment and Rating process, but are centrally focused on a broader quality uplift that helps services meet the needs of children, families and communities in a culturally responsive manner (this quality uplift is explored in greater detail in Section 3.2). For example, some of the indicators that are listed under the domain of 'Promoting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture' include:

- We acknowledge country, every day at group time with children.
- We display an Aboriginal languages map in various places within our service including learning environments.
- We embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives throughout all aspects of our curriculum.
- We have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander themed books and/or books by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors.

Figure 2.9: The SNAICC Implementation Model that underpins the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist



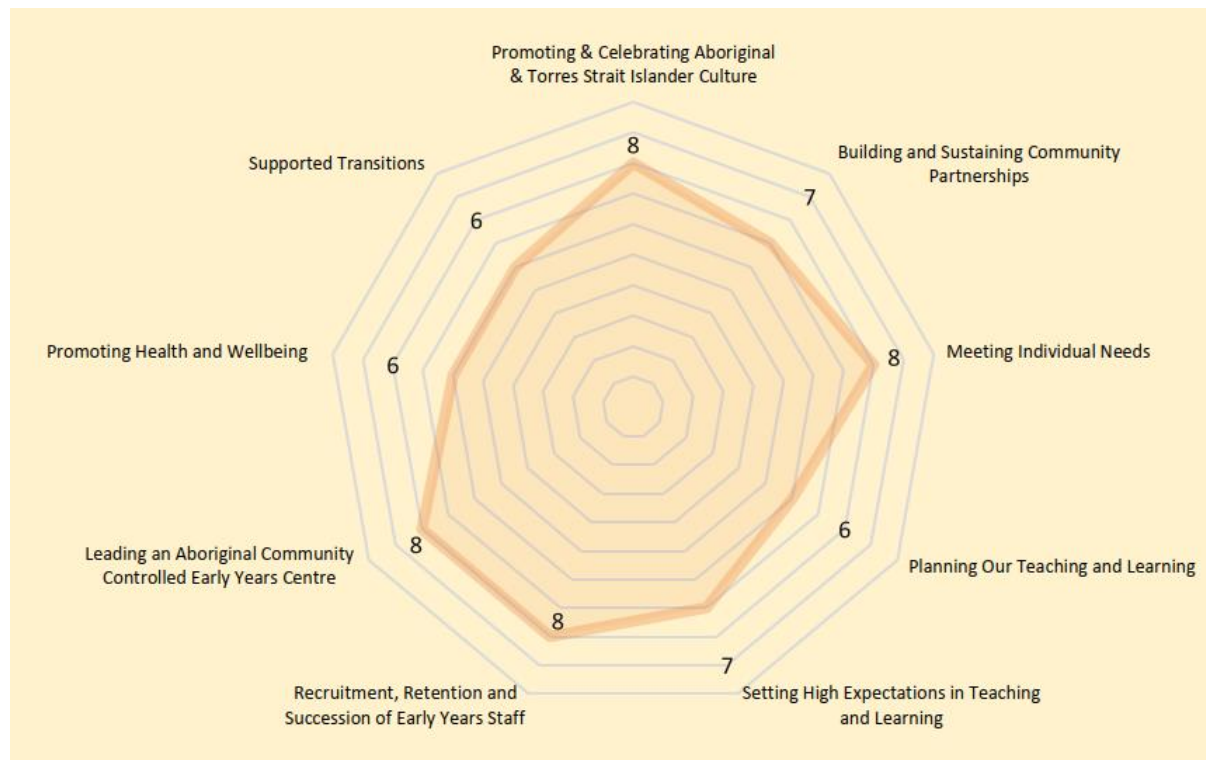
Source: SNAICC.

When a service onboards with SNAICC Early Years Support, advisors engage with service leaders to share the 'Getting Started' module (as discussed in Section 2.2.2.1). This module introduces the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist, which then acts as an ongoing reflective guide, and a checkpoint for professional

conversations centred around the service and their quality improvement aspirations. Section 3.2 contains further detail about how services engage with the Checklist in the context of leadership development.

As part of the usage of the Checklist, SNAICC Early Years Support offers a service snapshot for each service. This snapshot provides a rating against each domain for the service. An example of this can be seen in Figure 2.10. Furthermore, this snapshot includes commendations and recommendations that services can implement and use to improve their service provisions.

Figure 2.10: An example of the SNAICC Early Years Support snapshot provided to a service



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support.

The check-list completion is undertaken reflectively by participating services, utilising self-assessment (with the support of the SNAICC Early Years Support team). This supports the process being undertaken in an empowered and culturally safe way, with services self-identifying their areas of strength and improvement, using the indicators as a guide. In this way, it is not appropriate to compare assessed progress against each domain across services, or use the snapshots as an indicator of system quality.

The snapshot, which provides resources and suggestions for improvement across each domain (encouraging a continual improvement approach), then provides space for the expertise and resources of SNAICC Early Years Support – in partnership with the service – to create a practical and evidence-based path forward.

Box 2.3 below provides an example of how a specific service engages with SNAICC Early Years Support through the use of the Checklist and snapshots, and the support provided by SNAICC Early Years Support in response. Engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support more broadly is discussed in Section 2.4.2.

While quality uplift has been accomplished across all jurisdictions utilising both the Checklist and the action plans, there may be rationale to adopt a singular model of quality improvement support across SNAICC Early Years Support nationally. Equally, as the quality improvement framework(s) continue to mature, there will be scope to continue to refine the process and outputs to support a consistent and quality service experience, and drawing on centralised resources where appropriate. This is discussed further in Section 5.

Box 2.3: Spotlight on the use of the ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklists to support a service

The ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist has been developed to help services review and measure the impact of their offerings for children and families. The Checklist also helps SNAICC Early Years Support to better understand the needs of the service. The Checklist enables service leaders to assess their service against criteria in terms of activities they are 'currently doing', 'working on', 'not doing' and activities they 'will try' to incorporate. This case study focuses on the use of the Checklist and collaboration with SNAICC Early Years Support to improve service offerings and service delivery in a centre.

SNAICC Early Years Support uses the Checklist to offer a snapshot of that service with commendations and recommendations it can implement. Through this process, services have the chance to iteratively improve across each dimension, with practical and tailored support pathways mapped out between the service and SNAICC Early Years Support. For this service particularly, in 2024, it had implemented all the recommendations provided by SNAICC Early Years Support in the previous year. Outlined below are some ways in which SNAICC Early Years Support has supported the continual improvement of this service:

- **Promoting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia:** This service has connected and collaborated with the SNAICC Early Years Support team to establish ways to map out ideas on how to build connection to community. The SNAICC Early Years Support team has also supported the service to engage with Deadly Ed, who delivered cultural awareness training for children and service leaders. SNAICC Early Years Support has also provided the service with more resources and strategies to further improve this area, such as continued collaboration with the SNAICC Early Years Support Leadership Advisor.
- **Building and sustaining community partnerships:** Service leadership at this service have actively engaged with SNAICC Early Years Support and incorporated feedback and suggestions on collaboration and community engagement. To build strong community partnerships, SNAICC Early Years Support recommended development of collaborative programs, reaching out to families and community, hosting cultural exchange events and facilitating educational workshops. The SNAICC Early Years Support team has committed to working with the service and providing the resources and support required to facilitate the initiatives.
- **Meeting individual needs:** Staff at this service have adapted learning environments to meet the needs of the children. Educators have worked with SNAICC Early Years Support to expand their understanding of individual targets for each child. To improve the monitoring of child learning observations, SNAICC Early Years Support offered to provide templates to guide educators to improve specificity in their observations.
- **Planning our teaching and learning:** SNAICC Early Years Support provided this service with methods to improve their planning and teaching. This includes facilitating collaborative planning sessions with staff, participating in professional development, and fostering team-building activities.
- **Setting high expectations in teaching and learning:** As a way to improve the teaching and learning at the service, SNAICC Early Years Support has recommended this service to incorporate practices such as creative reflection practices, engage in research and regularly seek input from children. SNAICC Early Years Support has also committed to provide resources to this service to help facilitate the improvements.
- **Recruitment, retention and succession of early years staff:** SNAICC Early Years Support has recommended for the service leader to engage with local community and share available opportunities. Additionally, SNAICC Early Years Support will work alongside the centre to build capacity and strengths of this domain.
- **Leading an Aboriginal Community Controlled Early Years Centre:** SNAICC Early Years Support has recommended that this service continues to build meaningful connections with local community members, as well as promoting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, to improve the quality of this service.

- **Promoting health and wellbeing:** Service leadership have actively participated in SNAICC Early Years Support learning events about trauma informed practices in 2023 and 2024. These learnings have been shared with staff to practically implement. SNAICC Early Years Support also provided other practices that could be implemented in the service to promote the wellbeing of children.
- **Supported transitions:** To ensure that the capacity of all educators is supported, SNAICC Early Years Support has committed to delivering a learning package to ensure there is consistency of Trauma Informed Practices between all educators.

2.3.4 Staffing

SNAICC Early Years Support has increased their headcount over the course of the Program, and is now fully staffed, which has been beneficial and allowed for a greater degree of engagement and delivery of support. SNAICC Early Years Support emphasises the importance of keeping low turnover, and managing positional change so as to not disrupt service provision:

“To date the program has low staff turnover. This is a strategy to [manage] risk. We value and support valued staff and we retain them. We have managed staff positional change in Victoria... recruiting staff with the relationship building skills is critical to the success of this. I think our staff retention indicates we recruit well” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

In previous years, where teams were understaffed, there were difficulties in appropriately building relationships and being able to respond to service needs. While the staff during this period were recognised as going above and beyond, with a greater number of staff, SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to deliver on its intended objectives to a greater extent and in a more sustainable capacity.

“They do go above and beyond – people looking after people, community looking after community. Culturally safe, confidential, but able to assist services in appropriate way...we know they're spread out and spread thin. Whether they've got support to grow, if that's funding, support for recruitment, I think they'll be able to deliver more of what they want to” – NSW Advisory Committee representative.

In reflecting on this, both services and sector stakeholders alike shared that the additional time taken to find the right staff, were critical foundations for building trusted relationships with services – with trust being the cornerstone of SNAICC Early Years Support's success.

Appropriate staffing numbers have enabled SNAICC Early Years Support to balance responsiveness and long-term planning, as noted in Section 2.2.3. The diversity of roles and skillsets within the overall SNAICC Early Years Support team means that there can be short-term responsiveness, but also have a team working on higher level support such as policy advocacy. In this vein, it may be beneficial for SNAICC Early Years Support to consider having specialised roles as noted above in Section 2.3.2 – a specialised national team, but with a local regional presence.

Although SNAICC Early Years Support has reached full staffing and turnover has been low, sharing relationships and having a diversity of interactions (compared to interacting with a single person) will help to mitigate risks in the event of staff turnover – despite SNAICC Early Years Support's efforts in minimising turnover. Moving forward, there will also continue to be capacity and workload considerations, particularly as SNAICC Early Years Support looks to expand. For instance, the NSW Sector Strengthening Partnership added 26 new services to the NSW remit, increasing the potential workload for the NSW team.

“With the new [services]...[we're] making sure we're sharing the love. But it's tricky, with our requirements, they all have individual plans, and some need more support than others. With my five advisors, they have nine centres each. It would be good to share the load. For those centres they're the go-to person, but in the background those advisors have projects, all those other things” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

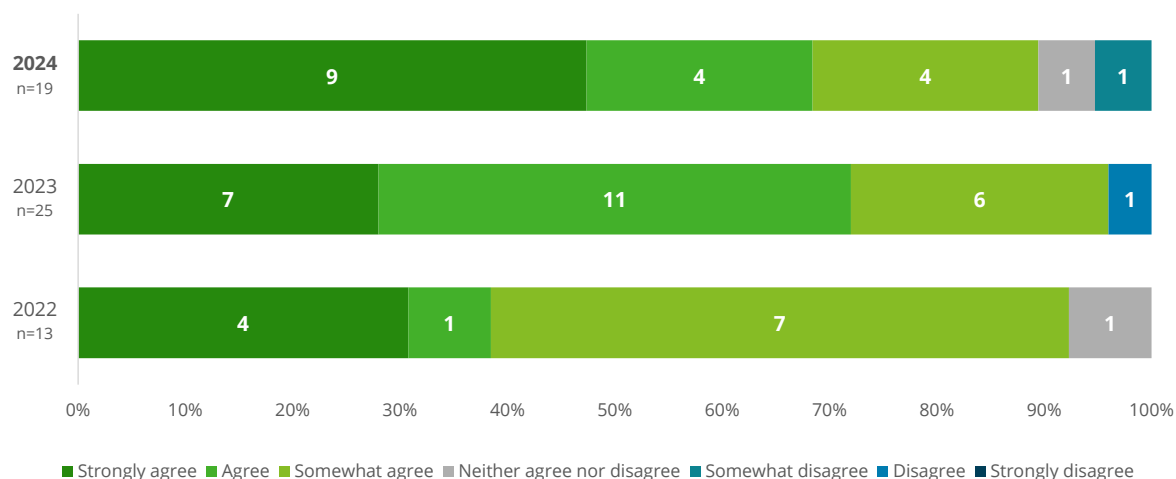
2.4 Building relationships

2.4.1 Awareness and understanding

As noted in Section 2.2.2.3, awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support has continued to build over the course of the program.

In the 2024 around half of all respondents strongly agreed that staff at their service were aware of SNAICC Early Years Support, and 89 per cent at least somewhat agreed. This proportion is comparable to previous years, but notably, 2024 saw the highest percentage of respondents indicate strong agreement (see Chart 2.4). This suggests an increasing level of confidence in staff awareness.

Chart 2.4: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: staff at this service are aware of SNAICC Early Years Support?', 2022-2024.

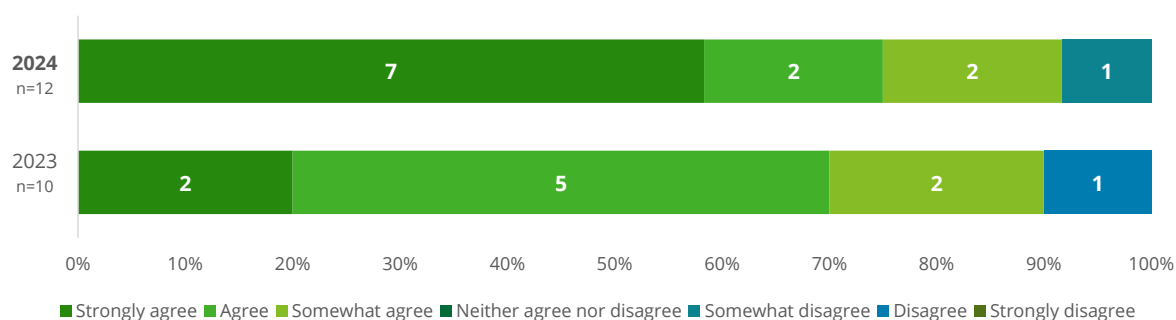


Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

Awareness has tended to be strongest in NSW, which is to be expected given the duration of operation. The majority of respondents at least somewhat agreed in all three survey years, but the proportion that agreed or strongly agreed grew over time, reflecting greater confidence in the level of awareness. A similar trend was also seen among Vic respondents, who saw the number of respondents that strongly agreed that staff at their service were aware of SNAICC Early Years Support increase from two to seven – in both instances, the majority of respondents agreed (see Chart 2.5 below).

Chart 2.5: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: staff at this service are aware of SNAICC Early Years Support?', 2022-2024, Vic only



Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

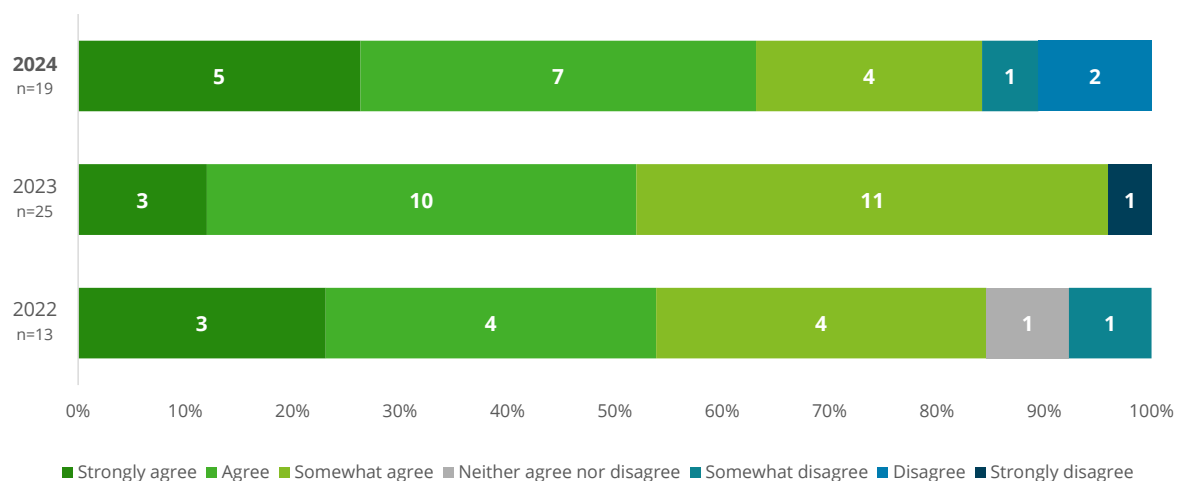
Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

Awareness in WA has tended to be lower, including in 2024. A key factor for this was the changeover of the state director, which has meant that time has been spent on rebuilding relationships and awareness in the state. Another key consideration for WA is the remoteness of services – the nature of which means that regular site visits and being on the ground is more limited, creating a barrier to awareness. This

geographical barrier means *“becoming known is harder”*. Moving forward, if the program can support similarly trusting relationships as in other jurisdictions, it is expected that awareness in WA will rise to the same level as those other jurisdictions.

The extent of understanding is not as high as awareness, in line with the logic of how engagement grows overtime. In general, the level of understanding has been high – around a quarter of respondents strongly agreed that staff at their service understood the purpose of SNAICC Early Years Support, which represents an increase in both proportion and number from previous years (see Chart 2.6). Around 84 per cent at least somewhat agreed, which is comparable to previous years.

Chart 2.6: Survey results from the question ‘To what extent do you agree: staff at this service understand SNAICC Early Years Support?’, 2022-2024



Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

In consultations, services expressed their understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support, which aligned with the intended objectives of the program. Many services spoke to the provision of resources, which is a highly tangible element of support that is provided. However, many also made reference to the professional learning and workforce development activities that their service had engaged in, assistance in gaining funding, policy advocacy work, and connection and cohesion with other services.

“They also keep us up to date with what DoE is updating in their policies in a way that is easy for us to understand” – NSW Early Years Service Director.

“What I’ve seen is an advocacy in the space for aboriginal kids and early years services” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

As with awareness, understanding has tended to be greatest in NSW, followed by Vic, with WA historically being a lower level. During consultations, it was noted that there were linkages between the level of engagement and understanding – for example, it was noted by a SNAICC representative that in Vic, *“it’s built on relational trust with leaders. Those who engage more, understand more”*

Over the course of the Program, increased understanding has been achieved primarily through site visits and communications, as well as networking events such as the State and National Gatherings. The communications review conducted at the NSW Gathering, as well as the introduction of ‘menus of service’, demonstrate how awareness and understanding are trying to be improved.

“One service came to the Gathering and thought, ‘wow, SNAICC Early Years Support run a tight ship’. You can sit on the outskirts, but when you see it in action, see the networking and strength building, it’s quite strong” – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff member.

"We were sceptical about what SNAICC could offer that was different compared to past support programs. But we worked with [the National Director] and attended a workshop aimed at understanding and addressing service needs. We understood [SNAICC Early Years Support] and how it could support us" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

"Understanding has been built by] all of it really – most from [SNAICC Early Years Support staff], but also going to gatherings, talking one-on-one with them. But also, your own research, researching who they are, and also understanding the culture and knowing WHY they're doing what they do" – WA Early Years Service Director.

In previous years of the evaluation, it was raised that educators tended to have a lower awareness and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support. However, it is important to note that SNAICC Early Years Support focuses on building relational trust with service leaders, and expanding their leadership capacity. This then flows on to other staff at the service, and therefore there is less expectation for educators to be as familiar with SNAICC Early Years Support.

2.4.2 Engagement

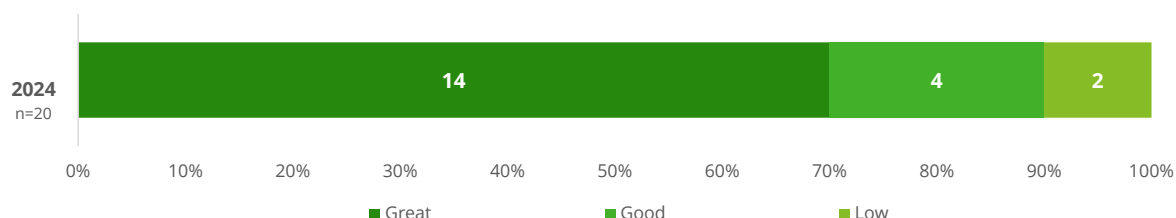
Over the three years, the services have reflected on the quality of engagement with SNAICC early years support as being high. This was spoken to by services in both surveys and consultations over the life of the Program.

In the 2024 survey, respondents were directly asked for the first time to rate the quality of their engagement – 70 per cent rated their engagement as 'great', and a further 20 per cent rated it as 'good' (see Chart 2.7). This is consistent with the sentiment shared in consultations, where consultees spoke highly of the interactions that they had had with SNAICC Early Years Support.

"The engagement is unreal – I wish we had this much engagement from our other providers" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

"It's always been positive. It's never too hard. They understand your needs, and they direct you in the right place" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Chart 2.7: Survey results from the question 'How would you rate the quality of your interaction with SNAICC Early Years Support, this year?'



Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey 2024.

In general, the quality of engagement is seen as an enabler to the success of SNAICC Early Years Support, as it is built on the relationships that have been established with services. Consultees have noted throughout the entire duration of the Program that the quality of engagement, and in particular the effort and commitment shown by SNAICC Early Years Support staff, has led to positive outcomes:

"I think they have employed great people in their roles. They are warm, welcoming and easy to talk to and build relationships" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

Despite a generally high rating of the quality of engagement, this experience was not always universal. In a small number of consultations, consultees noted that engagement did not always suit their needs. Given the intensive nature of service day-to-day operations, it is important that site visits and other forms of engagement can be adaptable and sensitive to the requirements of the services. While the majority of services did report high quality engagement, SNAICC Early Years Support continuing to allow services appropriate time and space will ensure they can fully engage. In WA, for example, staff at remote services

reported having multiple roles to fulfill and sometimes do not have the opportunity to check emails or attend virtual meetings for a few days at a time.

“There has been good quality engagement... but I found that the visits are really quick and [the adviser] has a list of things [they] want to tick off. It would be nice to be able to have a look around and see and have a chat to see what we would need. I feel like their visits need more time to get to know us and what our needs are” – NSW Early Years Service Director.

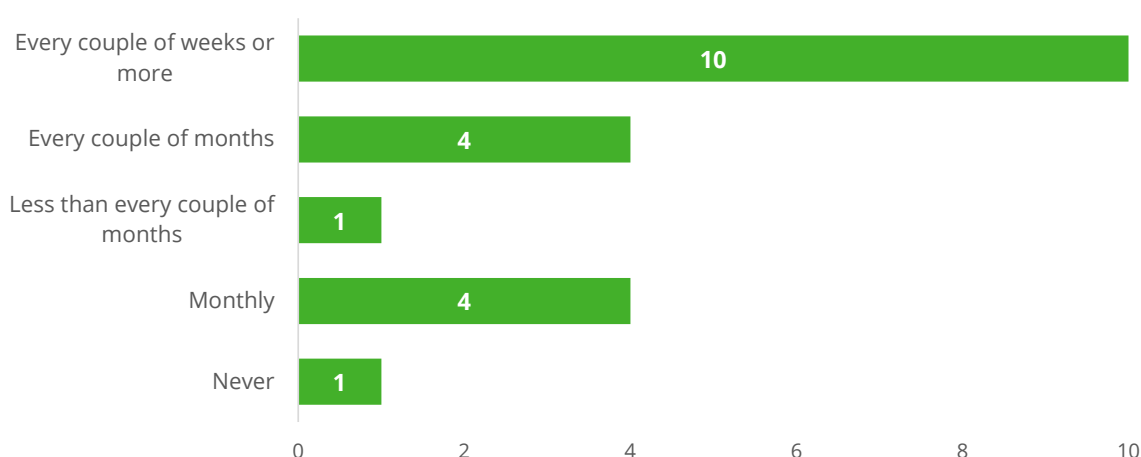
“Every interaction I have had with SNAICC Early Years Support has been a positive one. Nothing is too much trouble, and the level of response always exceeds my expectations” – Vic Early Years Service Survey Respondent.

Where a survey respondent had indicated that the quality of engagement was low, they elaborated that this was due to mismatch of expectations between what their service needed and what SNAICC Early Years Support offered. It was also noted by consultees that infrequent engagement led to feeling less supported.

“Not really. Not as often. Not as often as other services they support. Hasn’t been for a while. The interaction has changed, less of it. Could be staff changes. I don’t know what happens with the organisation now. But we have had no support with the organisation this year” – Vic Early Years Service Survey Respondent.

Although some services noted less frequent engagement, most still reported that the frequency of engagement was consistently sufficient over the course of the Program. In 2024, the majority of services reported that they engaged every couple of weeks or more.

Chart 2.8: Survey results from the question ‘How often has your service interacted with SNAICC Early Years Support, over this year?’



Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey 2024

In the 2023 and 2022 surveys, respondents tended to engage to a similar extent – although the question phrased differently, the majority of services (around 71 per cent – 27 out of 38 respondents over the two years) reported that they ‘often’ engaged with SNAICC Early Years Support, indicating that frequency has mostly been high and consistent across the three years. A further 13 per cent (five respondents over the two years) indicated that they ‘always’ engage.

As noted in Section 2.4.1 above, there is a link between engagement and understanding - where there has been a lower level of engagement between services and SNAICC Early Years Support, there is expected to be less understanding (and vice versa). Further, the nature of the engagement is related to understanding, particularly for staff who do not directly engage with SNAICC Early Years Support. For example, if staff only had exposure to SNAICC Early Years Support when doing professional development, then their understanding may be that SNAICC Early Years Support simply provides training.

"[Engagement has] gotten better. I think it's because we know each other now. There's that regular consistent engagement. And as the process has moved through, we sort have gotten a better understanding of what they can do for us" – WA Early Years Service Director.

There is still some extent to which engagement varies between jurisdictions. Although SNAICC Early Years Support NSW has the largest number of services under its remit, the quality and frequency of engagement tend to be highest. Due to the relatively large number of services, NSW utilises a 'traffic light system' to determine which services need greater attention, which has been reported by the State Director as working well – *"engagement, when it is occurring, is high quality"*.

In Vic, focus is being placed on maintaining relationships to foster greater engagement. Although many services do have a good relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support, it has been noted by SNAICC stakeholders that *"at times, the lack of a strong relational trust...that's a barrier"*. In these instances, services may have a lower degree of engagement, as well as awareness and understanding. Nevertheless, quality and frequency of engagement are still in good standing in Vic, with a third of survey respondents in 2024 rating their quality of engagement as 'great'.

In WA, services have appreciated the engagement they have had with SNAICC Early Years Support. Due to the geography of the state, having the ability to engage with both SNAICC Early Years Support and with other services through that relationship, has helped diminish feelings of isolation. However, engagement has been partially interrupted by the changeover of the State Director. As noted in Section 2.2.3, the lower level of operationalisation in WA, combined with the loss of continuity due to changeover of the state director has made services feel less of a relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support. For some services, this has lowered their experience of engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support.

"Where we had really robust conversation, and that presence on the ground, I feel like we don't have it as much anymore" – WA Early Years Service Director.

As the program continues to progress, there are some areas for improvement that have already been identified. SNAICC Early Years Support notes their intention to implement a system that tracks the level of engagement with services; and that there will be greater utilisation of action plans and service snapshots to keep data.

It should also be noted that as SNAICC Early Years Support grows increasingly confident in the level of trust, awareness, and understanding, that the frequency of engagement may become less important – instead, services will be comfortable to reach out when they need to.

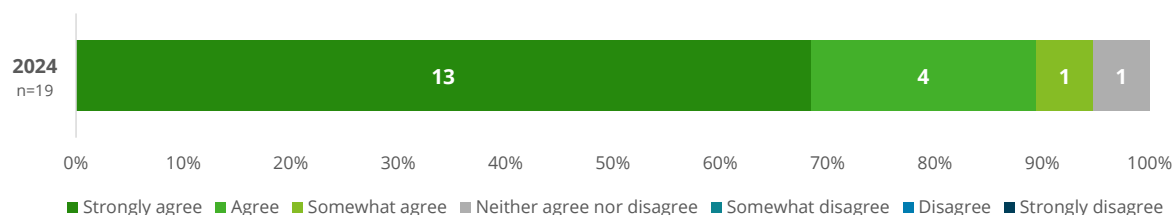
2.4.3 Trust

It is important to note that although SNAICC Early Years Support is now fully implemented in the program jurisdictions, it takes a significant amount of time and investment to build strong and trusting relationships with the early years services. Services often noted that they felt unsupported before this program or that they participated in other initiatives that were ineffective or unsustainable – resulting in diminished trust and willingness to engage with support services more broadly, and emphasising the importance of getting it right this time: *"But we need them to allow us in and trust us to do the work. It's getting them to want to allow us in. I think that historically, to their defence, they've been doing it unsupported for so long"* – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff.

Therefore, the extent to which SNAICC Early Years Support can build trust with services is critical to understanding and meeting the unique needs of services and, as such, having a sustained positive impact on children, families, communities, and the ACCO sector more broadly. Encouragingly, evidence suggests that SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to build a good level of trust over the course of the Program.

In the 2024 Early Years Service Survey, a new question was added for respondents to indicate the extent to which SNAICC Early Years Support had a good relationship and built trust with their service.

Chart 2.9: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support has a good relationship and built trust with this service?'

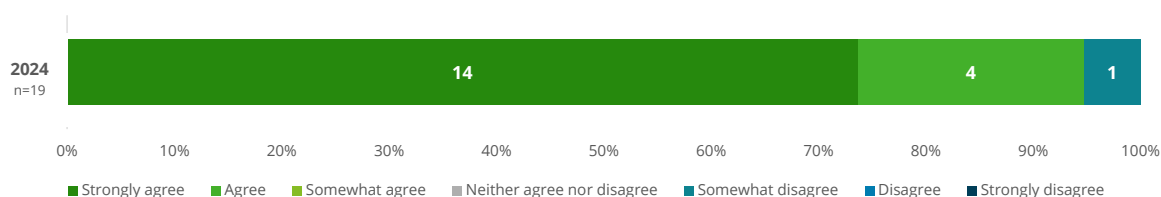


Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey 2024.

68 per cent of survey respondents (13 of 19) strongly agreed that there was a good relationship and that trust had been built. A further 21 per cent at least agreed, and no respondents disagreed to any extent, and the results were consistent in all jurisdictions.

Asking respondents to take a forward-looking view, around three-quarters of respondents strongly believed that SNAICC Early Years Support would provide ongoing benefits to their service in the future. Only one respondent did not agree.

Chart 2.10: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support will provide ongoing benefits to this service in the future?'



Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey 2024.

Services spoke to the level of trust in consultations as well, with many noting that SNAICC Early Years Support's commitment to relationship building as a strong enabler. Further, views on the level of trust were shared between a variety of stakeholders, indicating its presence as a key component of the program. For example, a government stakeholder noted that *"for SNAICC [Early Years Support] to make traction and build relationships...that takes time, especially with ACCOs, to build trust. I think [they're in] a good position now. Things are on the up"*.

"SNAICC are all over anything we do – even if I have trouble... they have people who've done it; they've created relationships so I know I can trust them" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

"Building the trust [with] service leaders and leaning on that trust... if we didn't have that relationship...it would be a barrier" – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

However, it is noted that the importance of building trust is still apparent, and where it is not as strongly established, it is seen as a barrier to quality engagement. Further, it is important that continual effort is made to retain trust – that is, continuing to be responsive, continue to maintain relationships in the event of turnover, and avoiding any actions that could cause a loss of trust.

"I feel we haven't gotten a deep relationship with them, I feel sometimes I'm not clear on how they are helping us. Sometimes I feel our service isn't really seen...I feel that when they come, it's not relational and its more task oriented. I think it's just trust building; how does the adviser build trust with me and this service?" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

2.4.4 Wrap around supports and collaboration with other peaks and organisations

While SNAICC Early Years Support has generally been successful in its implementation, there are some aspects of collaboration and wrap around supports that could be improved as the program continues to run.

Many of SNAICC Early Years Support's objectives align to government objectives (such as Closing the Gap – see Section 1.1), and there are regular meetings and touchpoints between SNAICC Early Years Support and government in NSW. In this jurisdiction, significant progress has been made in service-level advocacy (detailed in Section 3.5). SNAICC Early Years Support has also been able to interface with the broader SNAICC team, helping to elevate the voice of services in policy discussions – it was also noted that these services having a greater understanding of processes because of their participation in SNAICC Early Years Support, compared to other jurisdictions without it, was an enabler to effective collaboration between SNAICC's broader system-level advocacy and government.

"I see a place for us – I think the significant contributions that SNAICC makes at the national and jurisdictional level...the contributions we're making to Closing the Gap, are phenomenal" – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff.

"We're in a very different space to where we were 12 months ago. We've both grown. So, it's good to see that." – Government stakeholder.

"[SNAICC Early Years Support] has been developing and going from strength to strength, getting those strong relationships with organisations in jurisdictions. I see that when representatives from SNAICC Early Years Support bring forward those views into the rooms where we have policy discussions...it informs that policy work we're doing" – SNAICC representative

However, there is still the opportunity to increase the extent of collaboration with government, especially where it can reduce the duplication of support.

Further, there may be opportunities for stronger links or referral pathways for other support and mental health services. While SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to foster connections with external support services, services felt in some instances that this could be enhanced, particularly in rural locations – this is noted in Section 3.6.

A government stakeholder noted that increased collaboration with other peak bodies and organisations could be valuable. Such partnerships would help to *"give that united front. So that's it's not as segmented, divided community."* – that is, partnerships would be mutually beneficial and allow SNAICC Early Years Support to continue to expand their level of impact. Further, such collaboration may serve to avoid duplication and over-consultation, where services may become confused about who to get support from. However, this does not mean stepping back from the current offerings - support should still be provided, but greater collaboration may establish clarity for services.

The long-term implications and considerations of increased collaboration are explored in Section 5.1.7.

2.5 Jurisdictional variation

It is important to note that SNAICC Early Years Support is a program that is intended to adapt to the needs of the jurisdictions that it is implemented in. As such, each jurisdiction has its own contextual factors that have influenced how the implementation of the program has occurred.

2.5.1 New South Wales

SNAICC Early Years Support NSW has been fully operational since June 2021, though staffing constraints resulted in the team operating with reduced capacity throughout 2022 before returning to full operational capacity from March 2023. Because it is the longest-running jurisdiction, NSW is where the program is the furthest into the implementation journey and the most developed.

In 2022, the focus for NSW was in establishing trusted relationships with services – in which responsive activity and supporting services in whatever ways they needed remained a priority.

In 2023, while there remained elements of this responsiveness, there was also an opportunity with a fully operational team and more established service relationships to invest in more strategic supports. Governance was a key focus for Early Years Support NSW over 2023, with efforts towards improving service

compliance and efficiency through the creation of templates and training – and an explicit focus on service leadership through coaching and mentoring. Additionally, 2023 saw significant effort placed into advocacy (co-ordinating inputs into the ACCC and IPART inquiries) and sector growth, with Early Years Support NSW taking on an additional 26 services through becoming a Sector Strengthening Partner (see Box 2.3 below).

Box 2.3: SNAICC Early Years Support NSW chosen as Sector Strengthening Partner by NSW Department of Education

In June 2023, the NSW Department of Education released a tender for a partner to enhance the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in quality early childhood education and care that is culturally inclusive.¹⁵ Following the tender process, SNAICC was chosen as the "Sector Strengthening Partner" in NSW. As a partner, SNAICC Early Years Support NSW is supporting ACCOs in NSW from 2023 to 2027, focusing on childhood education and care. This support encompasses program design, sustainability, workforce development, capital infrastructure, and capacity building in areas like governance and compliance. Additionally, SNAICC Early Years Support NSW aims to foster a collective voice on key issues and plans to increase the number of providers to enhance educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with an emphasis on cultural identity.

This resulted in additional 26 ACCOs, including preschools and child and family centres, being supported by SNAICC Early Years Support NSW. This partnership will assist the NSW government in delivering on its First Steps Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-25, and contribute to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It also forms a component of the First Steps Aboriginal Children's Strategy, which has earmarked \$23 million from 2021-2025 to enhance outcomes for these children. This initiative supplements the Department of Education's existing 10-year collaboration with the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.¹⁶

Across 2024, focus has remained on responsive support balanced with higher-level goals, such as advocacy. Key activities in this respect have included:

- Launching the resource-sharing platform Padlet
- Developing an assessment and rating Toolkit
- Working with government on the 100 Preschools initiative
- Advocacy for a cultural safety training module for assessors (see Box 3.5 in Section 3.5).
- Hosting the NSW Gathering
- Delivering four newsletters, and weekly bulletins

The continuity and consistency of SNAICC Early Years Support in NSW has been an enabler to its success – staff turnover has been very low, which has helped build relational trust. While there has been natural *"ebbs and flows"* to the work, it was noted by the State Director that *"our stability has been instrumental. The continuity for services has been massive in terms of relationships. Otherwise, they would lose faith in our ability to provide"*.

Going forward in NSW, as the jurisdiction with the largest number of services and the largest volume of work, it will be important for SNAICC Early Years Support to be adequately resourced and appropriately designed to retain a balance between its objectives both on the ground and at the higher level, especially as it moves towards its broader sector-strengthening goals.

"We've done a completely bespoke approach. At some point in time, we're going to get to a point where they're all up to speed, where we just need to keep watering the flower" – NSW SNAICC Early Years Support Director

¹⁵ NSW Government, Aboriginal access, Sector strengthening partnership (2 June 2023)

<<https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/making-services-accessible-for-all-children/aboriginal-access/sector-strengthening-partnership>>

¹⁶ Torre, G., National Indigenous Times, NSW partnership to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and early childhood services (1 June 2023) <<https://nit.com.au/01-06-2023/6201/partnership-to-support-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-children-families-and-early-childhood-services>>

2.5.2 Victoria

SNAICC Early Years Support Victoria has been fully operational since March 2023 – fully staffed a little later than the NSW team. Over the course of 2023, the focus of the Victorian team remained on building trusted relationships with each service – including being responsive to services' needs as they arise and, where the relationship is established and services are receptive, beginning to venture into more active support of leadership and practice development – the prioritisation over 2023 was to support service leadership teams through coaching, mentoring and leadership training.

There was also focus on internally developing the Vic SNAICC Early Years Support offering to services, and clear and consistent communication around the ways in which support can be offered, and the points at which services could engage. As the team has grown, there has also been a focus on transitioning trusted relationships to new staff members, supporting the ongoing sustainability of the Victorian team.

In 2024, activities were similar, with a greater focus on building the capacity of services, and connecting services, as well as continuing to expand awareness and relationships.

"We are in a beautiful spot where we've been building the capacity of 2ICs and educators [as well as leaders]. I feel like there's an increased awareness from the educators on what we do and how we support the services. A key component of that is the resources we have built or that we have delivered which raise the awareness. I think another key component has been in the professional learning – but I also think the networking and debriefing in a cultural setting." – Vic SNAICC Early Years Support Director

The Victorian team reflected in 2023 that the experience of implementation further highlighted the importance of a trusted relationship with each service to support engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support offerings. If the team was onsite, or responsive to a specific issue, and could offer support, resources or information at the right point in time and in the context of relationship, engagement was much more effective. Continuing to build these deep and mature relationships over 2024 has helped SNAICC Early Years Support advance their offerings.

2.5.3 Western Australia

In 2023, SNAICC Early Years Support WA focused on raising awareness of their service and its offerings, both in terms of recruiting new services and increasing support for participating services. This was in response to some services experiencing turnover at the senior leadership or board level, and changing priorities, because of the time that had elapsed between the initial design of the WA program and reaching full operationalisation. Further, the changeover of the WA State Director at the start of 2024 was also an interruption of the delivery of SNAICC Early Years Support.

Therefore, the recent focus on SNAICC Early Years Support WA has been establishing networks across the state with other early years services and stakeholders, again raising awareness of how the offering can support services and the system, and also deepening the team's understanding of how early childhood business is done in the WA context. There has been ongoing communication and interaction with services and workforce support, as well as hosting networking events such as the WA Gathering in June 2024.

While the team has expressed that site visits are the key way in which trusted relationships with participating services can be built, the unique context of WA presents challenges in ensuring adequate face-to-face engagement. In particular, the travel time and cost, the impact of natural events (such as the floods) and the need to have two team members visiting (due to distance and safety concerns) can limit the extent to which face-to-face engagement is possible. Additionally, in 2023 it was noted that the lack of a male team member has been challenging in communities in which a male team member would have enabled more culturally and situationally responsive conversations.

In previous years, it has also been noted by services in WA that the issues that they face can often be unique to their context and therefore approaches and support that are effective in other jurisdictions may not always be applicable. Therefore, as SNAICC Early Years Support WA continues to progress, it will be important to ensure that support is tailored to the needs of the services, and is responsive to the contextual factors – for example, it has been considered that having a second WA office could help address the geographical difficulties. While having a shared State Director between Vic and WA has been effective over the course of 2024, having a WA-based director may be more sustainable in terms of workload and also enable a greater degree of contextual responsiveness.

3 Impact

In line with the Impact domains established in the evaluation framework (see Section 1.3.2), this Chapter outlines the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support on early years services and the ACCO sector (and through this children and families).

Overview

Evaluation domain	Key findings
Effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The vast majority of services stated that their service benefitted from SNAICC Early Years Support. Further, the majority noted that children at their service have benefitted from SNAICC Early Years Support. SNAICC Early Years Support has enabled services to uplift their quality in meeting the needs of children, families and communities Quality uplift has occurred from strategic investment in building the capacity of service leadership; embedding culture and responsiveness to community in service's understanding of and measurement of quality; facilitating knowledge and practice sharing, and exposing services to new methods of delivery; and a range of other service level supports. With the support of SNAICC Early Years Support, all services that have undergone assessments in the past two years have either retained or improved their quality rating, as well as eight provisional services supported to undertake the NQS assessment process. Services have found high value in the way in which SNAICC Early Years Support fosters connections with other community-controlled services – strengthening community and shared practice in ways that contribute to a sense of shared purpose, continual improvement and sector sustainability. SNAICC Early Years Support has invested in the development of the ACCO early years workforce, particularly in strengthening service leadership. SNAICC Early Years Support has facilitated a collective and representative ACCO voice to government. This benefits both services and governments in its influence on evidence-based policy making.

Figure 3.1: Key SNAICC Early Years Support objectives and activities





Source: Deloitte Access Economics, SNAICC.

The findings relating to the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support have been informed by an examination of program documentation, survey data and collated evidence from consultations with SNAICC staff, non-government bodies, government stakeholders and participating services (see Section 1.3.4).

SNAICC Early Years Support was implemented on a strong underlying rationale and theory of change, aimed at enhancing the delivery of early years education to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. As discussed in Section 1.2.2, SNAICC Early Years Support provides assistance to the ACCO sector, through the service leaders, to deliver place-based early years education to children. While the support is directed towards services, the ultimate goal is to benefit children, families, and communities. By undertaking activities that improve access and participation, workforce development, quality delivery, and system cohesion, it is expected that these efforts will lead to outcomes.

This Chapter examines the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support against the below evaluation domains and questions:

Table 3.2: Impact evaluation domains and questions

Impact domain	Evaluation questions
Effectiveness 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what extent are the intermediaries realising their intended objectives? 2. Are there any unintended outcomes or impacts observed to be generated by the intermediaries? 3. In what contexts are the intermediaries more likely to create impact? 4. What does the evidence tell us about what a high-quality intermediary looks like?
Equity 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To what extent are outcomes realised across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities? 6. What does the evidence tell us about who is missing out?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics

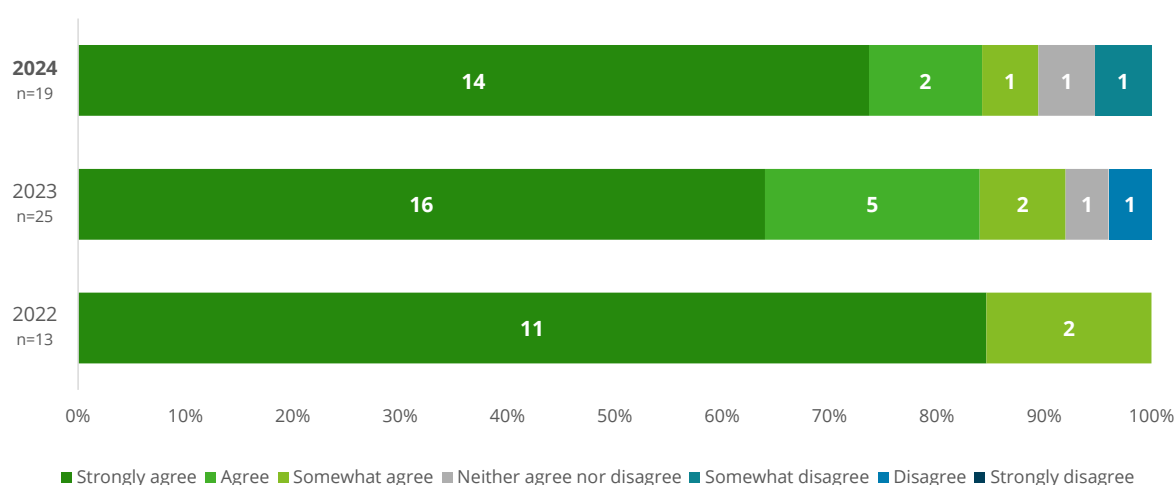
Note: Evaluation questions 4 and 5 (above) are addressed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 4, respectively.

3.1 Service perception of impact

As noted in the theory of change (see Figure ii), SNAICC Early Years Support is designed to provide direct and responsive support to ACCO early years services, harnessing and sharing sector knowledge to lift service quality, reduce barriers to delivery, and remove unnecessary administrative burden – enabling services to focus on delivering ECEC for their children, families and community.

Overall, evidence shows that services feel SNAICC Early Years Support has been successful in creating a positive impact. In the 2024 Early Years Service Survey, 74 per cent (14 out of 19 survey respondents) strongly agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support has benefitted their service. There has been a high level of agreement among services across all three survey years (see Chart 3.2).

Chart 3.1: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support has benefitted this service?', 2022-2024



Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

When reflecting on the ways in SNAICC Early Years Support has benefited services, the following themes were most commonly referenced:

- Increased access to tailored, relevant and high quality professional development opportunities;
- Service specific supports and quality improvement, including the ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist, site visits and support navigating particular instances
- Increased sector knowledge, including the sharing of high quality practice examples and resources
- Increased financial support or access to grants
- Increased sector connectedness, including the facilitation of service and sector stakeholder relationships

"Every time [SNAICC Early Years Support] have come here, we've had success with upskilling our educators, one of the biggest things our staff benefit from." – NSW Early Years Service Director.

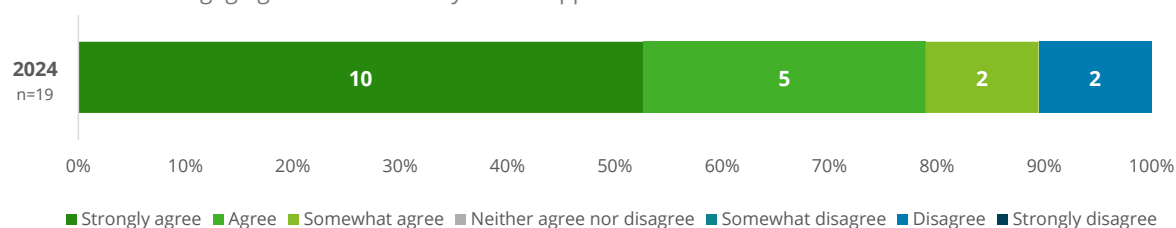
SNAICC Early Years Support is designed to promote a stronger early childhood system, in which service voice and evidence feeds directly through to system improvements, supporting a responsive sector focused on the needs of children and families. Ultimately these activities lead to improvements for the services that enable improvements in educational experiences and developmental outcomes for children, and create better long-term outcomes for families and communities.

Chart 3.2 shows that 79 per cent of services agree or strongly agree that children at their service have benefitted from their engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support. This belief tended to be strongest in

NSW and Vic, with only two respondents out of 16 between both jurisdictions not agreeing or strongly agreeing. In WA, two of three respondents at least somewhat agreed. As mentioned above, this is because the investment in resources, workforce development and improved service quality (evidenced through improved NQS ratings) ultimately leads to benefits for children and families. Further detail on improved service design and delivery can be found in Section 3.2.

One service director from NSW noted that they *“have never really experienced a support service like [SNAICC Early Years Support]... you can see they love what they do and they are strong advocates for [the] children”*. Another service director, from WA, noted that children benefitted through gaining cultural connection as a result of provision of resources from SNAICC Early Years Support: *“I think the biggest thing is cultural connection, by having the resources they gifted us, [this] gives us an understanding of culture and we can engage with children.”*

Chart 3.2: Survey results from the question ‘To what extent do you agree: Children at this service have benefitted from this service engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support?’



Note: This question was only asked in 2024.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey 2024

Services have commented on how SNAICC Early Years Support can be relied on for help, and how they have helped services to deliver for their community:

“The SNAICC Early Years Support team have been there when we have been through some really tough times with staffing; just knowing they are a phone call away helps support and benefit the community” – Vic Early Years Service Survey Respondent.

Looking at the long-term, it can be seen and expected that SNAICC Early Years Support will have sustained benefits for children and families. As noted below, SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to assist services in lifting their NQS ratings; and beyond what is observed through NQS, has lifted educator confidence and capacity to deliver high quality and culturally responsive early childhood education. Cultural safety, which is not always captured in NQS ratings, is also a critical element of service delivery for children and families – it means that children feel respected and valued in their educational environments, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being that enhances outcomes. The positive impact that SNAICC Early Years Support has generated in terms of cultural safety is discussed further below (See Chart 3.3 and Box 3.2 for further detail).

Box 3.1: Spotlight on how SNAICC Early Years Support supports a service

SNAICC Early Years Support has provided services with a diverse range of supports – based on the needs of services. This case study provides detail on what this support has looked like for a regional childcare centre that has participated in SNAICC Early Years Support since 2021. The centre is dedicated to serving the local Aboriginal community and provides care for up to 50 children aged 0 to 6 years. This service’s membership with SNAICC supports their access to valuable resources and professional networks which contributes to ongoing development.

Supporting staff: The centre director and educators receive coaching, mentoring, and feedback from SNAICC funded Early Years Support Co-ordinator (capital city based) to put in place ongoing improvements in the delivery of early years’ care and learning to the children attending the centre. The SNAICC Early Years Support adviser visits the service quarterly to deliver and share learning resources and supports the centre with compliance with the early years Quality Improvement Program and the Early Years Framework.

"My journey as an Early Years Service manager has been much easier from being with the EYS program, I have a great relationship with the EYS Co-ordinator to get the support we need to provide care and education in a safe, stimulating, and enriching environment which strengthens their Aboriginal identity" – Early Years Service Director.

Resource support: The centre needed to improve the standard of protection on their playground equipment to comply with the Early Years Service standards, but their operational budget could not pay for new protective covers for play equipment. The centre director spoke to the SNAICC Early Years Support adviser about the need for new protective padding to comply with standards and was advised that the cost for new padding would be funded under the SNAICC Early Years Support program to ensure compliance.

Training: The centre identified that most of the First Nations children it provides care and education for had experienced trauma and some children are, or have been, in out of home care. Educators raised the need for trauma aware training and resources to better support children they are caring for. The centre worked with the SNAICC Early Years Support program to find and deliver a trauma awareness program so educators could better understand and deliver appropriate and effective trauma-informed learning and care services and resources for children in the centre.

"The trauma-informed workshop really helped our educators to understand how trauma affects our children and how we can provide trauma-informed services to help the children we look after" – Early Years Service Director.

Service development: The SNAICC Early Years Support program supported the centre director and key educators to attend a regional early years services' workshop, a national Early Childhood conference and a National Gathering of Early Years services in 2024. SNAICC organise regional gatherings of early years services to support services to share their work, successes, and challenges through a community of practice program.

SNAICC supports early years services to connect with each other in their local region to form to learn from each other about their successes, challenges and enable staff to learn from each other to improve services to children. This service's attendance at networking and professional learning events held by SNAICC Early Years Support has enabled this service to extend its networking and professional learning networks.

"We've made so many friendships with other ACCOs in our area. To hear and know that issues we might be facing are what other others services face too. It makes you realise that your service is not alone and we can learn from each other and know more about the challenges we face" – Early Years Service Director.

This service has collaborated with SNAICC Early Years Support to improve quality of service and ensure it continues to provide high quality service delivery. This service has actively engaged in the development of a Quality Improvement Plan to ensure continuous growth and quality in its practices. Overall, the service reflected on how SNAICC Early Years Support supports her service, and other ACCOs, to provide the highest quality of education and care services to children and their families in their area.

"The SNAICC Early Years Support program is very unique, but it's also individualised; they tailor their support, which is unique in itself. There are different needs with every EYS ACCO and they suit our communities. There aren't alternatives. There's nothing like it, and that's why it's so beneficial" – Early Years Service Director.

3.2 Service design and delivery

One of the key objectives of SNAICC Early Years Support is to provide support to early years services in service design and delivery, enabling them to continue to improve their practice excellence, respond to community needs, design culturally appropriate programs, meet and exceed NQF assessments, and to effectively integrate and share practice with other services.

Over the course of its implementation, evidence suggests that SNAICC Early Years Support has been successful in meeting this objective, enabling services to uplift their quality in meeting the needs of children, families and communities. This is accomplished through multiple strategic investments in:

- building the capacity of service leadership (with a focus on service Directors and second in charge)
- embedding culture and responsiveness to community in service's understanding of and measurement of quality

- facilitating knowledge and practice sharing, and exposing services to new methods of delivery
- a range of other service level supports (as guided by services).

SNAICC Early Years Support's quality improvement frameworks (the NSW action plans and the Vic/WA ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist) have been developed over the pilot period, in response to a deepening understanding of the way ACCO services can understand, measure and continually improve quality delivery. Importantly, this conception of quality practice, and what supports quality practice in an ACCO services, has been developed from the ground up – in response to service leader and community feedback and experiences – rather than solely linking to any mainstream quality or compliance frameworks (such as the NQS). While (as outlined below), the application of these quality frameworks does hold benefits for NQS compliance, they are centred in a longer term and more holistic and community driven understanding of the practices that underpin sustainable and effective ACCO early years service delivery.

The implementation of the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist, as outlined in Section 2.3.3, provides an outline of the factors assessed within the SNAICC Early Years Service quality support model as underpinning practice excellence. The nine domains are as follows:

- Promoting and celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia
- Building and sustaining community partnership
- Meeting individual needs
- Planning our teaching and learning
- Setting high expectations in teaching and learning
- Recruitment, retention and succession of early years staff
- Leading an Aboriginal Community Controlled Early Years Centre
- Promoting health and wellbeing
- Supported transitions

By creating an uplift in these domains, SNAICC Early Years Support helps services to meet the needs of children, families, and communities. As is explored further in Section 5.1.8, there may be forward looking implications for how SNAICC Early Years Support can support mainstream services in the provision of a model for community centred and culturally responsive service quality improvement.

The PLM highlights the intent for SNAICC Early Years Support to continue to progress monitoring and impact measurement to highlight the value of ACCO service delivery and. Currently, the evaluation has observed some early progress here, which has included supporting promotion of 'best practice' among early years services. However, the progress on establishing and/or collecting quantitative measures has been more limited. The importance of data collection moving forward is discussed in Section 5.1.9.

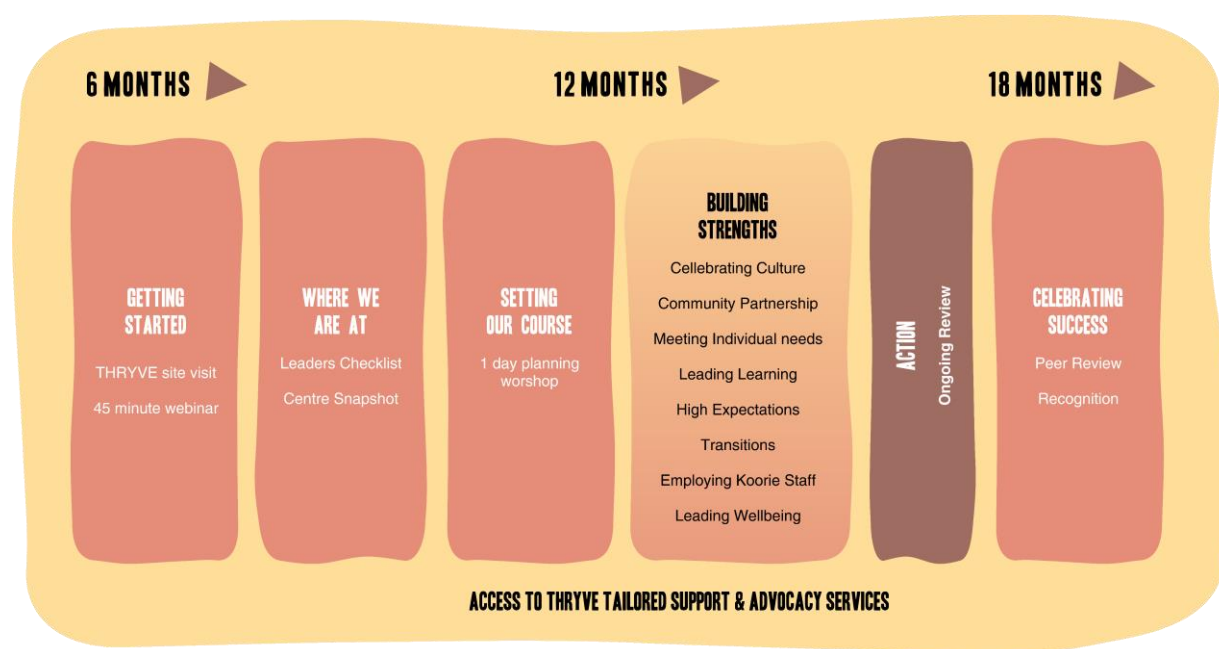
SNAICC Early Years Support helps to build the capacity of service leadership

As is explored in greater detail in Section 3.3, SNAICC Early Years Support emphasises support for service leaders by delivering leadership programs and other workforce development that ultimately helps to build quality. These leadership programs have seen good uptake, and are well received by service leaders. This has included monthly leadership forums and leadership events.

In Vic and WA, the ACCO Early Years Service Review Checklist helps to define the trajectory of leadership development, alongside the access to tailored support and advocacy from SNAICC Early Years Support. This framework is illustrated in Figure 3.2 below. The domains of the Checklist, which align to the 'Building Strengths' module, are noted as heavily supporting the leadership development model.

The 'Getting Started', 'Where Are We At', 'Setting Our Course' and 'Building Strengths' modules make up key aspects of the leadership program. It has been noted by SNAICC Early Years Support staff that services with strong relational trust have followed the 18-month trajectory in a linear and timely manner, and that for these services *"[the] professional learning journey has been well-documented and celebrated"*.

Figure 3.2: Example of the SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program framework



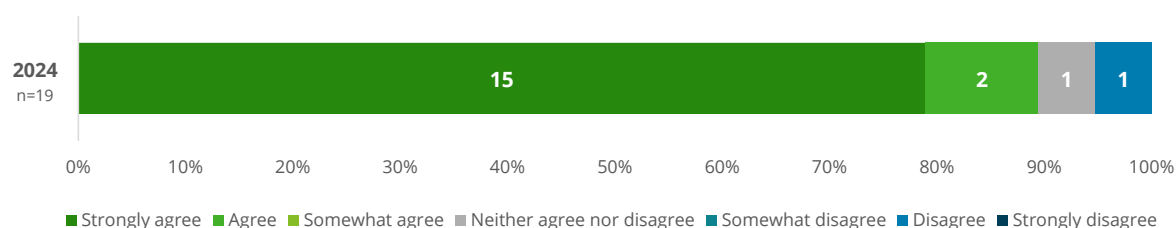
Source: SNAICC.

SNAICC Early Years Support's enables quality improvement to take place in a culturally and contextually responsive way, uniquely targeted to each service.

Cultural safety is a critical element of service delivery to children and families, yet the improvements and its impact may not always be reflected in ratings. Ensuring cultural safety means that children feel respected and valued in their educational environments, fostering a sense of belonging and well-being. This, in turn, can enhance engagement, participation, and learning outcomes.

The SNAICC Early Years Support program has been designed to support the cultural safety of services. In 2024, 17 of the 19 survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources (see Chart 3.3). While the program provides support that is unique to each service, most services have found these supports as culturally appropriate, showcasing that cultural safety is at the forefront of supports provided.

Chart 3.3: Survey results from the question 'To what extent do you agree: SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services?'



Note: This question was only asked in 2024

Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2024

Through providing avenues for practice sharing and development, as well as supporting system improvements in cultural safety (such as the work SNAICC Early Years Support is leading with ACECQA – see Box 3.6 in Section 3.5), the confidence and capacity of ACCO services to deliver culturally responsive education is lifting. As the program has evolved, SNAICC Early Years Support has also developed the ACCO snapshot which includes recommendations that highlight the targeted supports that SNAICC Early Years

Support can deliver or facilitate as aligned with specifically identified service level needs (see Section 2.3.3 for further detail) – services work together with SNAICC Early Years Support to complete these snapshots and identify their needs. Through these insights, services can better understand ways that SNAICC Early Years Support can assist them in improving their service delivery:

“With the checklist, we are able to identify things we could do differently to support families, or things we hadn’t thought of in the past” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

The provision of required and necessary resources improves service design and delivery, ensuring that culturally strong and high-quality early childhood education care is provided to children and families.

Another important element of high-quality service delivery for ACCO early years services is ensuring that services embed cultural safety in service design and delivery. One service director noted the benefit of having SNAICC Early Years Support to ensure that Aboriginal culture is incorporated in service delivery:

“[SNAICC Early Years Support] is able to bring in more culture by bringing in the Deadly Ed through bush tucker. We were also able to get our lockers painted with the local story which is great for children to see everyday...there are also elders who come in and do cultural teachings once a month.” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

Some services have staff that do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander that work at those services and in those circumstances, staff members have appreciated and benefitted from cultural training provided by SNAICC Early Years Support: *“SNAICC Early Years Support has been helping me as a non-Indigenous person to help me meet my checklist. They also guide me to be culturally safe and help me to know that what I’m doing is actually correct” – Vic Early Years Service Director.*

SNAICC Early Years Support has supported the needs of services by providing resources that support staff in service delivery, where cultural safety is embedded. For example, a service director from WA reflected: *“They’ve been really good in [providing] resources, giving us cultural resources that we can use for children”.*

This uplift in service quality through improved child and educator interactions, as well as improved family trust and access to services provides a basis for improved outcomes for children, families, and communities. For example, SNAICC Early Years Support has helped services in hosting family days, and provision of training to non-Aboriginal staff that allows them to have better-informed interactions with families:

“[SNAICC Early Years Support] offers financial support for NAIDOC week activities and other events, and provides financial help to us host family days and similar activities” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

“Having that conversation with [an external personal through SNAICC Early Years Support] eased that burden on the Aboriginal staff. It was an eye opener, the non-Aboriginal staff said, ‘This explains a lot. Now I understand, why when I bring up something particular with a family they put a wall up.’ It was very valuable” – Vic Early Years Service Educator.

This aligns with survey results, where a vast majority of respondents strongly agreed that SNAICC Early Years Support provided culturally appropriate and safe resources and services (see Chart 3.3 above). In each jurisdiction, the majority of respondents strongly agreed, including all four NSW respondents.

SNAICC Early Years Support’s provision of resources is driven by service need and improves operation and development whilst also simultaneously easing the lives of service staff. The figure below shows service perception of SNAICC Early Years Support’s resources.

Figure 3.3 A sample of service reflections on the resources provided by SNAICC Early Years Support



Source: Deloitte Access Economics consultations.

SNAICC Early Years Support also ensures it provides resources to services that are culturally appropriate for the ACCO early years services, with more detail seen in Box 3.2.

Box 3.2: SNAICC Early Years provision of resources

During consultations, many services indicated that they had received a range of resources from SNAICC Early Years Support that have benefitted their service. One service provider highlighted the receipt of flashcards, emu callers, tapping sticks, books, and even emu skins, which have been used to teach children in a hands-on manner.

The provision of these resources has been crucial in introducing and maintaining a cultural element within the service. One Early Years Service Educator expressed *"[These resources] bring culture into the service... We don't want those kids to forget where they come from because they do come from somewhere. And it's special."* A service director also voiced the role of resources in enhancing cultural education – *"I think the biggest thing is cultural connection. By having the resources they gifted us, [it] gives us an understanding of culture; we can engage with the children and see what they are."*

Service providers noted, in particular, the use of the emu skins and books in enriching the children's cultural education, enabling educators to teach children about traditional practices in an engaging manner.

SNAICC Early Years Support provides services with the exposure and access to different service design models.

The SNAICC Early Years Support program is designed to foster knowledge sharing between services, providing the opportunity to access and learn about different service design models and methods. The opportunity to share practices between services enables services to improve their service design and

delivery. This has been provided through the Gatherings, informal service connections and resources provided by SNAICC Early Years Support. The Deadly Practice Spotlights discussed in detail in Section 2.2.2 at Gatherings provide services with an opportunity to for services to share service practices on topics such as assessment and rating and the Cultural Safety Framework. The provision of the Deadly Cards promotes critical reflection of staff practices that are aligned with Aboriginal pedagogy, early childhood theorists, and the National Quality Framework. This resource is designed to improve and refine teaching practices for ACCO early years services. One service director stated their appreciation for the Deadly Cards: *"...also the Deadly Cards were our saviour. The pedagogy and philosophy, the cards were a life saver because [they] guided us to connect the philosophy with the practice in our services."* – NSW Early Years Service Director.

The Gatherings, discussed in further detail in Section 3.6, are a particularly notable mechanism for this:

"We are able to unlock a lot of information from the speakers, I like that at the gatherings we get a lot of information about the different things taking place." – NSW Early Years Service Director.

"There's a way we've been working in the language space, some of our team go to Fitzroy Crossing, and saw things and came back and tried to recreate. For me Halls Creek, Fitzroy Crossing and Derby have some commonalities in that language space." – WA Early Years Service Director.

"...especially for us given that we're so new, any networking opportunity has been great for us to then learn and experience from others." – Vic Early Years Service Director.

Connection between services was regarded as one the aspects that SNAICC Early Years Support most strongly improved. This is explored in further detail in Section 3.6.

SNAICC Early Years Support is contributing to an uplift in service quality NQS ratings, highlighting that while the focus in support is on culturally and community responsive service continual improvement – this has direct flow-on effects to compliance and quality as defined by the mainstream system.

As noted previously, NQS ratings do not fully capture the way in which SNAICC Early Years Support helps uplift ACCO service quality, but are a fundamental 'ticket to play' for services. SNAICC Early Years Support focuses on creating a broader quality uplift to help meets the needs of children, families, and communities, and improvements in NQS ratings are a positive resulting effect of this.

In Vic, in 2024, four services received updated ratings. Of these, two provisional services achieved a 'Meeting NQS' rating while the other two services moved from 'Meeting NQS' to 'Exceeding NQS', and 'Exceeding NQS' to 'Excellent NQS'. In New South Wales, two services have received updated ratings in the time period and both ratings improved, with one service moving from Working Towards to Meeting NQS. Additionally, eight provisional services were supported to undergo the assessment and ratings process. While SNAICC Early Years Support has continued to support WA services with matters related to NQS, no services received an assessment in 2024.

This means that over the period of the SNAICC Early Years Support pilot, over 10 services have been supported to move from not meeting to meeting quality standards, and there are now no provisionally approved ACCOs operating within any participating jurisdictions.

The quality uplift supported by SNAICC Early Years Support is much broader than as captured by these rating shifts. However, the shifts, and the speed with which they have been realised, serves to highlight the impact of the approach taken throughout the pilot to support practice improvement in historically challenging service contexts. There are valuable lessons for the mainstream system in the power of tailored supports delivered through trusted expert relationships.

These services credited the ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist and mock audits (discussed further in Box 3.3) with NQS improvements.

Box 3.3: Service delivery improvement through mock audits

One way in which SNAICC has been able to uplift early years service providers' NQS alignment is through mock audits. These audits have significantly contributed to service compliance and workforce development by identifying areas for improvement and reducing stress during actual audit processes.

During these mock audits, a member of the SNAICC Early Years Support team would visit the service, moving through all the educators' rooms to observe service delivery firsthand. They would then make pages of notes with comments and suggestions to later discuss with the service director and educators. A Victorian Early Years Service Director highlighted the value that mock audits provided to the service, stating, *"[The] mock audit was really helpful. There were simple things that the educators already knew. And it helped that it came from an additional pair of external eyes."* This approach not only reinforced existing knowledge but also ensured that the feedback was taken seriously by the staff.

Another director shared the positive impact of these mock audits on the educator's preparedness, expressing, *"It lessened the stress for the girls during the actual [audit] process."* By simulating the audit environment, SNAICC's mock audits helped alleviate anxiety and build confidence amongst service educators, ensuring they felt supported and well-prepared for official audits and evaluations.

3.3 Workforce planning and development supports

SNAICC Early Years Support is designed to assist services with recruitment, staff retention, training and growing the capability and sustainability of the workforce.

SNAICC Early Years Support has invested in the development of the ACCO early years workforce, particularly in strengthening service leadership. This ensures that services have the capabilities and resources needed for sustained high-quality service delivery.

As noted above in Section 3.2, the SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program is based on a leadership framework containing a range of modules that service leaders can engage with and progress through, alongside the access to tailored support and advocacy from SNAICC Early Years Support (illustrated in Figure 3.2 above). A summary of the activities and engagement around leadership is provided below in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3: Summary of engagement in jurisdictions around leadership training from SNAICC Early Years Support

Jurisdiction	Summary of activities
NSW	In NSW , most services have engaged with the SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program. In 2023, 100 staff attended leadership events in NSW and in 2024, 90 staff attended these events. This program has been recognised by early years services staff as an important point of connection and relationship for emerging sector leaders, and were described by the NSW SNAICC Early Years Support Director as often being a <i>"jumping-off point"</i> for services to access additional support.
Vic	In Vic , all services have participated in a comprehensive leadership program, attended various development forums, and engaged in networking events. Across 2023 and 2024, 62 early years service staff members have attended leadership events held in Victoria. Program documentation highlights that in 2023 over 250 hours of coaching and mentoring was delivered through the Vic SNAICC Early Years Support leadership program. Additionally, training opportunities including the '8 Ways of Aboriginal Learning Pedagogical Approach' professional learning package, have supported services to establish consistent teaching practices across all learning rooms. Further, in 2024, SNAICC Early Years Support has supported a service to establish a Registered Training Organisations (RTO) by advocating for funding, which now has 15 students - highlighting the potential for services to play a role in broader workforce development in a culturally supported pathway.

WA In **WA**, SNAICC Early Years Support has collaborated with RTOs to develop partnerships and work experience pathways. Service leaders have enrolled in leadership training and participated in professional development activities such as trauma-informed training (facilitated by SNAICC Early Years Support). Across 2023 and 2024, there were 76 attendees at leadership events in WA. Additionally, in 2024, 17 early years service staff members completed the trauma informed training. These efforts have been well-received by services – for example, one service commented *“(the) professional learning we had was brilliant... (it has helped with) embedding culture in everyday practice”*. There are also aspirations to develop a local and regional ACCO ECEC recruitment portal. This follows the successful recruitment of five Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff for participating services, facilitated by SNAICC Early Years Support.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics

Through consultation, it was generally found that the quality of training provided by SNAICC Early Years support was commended by services: *“The provided training was immense for our directors. The most informative we’ve done in a long time. Didn’t realise how much they had on them. I recommend to all ACFCs.”* – NSW Early Years Service Director.

“One impact was around knowledge and trauma informed practice. That has had a big effect on a lot of our children. The training supported the educators to reflect more on, ‘Well, this child is really struggling with big emotions. I need to look further into that context.’” – Vic Early Years Service Educator. Across all three jurisdictions, SNAICC Early Years Support has helped service staff participate in trauma informed training. NSW had the highest participation, with 153 early years service staff completing trauma informed training. This was followed by Vic, which saw 36 staff complete the training and in WA 17 staff completed the training.

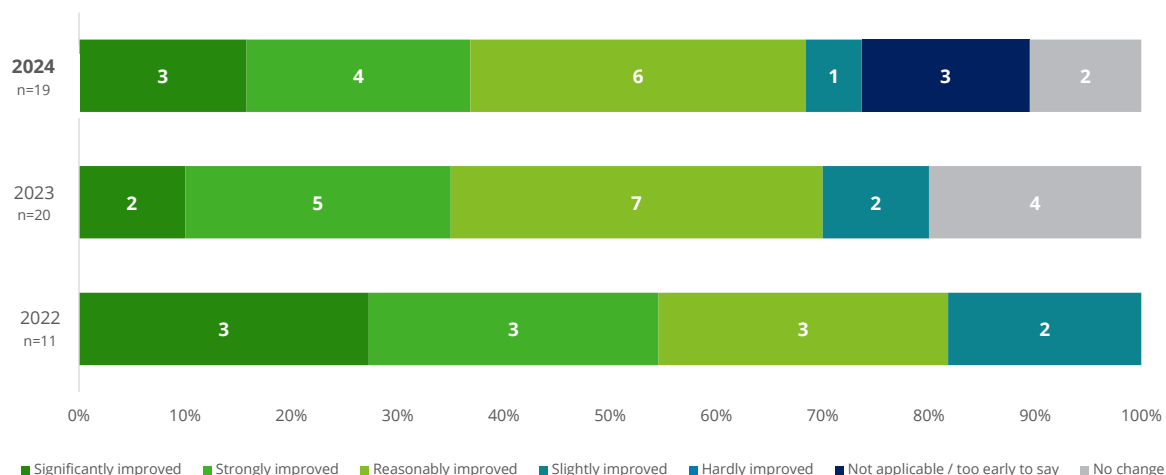
Some services suggested that even more opportunities would be welcome: *“There should be the opportunity for more professional development. You can get so much out of professional development. For me professional development about culture would be good.”* – WA Early Years Service Educator.

One early years service noted that the investment in workforce development has cumulative impacts which creates further opportunities and momentum over time: *“...I feel like it’s built from strength to strength. SNAICC has been able to foster a sense of building capacity, and further growth. That’s been really beneficial”*. – Vic Early Years Service Educator.

Beyond the direct professional development delivered, SNAICC Early Years Support also works to connect services to workforce training opportunities. In 2024, across all three states, a total of 37 early years services staff completed the leadership management training course, with a further 40 staff members enrolled in the leadership management training.

Within each survey year, the majority of services reported that identifying and accessing workforce training opportunities had at least reasonably improved, ranging from 9 services in 2022 to 13 services in 2024 (see Chart 3.4). Although it appears to be a smaller proportion than 2022, this is due to the varying nature in sample sizes over the years. As noted in Section 2.2.3, identifying workforce and training opportunities has been a consistently highly rated priority for services. This is also further explored below.

Chart 3.4 Number and proportion of survey respondents that felt identifying and accessing workforce training opportunities improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support



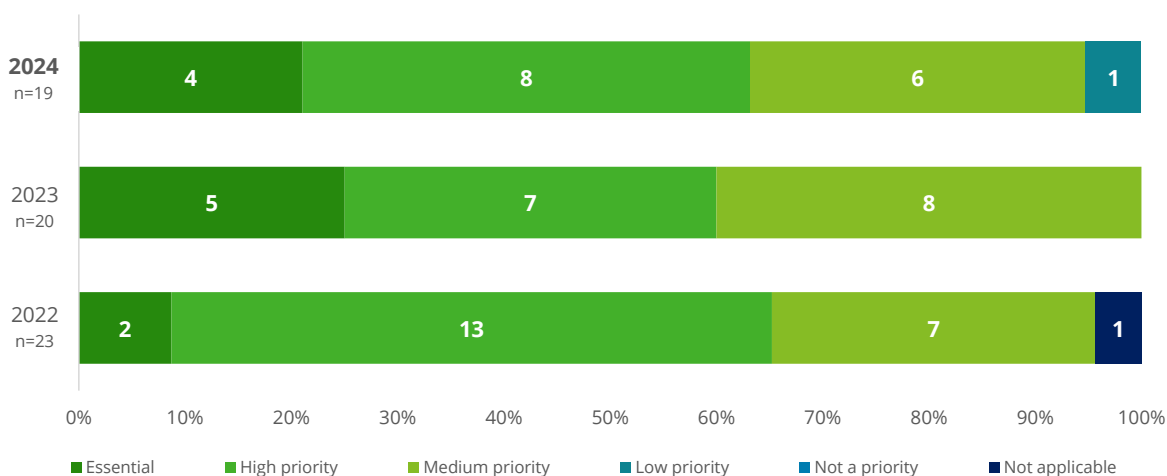
Note: In 2022, this question was only asked to NSW services due to the early stages of implementation in Vic and WA
Source: Deloitte Access Economics, Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

SNAICC Early Years Support uses data captured in their dashboards to guide some of their workforce planning and development supports offered. Box 3.4 includes detail on the data captured by SNAICC Early Years Support and its role in informing supports offered by SNAICC Early Years Support.

SNAICC Early Years Support has a dual-focused role on ensuring it can fill immediate gaps whilst also ensuring it addresses factors that threaten the sustainability of the workforce.

The SNAICC Early Years Support program is designed to support immediate service workforce needs, while at the same time strengthening sector workforce capacity and finding workforce opportunities. In all three survey years, around two-thirds of survey respondents stated that identifying workforce training opportunities was essential or a high priority area they would need further support in, making it one of the highest-ranked priority areas on average (see Chart 3.5).

Chart 3.5: Number and proportion of respondents who expressed the importance of identifying workforce training opportunities



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

One SNAICC staff member noted that the workforce is a priority and noted the need to incentivise people to the sector: *"There is a shortage crisis at the moment. Works need to be done around the sector and getting them to love the job again...we don't want our centres to have a crisis in workforce."* Although SNAICC Early Years Support continues to support services, it has limited control over the workforce: *"I think SNAICC will only control so much around workforce availability. I'm pretty sure they are doing everything they can."* – Government stakeholder.

To address immediate workforce gaps for services, SNAICC Early Years Support has assisted services through job advertisement: *"They made a promotional video to attract people to the early years workforce."* – Vic Early Years Service Director. SNAICC Early Years Support has also ensured that workforce development supports are unique to service needs. This ensures that supports ensure workforce sustainability of the sector but also specifically for that service, with one service noting *"SNAICC advocates for pay increases for our sector, they also made a promotional video to attract people to the early years' workforce. They also pay for advertising costs for jobs in our service and use their networks to draw people to work in our sector"*. In WA, a service is currently engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support to add a training and development officer at their service.

Although SNAICC Early Years Support can provide these supports, consultation with a SNAICC staff member noted a lower uptake from services for the direct support offerings in recruitment: *"It's interesting, they scream about workforce in codesign, it's always raised as an issue. [But] my observation is we've had really low uptake in terms of direct support offerings in recruitment...We had a really low uptake on those things. We haven't given up...we're persevering with that stuff."* This presents an opportunity for SNAICC Early Years Support to tailor its support differently to address immediate workforce gaps, in a way that services are responsive to.

One SNAICC Early Years Support staff member stated the service-level advocacy role it plays for the ACCO early years sector, through facilitating collective service voice: *"SNAICC Early Years Support plays that key advocacy role on their behalf [for] anything [like] pay, education assistants and so on."* Further, an Early Years Service Director reflected: *"SNAICC Early Years Support supports workforce development, advocating for a 15 per cent pay increase, supporting early years services to attract staff."*

SNAICC Early Years Support's role in service level advocacy and supporting broader SNAICC teams with system-level advocacy is discussed in Section 3.5.

Staff retention is a priority for the early years sector and SNAICC Early Years Support has actively supported services to retain staff.

Services stated that one of the priorities for the sector is staff retention – given the nature of the work staff can feel overburdened, and this has led to staff retention issues. SNAICC Early Years Support has supported some services through funding their staff well-being days to prevent staff burn-out which has led to positive outcomes for the services. Services have noted the importance of retaining staff due to the skills shortage and inability to easily replace staff once they no longer work for the service.

Workforce retention is a priority for services as some foresee that demand for early years services will increase in future. Service staff have stated the importance of upskilling and training staff to meet this need. Services have also highlighted the impact of staff training to promote staff retention: *"I can see with future plans to do stuff on our PIP and more links to training that is funded would help us to be able to increase staff wages which would help us with recruitment and retention."* – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Services have also noted that there have been improvements in staff retention due to the support they received from SNAICC Early Years Support. As noted in Section 1.1.3, a key challenge that services face is isolation – they often work independently, focusing on the unique needs of their local communities with limited opportunities or vehicles for interaction with other services. This isolation has exacerbated the challenges faced by services, including difficulties around recruiting and retaining workforce. In this way, SNAICC Early Years Support has helped to mitigate some of the barriers that the previous sense of isolation had created.

"Retention of staff, due to the fact that they help my staff on the floor and off the floor...That alone, that's immense for us." – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Despite the support that SNAICC Early Years Support has offered, there are factors that are beyond the control of SNAICC Early Years Support which greatly influence staff retention, such as workforce shortages and wages in the ECEC sector. And although some services have stated their need for support in staff retention, this is not always a priority for all services. Some services would rather limit SNAICC Early Years Support's involvement in recruitment and staff retention, due to concern regarding losing staff moving from one ACCO service to another.

Staff retention can also be linked to leadership of the service. SNAICC Early Years Support staff noted that services that had strong and established leadership can manage their staff retention better than services that experience changes in leadership: *"I think six centres had a rollover in leadership, so they had a lot of disruption. And that is reflected in other staff churn, and quality challenges. A part of our strategy linked to workforce is supporting people to grow into roles."* – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

3.4 Back-office support

Considering the different priorities of early years services, one of the objectives for SNAICC Early Years Support is to assist services with administration, promotion, grant and funding applications as well as compliance and policy transition.

SNAICC Early Years Support has been beneficial for services by providing back-office support in addition to the on-the-ground support it already provides. One of these key features has been meeting compliance standards.

SNAICC Early Years Support supported services with auditing and compliance support, in addition to acquiring consultant support for compliance and ratings improvement. There have already been signs of progression in compliance standards through the changes in the NQS assessment ratings as discussed in detail in Section 3.2. Services have also felt comfortable to reach out to SNAICC Early Years Support if they need support meeting compliance requirements:

"If we came up with any compliance issues, I'm sure [SNAICC Early Years Support] would be able to help." -Vic Early Years Service Director.

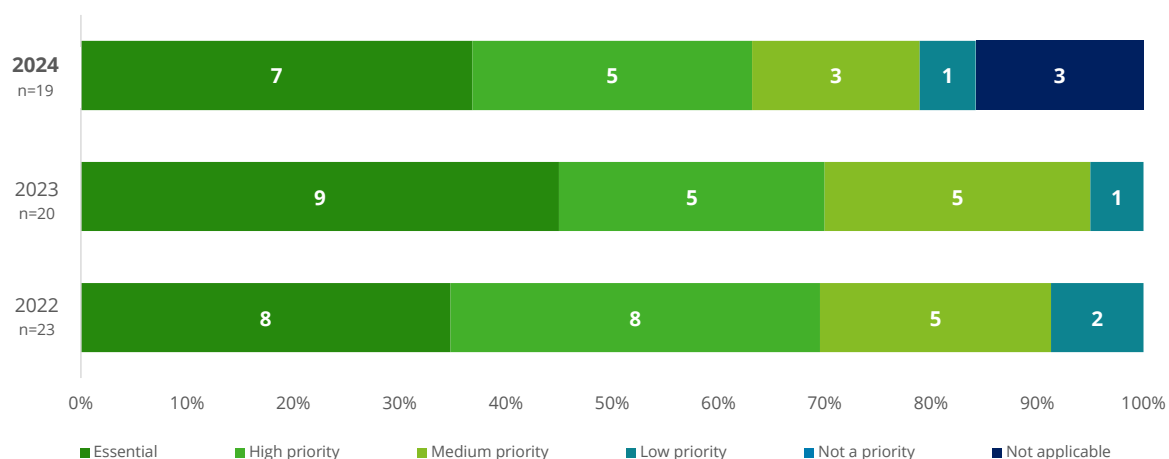
"SNAICC responds to leaders' frustrations and challenges in a confidential and supportive way. They help us with meeting compliance standards." – Vic Early Years Service Director.

As discussed in Section 3.2, SNAICC Early Years Support has helped services with the uplift in service quality by providing services with ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist that have contributed to service improvement in NQS ratings. From survey responses, there was only a small change in the number of services that strongly or significantly improved in service compliance between 2023 and 2024. In 2023, 6 out of 20 services felt that service compliance had been strongly or significantly improved – in 2024, this slightly increased to 7 out of 19 services.

SNAICC Early Years Support has helped early years services strengthen their funding base.

Across all three years of the evaluation period, over 60 per cent of survey respondents indicated that identifying and accessing funding opportunities was either essential or a high priority for their service (see Chart 3.6). As noted in Section 2.2.3.2, funding had the highest average percentage of respondents who rated the area as essential or high priority, over the three years. Therefore, it is important that respondents feel that SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to induce positive change in this aspect.

Chart 3.6: Number and proportion of survey respondents who have expressed the level of importance of identifying and accessing funding opportunities, 2022-2024



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

SNAICC Early Years support recognises the need to support services with identifying and accessing funding opportunities to enable services to provide better services for children and families. This has been accomplished by helping services strengthen their funding base and consolidate funding streams, contributing to greater levels of financial sustainability, more effective resource allocation within and across services and greater alignment between funding and need and supporting grant recipients in effective use of funding. Continuing to assist services with the maintenance of sustainable funding streams will be a vital component of SNAICC Early Years Support's future activities.

As a method to promote the sustainability of funding streams, Vic SNAICC Early Years Support has provided promotional filming for seven early years services. These promotional films allow services to use the films as a tool to promote the work they do in their service and advocate this work to potential funders. These films increase the visibility of these services and also aim to promote and advocate for the ACCO ECEC sector in Victoria.

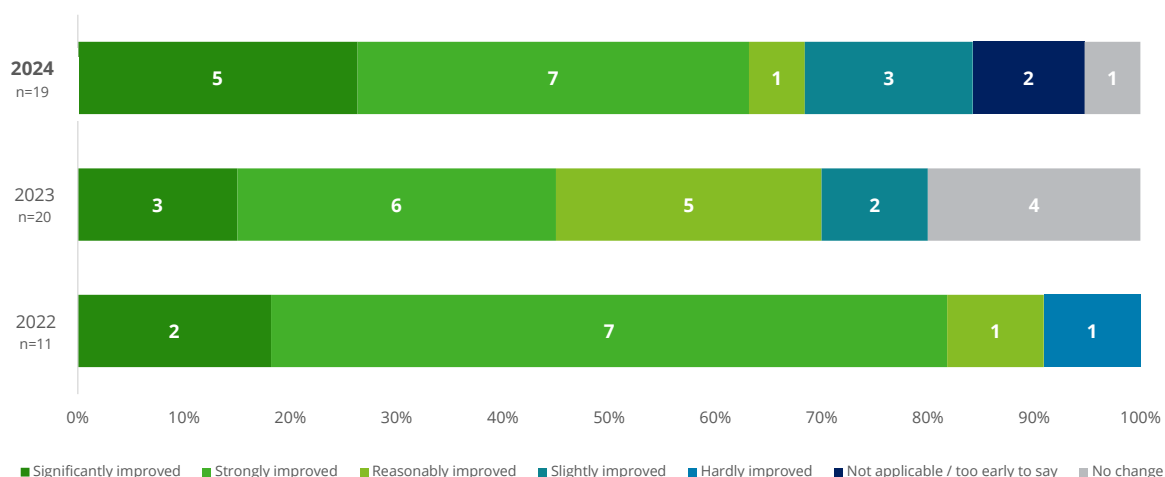
Activity documentation across jurisdictions provides detailed examples of how SNAICC Early Years Support has assisted services with funding matters. Several examples include:

- supporting an application for a service to attain \$250,000 in Closing the Gap funding and trialling of an innovative multi-disciplinary program of support for children and families.
- working with NSW government funders to consolidate funding streams, securing funding certainty, increased quantum and reducing administrative burden for services. One NSW service noted that SNAICC Early Years Support advocacy has been a catalyst for funding enhancements and new funding opportunities.
- supporting services in the preparation and submission of grant applications and funding. This includes assistance in reporting on deliverables, ensuring services meet their funding requirements and secures necessary resources for continued operation and development. Following SNAICC Early Years Support's assistance, two services successfully received Connected Beginning fundings, one service received Play Group Funding.
- supporting grant recipients in effectively using their funding. For example, SNAICC Early Years Support assisted Western Australian services that received Community Child Care Fund Restricted grants.
- supporting services who would like to expand to conduct feasibility studies, which helps these services to have more clarity and detail when pursuing funding opportunities.

"We were filling out and counting 14 grants. That was a full-time job itself. [It was for] all the little amounts... but now they helped us get a 10-year contract out of Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ). They worked with DCJ and managers and proved through data that what we did was worth \$4 million a year." – Early Years Service

One WA Early Years Service Director noted that they most valued *“The sharing of info, especially things like funding opportunities.”* SNAICC Early Years Support has iteratively implemented feedback and findings from the evaluation period. This can be seen in the 18 percentage point increase in services that have strongly or significantly improved in identifying and accessing funding opportunities between 2023 and 2024 (Chart 3.7).

Chart 3.7: Number and proportion of respondents who have felt identifying and accessing funding opportunities improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support



Source: Deloitte Access Economics, Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

SNAICC Early Years Support also recognises the need to invest in services to uplift service quality. SNAICC Early Years Support has provided funding to services for various reasons including to support culturally strong service delivery through the provision of flags and painted walls. One service was provided funding to install contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural artefacts to enhance authentic teaching opportunities with children and support leaders and educators to promote cultural safety. Some services have been provided with funding to enhance the outdoor learning areas for children and promote the safety of these areas with the aim of improving service delivery of outdoor learning programs for children.

One Service Director stated that upon receiving funding from SNAICC Early Years Support, that service was able to upgrade infrastructure: *“I don’t want to underestimate what they have done for us. We can buy more resources and we couldn’t do it without [SNAICC Early Years Support]”.*

Reducing the operational and administrative burden of service leaders, allows them to reinvest time and capacity into their service and community, enhancing service quality and delivery.

SNAICC Early Years Support has prioritised reducing the administrative burden for services over the course of the Program. While reducing administrative burden is an important element of its offering, survey respondents in 2024 did not rank it as high of a priority as in previous years. As noted in Section 2.2.3.2, this may reflect a natural evolution in the priorities of services as their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support has grown deeper over time. Nevertheless, it is still an area where SNAICC Early Years Support is able to assist, such as in processes related to funding applications, data collection, newsletters, and quality ratings.

Administrative burden can be a factor that impacts the quality of service delivery, with one Service Director stating *“It’s hard to do an awesome job and be on top of everything administratively”*. SNAICC Early Years Support has helped services with administrative tasks to position them to focus on quality service delivery:

“Admin is all I do sometimes...SNAICC are really good with [this]. They gave me a book of quality areas, they said once you finish send it to us and we can update your QIP. It takes a big burden off because I know I can do that book and my QIP will be updated.” – WA Early Years Service Director.

Although administrative tasks are necessary for the success of the services, SNAICC Early Years support has focused on alleviating the burden and streamlining processes for services so that they can focus on service delivery. One of the key administrative tasks for services is filling out grant applications.

As part of the initial design, it was expected that SNAICC Early Years Service would invest in the development of data systems to support the monitoring of impact (ultimately reducing services' administrative burden). However, the focus on this has reduced over time in response to concerns from services regarding data sovereignty and administrative complexity. Nonetheless, there is potential for SNAICC Early Years Support to play a larger role in data collection and management to support a continued understanding of impact (see Section 5).

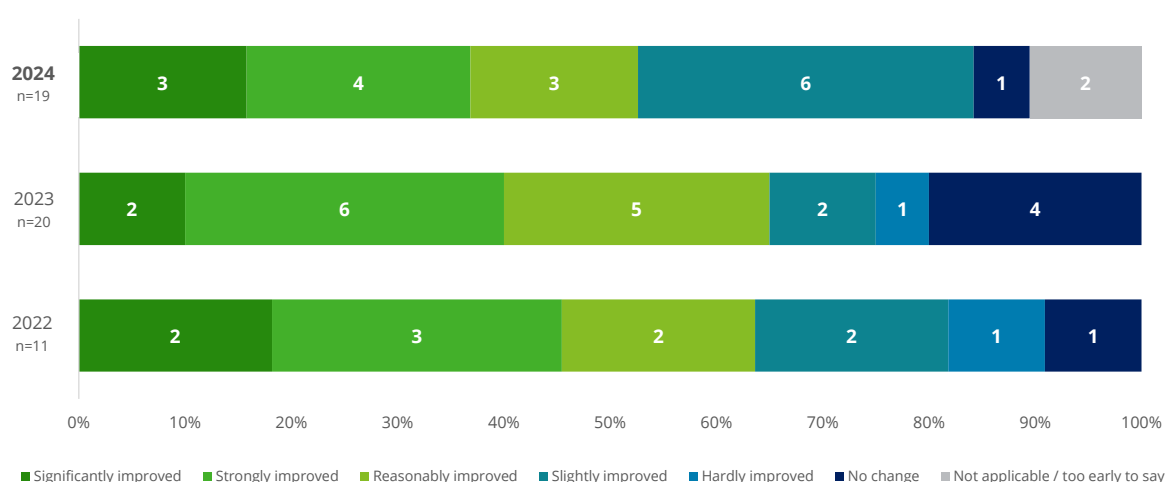
Understanding legislation and policy changes

Understanding legislation and policy changes and their implications was rated as the highest priority area in the 2024 Early Years Service Survey, with 79 per cent of respondents rating it as essential or high priority – making it the second-highest priority area by average rating over the three survey years. This reflects consistent percentage point increases year-on-year (56 per cent in 2022, then 65 per cent in 2023). This increase may indicate that services are deepening their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support and turning to them for higher-level forms of support – i.e. those related to legislation and policy.

To date, services and government alike valued the role SNAICC Early Years Support in supporting services to access, understand and implement policy changes in a service specific context: *"SNAICC always helps us with keeping up to date with the info about changes or shifts in policy."* – NSW Early Years Service Director. Over the years, there has been increased engagement in policy from service leaders: *"Better understanding among service leaders around policy. In those states with SNAICC Early Years Support, [services] understand the levers and the value in feeding that upwards...I see that when representatives from SNAICC Early Years Support bring forward views into rooms where we have policy discussions – it informs that policy work we're doing"* – SNAICC representative.

The proportion of survey respondents who felt that this area had seen significant or strong improvement was relatively consistent among all three survey years (see Chart 3.8 below). In 2024 there was a larger proportion than previous years where respondents felt that this area was only slightly improved, however this may reflect the frequency of opportunities where legislation or policy changes need to be understood. There was also a decrease in the number of respondents who felt there was no change, which may imply a positive shift towards at least slight impact.

Chart 3.8: Number and proportion of respondents who felt understanding legislative and policy changes had been improved because of SNAICC Early Years Support



Source: Deloitte Access Economics Early Years Service Survey, 2022-2024

Nevertheless, this area seeing consistent increases in priority ranking over the course of the Program suggests that it is an area where SNAICC Early Years Support should continue to focus on making an impact. As governments gain trust and familiarity with the SNAICC Early Years Support program, and the way the program supports connections to and evidence from the ACCO sector, it is clear the value the program holds for policy implementation. Collectively, the representative voice back to government, alongside the policy implementation support that SNAICC Early Years Support facilitates, both provide a platform for strengthening the basis upon which outcome-improving system change is delivered.

3.5 Service-level advocacy

SNAICC Early Years Support has facilitated a collective and representative understanding of ACCO voice to government, underpinning SNAICC's system-level advocacy efforts. This understanding benefits both services and governments and influences evidence-based policy making.

SNAICC Early Years Support plays a critical role in service-level advocacy by focusing on empowerment, self-determination, and amplifying the voices of early years services it supports and the broader ACCO sector. Through on-the-ground community connections and a deep understanding of service needs and priorities, SNAICC Early Years Support provides an avenue for collective service voice, enabling the ACCO sector to share their needs, experiences, and stories.

This service-level advocacy led by SNAICC Early Years Support differs from the system-level advocacy efforts of SNAICC's broader teams, which aim at influencing larger policy frameworks. However, critically, this collaboration allows SNAICC to channel insights from service-level experiences into its system-level efforts, ensuring service voices are effectively represented in broader advocacy initiatives. This leads to evidence-informed policy processes, ensuring that government policies are grounded in real experiences and consider the critical and unique needs of the ACCO sector.

An example of this facilitation through SNAICC Early Years Support is when early years service leaders, accompanied by SNAICC Early Years Support teams, travelled to Canberra to share their stories. A SNAICC stakeholder reflected on this experience: *"SNAICC opens the door but it's [the services] story. They are the ones who could tell their story and ultimately get that impact. They ordinarily wouldn't be able to do this without SNAICC Early Years Support."*

Additionally, a SNAICC representative highlighted the importance of meaningful and regular communication with early years services: *"In the monthly team meetings, we ask members if they have anything they want to raise and we relay that to the steering group. We discuss any 'big ticket' items [that] we would take to the tech advisory group and they can then advise us."* Early years services have also acknowledged the criticality of their voices being represented, with one Service Director noting: *"SNAICC for me is about advocacy, they have the big voice that we don't necessarily have."*

Moreover, beyond the service-level advocacy – which sees SNAICC Early Years Support facilitate direct communication between early years service leaders and staff, SNAICC more broadly, and government – SNAICC Early Years Support ensures that services are well-prepared and engaged in policy discussions. Services supported by SNAICC Early Years Support have been reported to have a better understanding of critical policy issues and are more willing to participate in key policy consultations or discussions.

"[There is] better understanding among service leaders around policy. In those states with SNAICC Early Years Support there is that capacity built in, they understand the levers and the value in feeding that upwards – that makes [advocacy] easier to do. They have more time, with SNAICC Early Years Support now – so it's capability, and time, where there's been a dramatic difference" – SNAICC staff

This increased engagement in policy discussions by early years services comes as a result of the trust and relationships that SNAICC Early Years Support has built over time. Initially, services reported being apprehensive of sharing some of the challenges they face. Over the evaluation period, as the relationship between SNAICC Early Years Support and services has strengthened and this trust has deepened, services have become more open to share critical issues facing them individually or the sector more broadly: *"The first six months was building trust and engaging network leaders as we could and from there service leaders developed an understanding of our services. Once they understood we didn't want anything in return and just wanted to provide advocacy, we got more buy in."* – SNAICC staff.

The service-level advocacy efforts of SNAICC Early Years Support saw the inclusion of a cultural safety training module for assessors working with ACECQA. Further detail is provided in Box 3.5.

Box 3.5: Service-level advocacy for the cultural safety training module

SNAICC Early Years Support facilitated a collective service voice in policy discussions with ACECQA relating to its assessment and rating processes – working with ACECQA on the implementation of a cultural training module for assessors.

The purpose of this module was to enhance confidence of ACCO early years services staff and ensure a cultural lens was appropriately considered and applied. An example of the experiences prior to the introduction of this training module was provided by SNAICC staff member, who noted that the review officers *“didn’t understand our services and what quality can look like in that space.”*

One SNAICC staff member noted that *“it’s small but it’s a big thing to negotiate”* as although it doesn’t change the process, in the long term it could lead to a more culturally responsive quality assessment process. This could lead to the foundations for services to engage more deeply and safely with continual improvement through the NQS framework, and the flow on benefits for children and benefits for families and communities.

“It’s much needed, a cultural lens. (Officers) didn’t understand our services and what quality can look like in that space... our services need to feel like they’re being listened to with the regulatory requirements. Everyone will feel much more confident” – SNAICC representative.

These mechanisms – collectively through SNAICC Early Years Support and SNAICC more broadly – work together to create better communication channels between services and policymakers – leading to improved service delivery that benefits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities. This also ensures that governments have better access to services and understanding of service needs, which leads to evidence-based policy making.

SNAICC Early Years Support collaborates with the broader SNAICC team as a mechanism to support service-level advocacy for the ACCO sector.

To adequately support the broader ACCO sector, SNAICC Early Years Support works with the broader SNAICC team to advocate for the necessary supports and needs for early years services. Over the evaluation period SNAICC Early Years Support has supported with:

- two submissions to NSW Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal
- advocacy support to services in their negotiations with NSW government regarding asset and infrastructure maintenance and leases obligations
- conversations with Ministers and departments at the ECEC Roundtable hosted by CommunitySkills WA to address the childcare workforce issues
- submissions to the ACCC Inquiry
- recommendations for the ACCO Funding program

More broadly, SNAICC has continued to participate in national policy conversations about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years workforces. This has included providing policy submissions on the draft National Care and Support Economy Strategy, Early Years Strategy and Productivity Commission Inquiry into Early Childhood Education and Care. In 2024, SNAICC obtained funding to assist with workplace eligibility tools for ACCOs. The system-level advocacy efforts championed by SNAICC are informed by the service-level advocacy of SNAICC Early Years Service, providing an increasingly evidence-based understanding of service needs and priorities.

Furthermore, SNAICC Early Years Support has also relied on service voice to inform recommendations for the ACCO Funding Reform suggestions which have been including in the Productivity Commission.¹⁷ More

¹⁷ SNAICC, *‘Funding program options for ACCO integrated early years services (2024),* < <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/240507-ACCO-Funding-Report.pdf>>

broadly, SNAICC has provided recommendations that would make the funding more accessible for ACCOs. Some of these inclusions are:

- the new funding program should provide long-term sustainability for service provision alongside the flexibility to adjust towards community needs.
- the funding program should include dedicated allocations for base funding entitlement and flexible funding
- the new funding program for ACCOs should explicitly and systematically include a provision for backbone support.

Although SNAICC Early Years Support supports service-level advocacy, one government stakeholder stated: *“the level of advocacy is not consistent across the states and services they provide for”*. This could present an opportunity for SNAICC Early Years Support to strengthen its collaboration with SNAICC to ensure this consistency and representation of a collective service voice.

The intersections between SNAICC Early Years Support and broader SNAICC teams in their advocacy roles has been acknowledged by a SNAICC staff member, who noted that SNAICC Early Years Support is still refining the intersection between SNAICC and SNAICC Early Years Support: *“We’re still figuring out how to interface state directors and the office of the CEO that runs advocacy but also the interface with policy division that does the work behind advocacy.”*

3.6 Sector strength and cohesion

SNAICC Early Years Support has fostered connections with other community-controlled services. This has strengthened community and shared practice in ways that contribute to a sense of shared purpose, continual improvement and sector sustainability.

By tailoring its support to each service, and ensuring this aligns closely with service need, SNAICC Early Years Support strengthens the entire ACCO sector. As part of this, one of SNAICC’s key objectives is to facilitate knowledge sharing, collaboration, and networking opportunities across the sector.

SNAICC Early Years Support’s role in sector strengthening and building of cohesion across the sector has grown in importance for services over the evaluation period. In 2022, only 17 per cent (four out of 23 of survey respondents) considered connecting to services and facilitating knowledge sharing as a critical priority for their service. However, in 2024, 47 per cent of respondents responded this way (nine out of 19 survey respondents).

SNAICC Early Years Support hosts various opportunities for services to build and make connections with other services such as network meetings, gatherings, conferences and state advisory committees. One example of this is through the monthly network meetings: *“We’ve made so many friendships with other ACCOS in Victoria. To hear what issues we might be facing, other places too. So, working together, knowing you’re not alone is fantastic.”* – Vic Early Years Service Director.

“I think we see [SNAICC Early Years Support] as a really important tool for sector strengthening.” – Government stakeholder.

“They’ve brought the sector together and had good engagement.” – Government stakeholder.

SNAICC Early Years Support also fosters connections between services through the annual jurisdictional Gatherings, early learning conferences and regular communication. Further detail on the attendance at leadership gatherings can be seen in Section 3.3. Beyond SNAICC facilitated events and conferences, SNAICC Early Years Support also helps early years services attend other events such as the Cairns Early Childhood Conference and the ECA Conference. These mechanisms enable services to network and share best practices, thereby enhancing their capabilities.

In 2024, 95 per cent of respondents acknowledged that there was an improvement in their connection to other services as well as facilitating knowledge sharing due to of SNAICC Early Years Support. It was the area seen as the most strongly improved in 2024, with 42 per cent of respondents indicating that it was significantly improved, and a further 21 per cent indicating it was strongly improved.

Jurisdictionally, Vic and WA increased in terms of proportion of services that had seen significant or strong improvement between 2023 and 2024. In 2023, Vic and WA had 33 per cent and 50 per cent, respectively,

which increased to 58 per cent and 67 per cent, respectively in 2024. NSW, however experienced a slight decrease with 83 per cent (2023) and 75 per cent (2024). This presents an opportunity for SNAICC Early Years Support to provide more opportunities to connect with other services in WA and Vic.

"...I like that at the gatherings we get a lot of info about the different things taking place. I enjoy that all the Aboriginal preschools can gather together." – NSW Early Years Service Director.

Over the evaluation period, services have noted the improvement in participation in the Gatherings: *"I have noticed an increased participation from services that historically did not attend the statewide Gatherings. At the last conference, SNAICC brought 14 services together at the Gathering."* – Vic Early Years Service Director.

Educators have benefitted from attendance at the gatherings as it has been a method to keep educators inspired: *"To know there is support there to keep growing and being able to attend conferences where they can do that. It's a trickle effect. SNAICC supports us to support them."* – Vic Early Years Service Educator.

As a result of attendance at the Gatherings, one service in WA has looked into creating their own gatherings with other similar services, as a way to share things that are relevant to those services and how to embed strategies. Although many services expressed that they benefitted from the attendance at conferences, one service in NSW expressed their lack of attendance at conferences due to low staff members. This has limited their opportunity to better learn and understand the SNAICC Early Years Support offerings.

3.7 Growing the sector

SNAICC Early Years Support aims to help grow the ACCO sector by helping to identify opportunities, and support service establishment. In the early stages of the program, identifying new sites and expanding ACCO delivery was a more significant focus area. This specific element did not occur to the extent initially anticipated, primarily due to the broader policy conditions, and focus being placed on other priorities for services.

Nevertheless, organic growth has occurred for SNAICC Early Years Support, wherein the number of supported services has expanded over the course of the three years - the Sector Strengthening Partnership in NSW is a key example of this, which added 26 new services (explored below). SNAICC Early Years Support is also well positioned to support ACCO transitions when they arise. This is in addition to possible opportunities for expansion into new jurisdictions.

"On top of that quality and capability building work, it's leadership development, workforce development – the other big pieces are in the advocacy space and expansion space. Expansion could be brand new services. NSW have a few from partnerships with state government. But also, working with existing services, ACCOs, kinders, to expand their service offering. It could also be working with organisations that used to be ACCOs, that want to transition back to being ACCOs. We'd also be super keen to work with councils and DoE to look at government-owned and council-run schools, especially in remote communities" – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff.

The Sector Strengthening Partnership bolstered growth in NSW, with several services across NSW and Victoria also supported to grow the ACCO sector.

State governments increasingly recognise the need and role they play in supporting ACCOs to deliver stronger outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The NSW Department of Education's *First Steps – Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021- 2025* aims to improve the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in the ECEC sector. This includes funding to support the sustainability and expansion of ACCOs with SNAICC Early Years Support appointed as the Sector Strengthening Partner in 2023 which is discussed in detail in Section 2.5.¹⁸ This has led to 26 new ACCOs in NSW in 2023.

Through a partnership with NSW Department of Communities and Justice, SNAICC Early Years Support has also contributed to the expansion of 10 new ACFC services. Furthermore, SNAICC Early Years Support is

¹⁸ Department of Education New South Wales, *First Steps – the NSW Aboriginal Children's Early Childhood Education Strategy 2021-2025* (2021), < <https://education.nsw.gov.au/early-childhood-education/operating-an-early-childhood-education-service/current-service-providers/making-services-accessible-for-all-children/aboriginal-access/strategy#First2>>

partnering with NSW DoE to support the expansion of MAC centres (yet to be confirmed). SNAICC Early Years Support has also supported the transition of one service in NSW into an ACCO.

In Victoria, two new services have been supported with SNAICC Early Years Support.

There is evidence of demand in other jurisdictions for a program like SNAICC Early Years Support to exist. It has been noted through consultations that governments in Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory have displayed an interest in SNAICC Early Years Support across these jurisdictions. In South Australia specifically, SNAICC Early Years Support has been working with South Australia's Office of Early Childhood and providing policy advice through the current reforms. As a result of these efforts, there will be at least one new ACCO early years service established.

SNAICC stakeholders have noted that services in these jurisdictions have expressed demand for such supports after observing the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support in existing jurisdictions. However, not all states and territories currently have a strong ACCO sector – SNAICC Early Years Support could be used to spearhead and support the sector's growth and strengthening.

"No other organisation has that culturally responsive lens and way of working. Other jurisdictions are saying that they need that support...the [SNAICC Early Years Support] program – that's what's required for this work" – SNAICC staff.

SNAICC Early Years Support is in the process of undertaking several other projects to support longer term expansion aspirations

SNAICC Early Years Support has conducted an ACCO EY National Operator Feasibility Study that identifies the risks and challenges associated with expansion. Through this study, SNAICC Early Years Support has identified a model that can act as a national operator and can support communities to establish new services whilst ensuring it continues to support existing services. To further support the growth of the sector, SNAICC Early Years Support is developing an ACCO Growth Tool and Road Map. SNAICC Early Years Support has combined several other pieces of work into one tool that service leaders can use. This tool can be used for national need data analysis, a process map for growth as well as a financial tool. SNAICC Early Years Support intends to pilot the tools with the NSW ACFC new builds as well as the CCCFR sites.

3.8 Unintended impacts

The above section outlines the impacts observed of SNAICC Early Years Support in line with original intentions and as specified within the program logic. There have been several additional impacts observed beyond those specified at the pilot's outset – which are detailed below.

SNAICC Early Years Support has shifted the landscape of early years service support within the sector, requiring careful navigation of relationships with other providers to ensure services are complementary and do not displace existing strong relationships.

While SNAICC Early Years Support was established as a transformational shift in the nature and scale of supports available for ACCO early years services, prior to its establishment other peak bodies, government departments and service providers were working closely with ACCOs in various ways. It has been important for SNAICC Early Years Support, and a key feature of the co-design process, to work to leverage and complement these relationships rather than displace.

There is evidence of SNAICC Early Years Support working collaboratively with a number of peak bodies and service providers to collectively lift outcomes for the sector. However, there were also instances observed where services or peak bodies shared that the introduction of SNAICC Early Years Support had challenged their ways of working and risked duplication. In this, alternative providers of early years service support reflected that the national coverage and scale of SNAICC Early Years Support was a differentiating factor, but that diversity and choice for services was important to retain.

Despite operating in three jurisdictions, there are positive flow-on effects felt nationally and in other states and territories, due to service-level advocacy and shared resources.

SNAICC Early Years Support has led to positive flow-on benefits for other jurisdictions, where it is not currently operational. At one level, this occurs through the benefits of the service-level advocacy championed by SNAICC Early Years support, and the impact this has on the ACCO sector through improved policies and practices (such as the work undertaken with ACECQA to improve cultural responsiveness in quality ratings).

A SNAICC staff member reflected: *"I think that NSW stands out... heard multiple people talk about how valuable the service is and how they get feedback from across the sectors as to how valued it is and the contribution it makes and we've had conversations with South Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland governments about that expansion...it's clear they see the value."*

More directly, the knowledge and practice sharing facilitated by SNAICC Early Years Support supports an increasingly strong and accessible resource and evidence base to support ACCO services, and states and territories not formally participating in the pilot have benefited from this. The national gathering had representation from states and territories not currently participating in the SNAICC Early Years Support pilot, and SNAICC Early Years Support shared in consultation that there have been various discussions with non-participating states regarding how they can best leverage the knowledge and resources held.

Importantly, as ACCO service delivery is leading in holistic, integrated and culturally responsive care for children and families, there are significant spill over benefits to the mainstream early childhood sector in this shared knowledge and resource base.

SNAICC Early Years Support has provided further employment opportunities and pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, educators and early years staff.

As a significant employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, educators and early years professionals, SNAICC Early Years Support has provided alternative options and pathways for the sector. As highlighted throughout the evaluation, the importance of the finding highly relational, culturally responsive and capable early years advisors has been key to the program's early success.

In the context of significant workforce shortages across the sector, this has had mixed short term implications. A small number of services spoke to the risks associated with SNAICC Early Years Support shifting high quality people out of direct service delivery and into service supports. Alternatively, others welcomed the introduction of further pathways for early years professionals in the sector. As detailed in Section 3.3, the work of SNAICC Early Years Support ultimately seeks to strengthen the sustainability of the ACCO service workforce, so these issues are expected to dissipate overtime.

4 Conditions for ongoing impact

This section explores the conditions for ongoing impact of SNAICC Early Years Support and its cost-effectiveness.

Overview	
Evaluation domain	Key findings
Sustainability	<p>The evaluation has identified several design features that have been central to the ways in which SNAICC Early Years Support has developed into a trusted intermediary within the ACCO early years sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keeping the needs and voices of ACCOs early years services at the heart of SNAICC Early Years Support • high quality working relationships (and trust) with early years services as the primary avenue through which SNAICC Early Years Support can influence change • a delivery program that is built on the principles of cultural governance, respect and responsiveness • listening, adapting and being responsive to feedback collected from services, and through evaluation findings.
Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The context in which a participating service operates can influence the impact that SNAICC Early Years Support will have. This includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Geographical context: Services in more regional and remote areas required additional travel distance – acting as a barrier to support. – Level of establishment: Given the program is more reactive to the acute needs of the service, it can lead to more impact being focused on newer services who have more acute needs, compared to a reduced impact at more established services that require less support. – Workforce constraints: Services may not have the capacity to engage with SNAICC Early Years Support, and SNAICC Early Years Support does not have the capacity to support services. • As SNAICC Early Years Support has matured, engagement approaches have grown in sophistication to mitigate the risk that service or leader context influences the quality and extent of engagement.
Cost-effectiveness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The unique program that SNAICC Early Years Support presents - the deep network of relationships and the specialist cultural leadership and expertise - leaves few alternatives for achieving the outcomes SNAICC Early Years Support is on track to deliver. • Considerations of cost effectiveness are most usefully centred in efficiency optimisation, and the ways in which the program can grow in value and efficiency over time. • To achieve efficient operation it is important to recognise high value investments and to ensure resources are allocated efficiently.

The findings from the implementation and impact chapters provide insights into the elements of the SNAICC Early Years Support Program that are most closely linked to its overall impact. This helps inform future operations and potential refinements to or scaling of the program. As part of this, an important consideration is the cost-effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support.

4.1 Key features of SNAICC Early Years Support

4.1.1 Design features

In considering the early successes of the program, the evaluation has found several design features that have been central to the ways in which SNAICC Early Years Support has developed into a trusted intermediary within the ACCO early years sector over the pilot phase. These include:

- a recognition that **high quality working relationships (and trust) with early years services** are the primary avenue through which SNAICC Early Years Support can influence change.
 - The capability and skills of site advisors, time spent with services, and the responsiveness of the SNAICC Early Years Support team have all been key investments in the early years of implementation.
 - As trust deepens, the opportunities for SNAICC Early Years Support to extend into more transformational relationships with services does too, with increased license to support services in areas they may not have identified themselves as a need.
 - *“...there's an important piece around trust, the openness [of ACCO services] to share and connect with outside services. We've noticed that [the services] are more reserved and because of that we see we've had to build that trust”* - SNAICC Early Years Support staff.
- a relentless focus on keeping the **needs and voices of ACCOs early years services** at the heart of SNAICC Early Years Support.
 - With a broad remit and a diverse range of opportunities and competing priorities, the ability to form trusted relationships with services (as above) has been facilitated through a commitment to centring all activities and decisions within service need and priorities (above and beyond that of governments, SNAICC or other stakeholders). The program of service delivery has stayed true to the intention of being ‘a service for services, designed by services’, in governance and in practice.
 - It is noted that the State Advisory Committees have perhaps not been the primary forum for ensuring service decision-making power in the SNAICC Early Years Support governance, but strong service feedback loops have ensured service voice is an active contributor to strategic priority setting.
 - The program has proven to be flexible and responsive to the unique and varied priorities and needs across the range of participating services. The model of support is centred on building the capacity and sustainability of service leadership, as a direct enabler of ACCO service effectiveness and sustainability, and worked to develop a model that is inclusive of, and provides value for, leaders and services from all contexts.
- a delivery program that is built on the **principles of cultural governance, respect and responsiveness**.
 - As a support designed to create a truly self-determining and First Nations led early years body that works beyond the constraints of the mainstream system, the importance of the strong cultural foundations of SNAICC Early Years Support are not to be understated and are key to its effectiveness.
 - The opportunities provided by SNAICC Early Years Support for practice and knowledge sharing, community building and advocacy all work to continue to build the strength of culturally strong early years services, and a sense of community and shared purpose and value across the ACCO sector.
- **listening, adapting and being responsive to feedback** collected from services, and through evaluation findings.
 - Actively listening, adapting and responding to feedback collected both from early years services but also through evaluation findings are critical in ensuring that the support provided continues to be aligned with service needs and priorities.

4.1.2 Supporting conditions

Beyond the design and delivery of the program itself, the ability for SNAICC Early Years Support to continue to generate impact in line with what this evaluation has observed it is on track to do, is dependent on a number of supporting policy conditions being in place.

The design features outlined in the Section above, and key drivers of the early success observed in the program, stem from the procurement and funding arrangements that supported the program's establishment and development. In consultation, NIAA shared that the procurement for the program differed significantly from historical and mainstream arrangements in the flexibility, outcomes (rather than activity) focus and autonomy provided to SNAICC EYS for design and development. This was deliberate in its intention to provide for a self-determining and truly First Nations led approach, while retaining the critical elements of transparency and accountability for outcomes.

This evaluation has underscored the benefits of this approach, and the early successes observed in the ability for SNAICC Early Years Support to build an effective intermediary in a short space of time. A lack of funding and policy uncertainty in the latter months of the program has been observed to negatively impact the ability of SNAICC Early Years Support to invest in the staff and capabilities and plan effectively for the longer term. This works against the ambition of government to support a self-determining program, and risks undermining the value gained in the innovative approach to procurement which supported the program.

The policy foundations that need to be established to support SNAICC Early Years Support's ongoing success as it moves from its pilot phase are:

- **A clear policy framework and long-term vision** for SNAICC Early Years Support in the ACCO early years system. This includes a clear policy framework and long-term vision for the role of an intermediary in supporting ACCOs in lifting child and family outcomes.
- **Funding certainty** to enable strategic resource allocation and planning, ensuring that resources are allocated to address the specific needs of ACCOs and the communities they serve. This would include the development of a resourcing model to link expected outcomes to investment.
- **Effective governance arrangements** to facilitate collaboration, decision-making, and accountability within the ACCO early years system. This includes establishing clear lines of authority, defining roles and responsibilities, and promoting transparent communication and decision-making processes.

It is worth noting that if SNAICC Early Years Support was ceased or reduced, while some impacts generated over the program period would continue, especially where capabilities in services and leaders have been built, reducing the current support ACCOs receive risks these benefits being quickly lost – or overcome by the issues which rendered the original need for SNAICC Early Years Support.

4.2 Equitable impact across different contexts

Given the highly tailored and place-based service delivery models employed across the ACCO sector to respond to community need, the evaluation has been concerned from the outset in understanding how the effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support differs for individual services and jurisdictions in alignment with context. This is the lens through which equity is viewed and is explored in the sections below.

Over time as the SNAICC Early Years Support model has matured, and as service needs and engagement barriers have become increasingly understood, the diversity and sophistication of engagement approaches has grown. This has included a greater number of ways for services to engage (i.e., through gatherings, tablets, communities of practices) and the development of services that are increasingly tailored to service maturity and context.

4.2.1 Geographical context

An important aspect of the support that SNAICC Early Years Support aims to offer is centred in time spent with services face to face, building relationships and establishing a deep understanding of service needs. In this, remoteness and time investment required to form relationships with harder to access services has been observed to play a role in the quality of engagement and holds implications for the ways in which SNAICC Early Years Support is resourced.

Observations to this effect were noted across the evaluation in all jurisdictions but have been most pronounced and persistent in WA (see the service reflections below). It was raised in previous evaluation reports that, particularly in WA, where travel to remote areas requires significant investment, a future resourcing model might support local areas to be more adequately serviced.

"SNAICC is starting to develop a footprint in WA. There's still a lot of work to do, particularly around awareness of what we do...[because] it's such a geographical distance. I worry about spreading yourself too thin. In saying that, I think we worked hard on relationships" – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff

"In WA, [the challenge] is the distance that they have to cover...a lot more travel is involved" – SNAICC Early Years Support Staff.

This was also reflected by services, with one service reflecting that the vast nature of WA affects the level of support required and emphasised the need to increase the supports currently provided throughout the State: *"one of the things that [the team] have really looked at and fed up nationally is how big WA is and how we've identified another 10 areas with a high number of Indigenous families. To me, I wish [SNAICC Early Years Support] was everywhere in WA, because of how big WA is. Understanding the complexity of geographic consideration. [The team have] raised that they can travel and they can support everybody, but it's not easy."*

It was also observed from feedback received at the gatherings and consultations, that some WA services find that the SNAICC Early Years Support program is more targeted towards Eastern states: *"[The] program [is] best suited for Eastern states. How can we best suit WA that has more playgroups?" – Gathering attendee.*

"We do like when the conferences are here in the Kimberley because we're different and [those differences] relevant." – WA Early Years Service Director.

Responsiveness to this element of WA's specific context has been noted as a priority for 2025. SNAICC Early Years Support WA is aiming to support playgroup expansion, as part of how its delivery in the state has been shaped to meet the needs of these ACCO playgroups.

4.2.2 Service maturity and nature of need

SNAICC Early Years Support has been designed to be responsive to service needs and provide the tailored necessary supports for each service. Given the program is more reactive to the acute needs of the service, it can lead to more impact being focused on newer services who have more immediate needs, compared to a less observed impact at more established services that require less support. This varying level of impact across established services has continued to be observed over the evaluation, and has also been noted in some consultations in 2024.

"They were most helpful last year getting set up, but now that we have our own policies, we don't really need that help, it's just confusing. Now what would be more helpful is for them to come in with staffing help" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

"We are fortunate in that we're a fairly self-sufficient service and haven't needed help...[but] if there was something I needed support for, I'd just ring [SNAICC Early Years Support]" – NSW Early Years Service Director.

However, SNAICC Early Years Support has placed emphasis on balancing responsiveness and high-level decision-making, in order to provide more equitable support. Improvement in this respect is acknowledged in Section 2.2.4, and future considerations are explored in Section 5. Importantly, SNAICC Early Years Support has found ways to engage more mature services in different ways (through practice sharing, and service-level advocacy and policy discussion) and is increasingly investing in more strategic (rather than responsive) service delivery for these services.

It is also important to note that, in the first two years of the evaluation, it was observed that services in high need – but without a trusted relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support, were less likely to engage in an effective way, lacking the capacity or will to introduce another element into their working environment. As time has progressed, for the vast majority of services, SNAICC Early Years Support has been able to find effective ways to progress relationship building. Once the relationship and trust is established to a sufficient level, services have tended to be more willing to engage in times of need.

As relationships between SNAICC Early Years Support and services continue to deepen, SNAICC Early Years Support has also observed that services have become increasingly trusting and open of external support and guidance, allowing for support in areas where services may not self-identify a need. This, paired with sector wide knowledge and practice sharing, provides scope for SNAICC Early Years Support to facilitate links to evidence-based quality uplift programs and processes along a spectrum of service maturity.

4.2.3 Workforce demands, experience and capacity

As noted in Section 2.3.3, workforce shortages have influenced the nature of engagement for services over the pilot period. This relates to both challenges in staffing SNAICC Early Years Support, and also the capacity of services to engage in the pilot due to internal service workforce burden. One Service Director, who was also part of the State Advisory Committee, noted the impact of the workforce limitations: *"the goodwill is there, but the working environment at the moment prevents people from being at the table."*

In 2023, within the SNAICC Early Years Support team, one member of staff reflected their concern on delivering impact because of workforce limitations: *"[I'm] worried we don't have the manpower to deliver the service at full tilt... we could be doing so much more, but we don't have the staff to be able to do that"*. This also noted by an Early Years Service Director, who acknowledged the contributions that SNAICC Early Years Support had made despite staffing shortages: *"It's not staffed fully. [But] they've accomplished a lot for the services so far. They've spent a lot of time coming to services."*

While SNAICC Early Years Support is now fully staffed and operational, the impact of the workforce challenges throughout the pilot are important for considering impact and where relationships are more established than others. The importance of finding the 'right people' to deliver on the relational and culturally strong model of SNAICC Early Years Support has been continually reinforced by the delivery team. Retention and continuity of relationships, and how to support this for services, is discussed further in Sections 5.1.2 and 5.1.3.

4.3 Cost-effectiveness

Cost-effectiveness, in the context of this evaluation and as established in the evaluation framework, refers to the extent SNAICC Early Years Support represents a value for money offering, and what effective investment looks like for SNAICC Early Years Support. Cost-effectiveness is assessed as it relates to: the SNAICC Early Years Support Budget, the effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support, similar initiatives, and the extent to which operational efficiencies are being realised.

Given SNAICC Early Years Support has only relatively recently (less than two years) become fully operational across all its jurisdictions, it is important to note that the analysis presented here is preliminary in nature. Evidence is still emerging, and there are difficulties in this early phase of implementation in distilling which costs were related to establishment, service design and relationship building, and which would be expected to continue as part of ongoing service delivery.

4.3.1 SNAICC Early Years Support Budget

The SNAICC Early Years Support budget is comprised of funding from NIAA, philanthropic funding as well as State government funding. SNAICC Early Years Support has remained in a surplus over the past periods, due to the time taken to become fully staffed and operational. However, it is expected the budget will shift in the Jul-Dec 2024 period into a deficit of \$400,000. Table 4.1 shows the SNAICC Early Years Support budget between 2022 to 2024.

Table 4.1 SNAICC Early Years Support budget forecasts.

	2022-23 forecast (AUD '000s)	2023-24 forecast (AUD '000s)	Jul – Dec 2024 forecast (AUD '000s)
Total funding	\$8,933	\$7,768	\$2,662
Expenditure			

National intermediary	\$2,070	\$2,929	\$1,464
NSW intermediary	\$1,527	\$1,028	\$514
WA intermediary	\$1,180	\$1,128	\$564
VIC intermediary	\$1,242	\$1,050	\$525
Total expenditure	\$6,019	\$6,135	\$3,067
Net surplus/deficit	\$2,915	\$1,634	\$(400)

Source: Deloitte Access Economics, using SNAICC Early Years Support Budget data.

4.3.2 The cost effectiveness of SNAICC Early Years Support

While the above budget demonstrates the annual expenditure of SNAICC Early Years Support, to understand how this translates into cost-effectiveness, expenditure needs to be linked with activities, outputs, outcomes and value.

The establishment of SNAICC Early Years Support was driven by the unique and substantial operational challenges that ACCO providers face, which are considerably greater than those encountered by mainstream early years services. This need, and the understanding (as evidenced through this evaluation) that through increased ACCO capacity, capability, reach and sustainability – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities stand to significantly benefit, remains unchanged. Further, the evaluation has identified additional value in the learnings the mainstream early years sector can take from ACCO delivery in providing holistic and culturally responsive services, learnings which are shared and made increasingly accessible through SNAICC Early Years Support.

The evaluation determined that SNAICC Early Years Support has been effective in supporting ACCO services to deliver high quality, responsive, accessible and culturally strong supports. Further detail on the effectiveness of supports is shown in Section 3, and the need for SNAICC Early Years Support in Section 1.1.

To fully appraise the value of SNAICC Early Years Support brings, the counterfactual needs to be considered – what outcomes would be observed if SNAICC Early Years Support did not exist? The varied, culturally responsive, and tailored nature of supports offered by SNAICC Early Years Support makes a comparison against other programs quite complex and challenging. Additionally, the unique skillsets and capabilities held by SNAICC Early Years Support teams and staff, including cultural legitimacy and responsiveness, limits the potential that alternative providers could deliver similar services, at scale, with the same effectiveness.

In consultations, the majority of services noted that SNAICC Early Years Support was the only initiative they were aware of that offered them support of the nature that SNAICC Early Years Support Strives to. While a number of similar supports have been and are provided by local peak bodies in some jurisdictions, the scale and national nature of SNAICC Early Years Support provides a highly differentiated offering.

"I don't think there's anything else we could reach out to, there is nobody else, it would likely be the department of education." - NSW Early Years Service Director.

"I think that it is one-of-a-kind. I have never seen this level of support before (in 30 years). I don't think that anyone would be able to duplicate the work that SNAICC Early Support team provide. They have the relationship with services, nationally as well. Why reinvent something that works so well?" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

"I have never really experienced a support service like this. You are never going to say no to resources are you. Just having things available to you in a strength based non-judgemental way....To be honest there isn't anything else)" – Vic Early Years Service Director.

Two Vic services noted they were aware of other supports – but noted they were not as available or as aligned to their needs as SNAICC Early Years Support.

“There are other services that specialise in ACCO early years but they are nothing like SNAICC. SNAICC is constantly available for us and is always supporting us.” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

“There is an ACCO alternative, but it is nothing compared to SNAICC. They do not specialise it to the different type of services, like we do not have kinder we just have long day care and so we would not fit in for this.” – Vic Early Years Service Director.

It is worth noting that NIAA, in consultation, emphasised that the level of investment associated with the pilot, and the flexibility with how this funding could be invested (with corresponding transparency) was understood as a critical enabler of supporting a self-determining pilot to explore, take the time required to collaboratively design and establish new ways of working and doing. As such, the ability for the evaluation to acquit dollars invested against pre-determined activities is more challenging - and indeed less appropriate - as these activities were defined in broad and flexible strokes. Instead, value for money is more appropriately considered through an outcomes lens and going forward - as impact can be more confidently measured and attributed to SNAICC Early Years Support - a social return on investment analysis may provide further insights.

4.3.3 Operating efficiencies

The unique program that SNAICC Early Years Support presents - the deep network of relationships and the specialist cultural leadership and expertise - leaves few alternatives for achieving the outcomes SNAICC Early Years Support is on track to deliver. As such, considerations of cost effectiveness are most usefully centred in efficiency optimisation, and the ways in which the program can grow in value and efficiency over time.

To achieve efficiency in its operations, it is important:

- **To recognise highest value investments:** It is crucial to identify and prioritise investments that will bring the highest value to services. To ensure that our resources are allocated to supports that have the greatest impact- currently, this is focused on building service leadership. This includes considering factors such as the alignment with service needs, the link to long-term benefits (e.g., children and family outcomes), and the overall resource requirements for each investment.
- **To ensure resources are allocated efficiently:** To achieve cost effectiveness, it is essential to allocate our resources efficiently. This involves making informed decisions about how resources are distributed and utilised across different jurisdiction and supports. There is a need to closely monitor and manage resources, to identify any inefficiencies or areas where resources may be underutilised or misallocated. This allows for necessary adjustments and reallocate resources to areas that require greater support or have a higher potential for generating value.

It is worth noting that the SNAICC Early Years Support program is still evolving - and movement into new areas of service delivery, or new geographies, will also influence the total cost of delivery. To the extent any expansions are based on a clear premise of need and the potential for outcomes, continued expansion offers the potential for increased cost effectiveness through economies of scale.

A number of future considerations are presented in Section 5 that may help continue to refine SNAICC Early Years Support to optimise operating efficiency.

5 Future considerations

As highlighted throughout this evaluation report, emerging indications of impact suggest that SNAICC Early Years Support is progressing toward – and in some cases, already delivering – outcomes in accordance with service need and the theory of change (see Figure ii). This has been observed with improvements in service quality and sector sustainability (as detailed in Chapter 3), which flow directly through to benefits for children, families and communities.

This Section highlights future considerations, informed by evaluation evidence, regarding how SNAICC Early Years Support underpin and may further extend its impact going forward, particularly as the program transitions from its pilot phase. These considerations are centred in potential areas of refinement or extension within the current SNAICC Early Years Support model to position it for continued success in the future. Broader policy considerations are discussed in Section 4.1.2.

5.1 Positioning SNAICC Early Years Support for success

The evaluation is intended to play a critical role in supporting evidence-based refinements to SNAICC Early Years Support (Section 1.3). This third and final evaluation report highlights a range of areas for SNAICC to consider as its operations evolve and potential expansion into new jurisdictions is considered.

Through the evidence gathered in the evaluation, the following focus areas have been identified to position SNAICC Early Years Support for success in the longer term:

- Strengthening communication and articulation of SNAICC Early Years Support's offering to services
- Specialisation of the national team, in combination with continued local presence
- Reducing personnel risk as it relates to individual relationships with services
- Ensuring governance structures are enabled and appropriately used
- Strengthening consistency (where appropriate) and equity in access
- Improving intentional collaboration and connection between SNAICC Early Years Support and government, peaks or coalitions
- Opportunities to upskill mainstream services
- Improving collection and management of quantitative data
- Monitoring the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support over time
- Consideration of expansion to other jurisdictions.

The future considerations discussed in this Section seek to build on the key features of the program established in Section 4.1.1. These considerations are assumed to be in the addition to continuation of investment in these central design components.

5.1.1 Communication and articulation of SNAICC Early Years Support's offering to services

While there is a high level of understanding of SNAICC Early Years support within service directors, this understanding is lower for stakeholders that engage less directly (including service educators and sector stakeholders – such as governments, peak bodies and complementary services), as is noted in Section 2.4.1.

While service leadership have been the primary focus to date, at this phase of maturity – there is an opportunity for SNAICC Early Years Support to communicate a clear, consistent, and comprehensive set of information that outlines what the Early Years Support teams can offer or what support participating services are welcome to ask for. The information could be developed by and distributed to each jurisdiction, and provide a long list of examples and themes of activity to increase understanding, while making clear that flexibility and adaptability is part of the offering.

Actions have begun to be taken in this respect – for example, a 'menu' of services that outlines the support that early years services can receive was distributed in NSW, and later in 2024 distributed across other jurisdictions. Continuing to communicate offerings to services will further make clear the role that SNAICC Early Years Support has played, and can play in future, and ensure stakeholders and services are engaging where opportunities arise.

5.1.2 Specialisation of the national team, in combination with local presence

The development of relationships with services is time-intensive – requiring on-the-ground interaction with services to understand their needs, and to offer support at any point in time. As relationships become more established, and the nature of support provided by SNAICC Early Years Support becomes increasingly targeted and strategic, there is a challenge in balancing the importance of the personal relationships between services and SNAICC Early Years Support and the expertise required to deliver specific supports.

In this context, there is an opportunity to provide more specialised resources, as appropriate, through roles within SNAICC Early Years Support that are focused on particular areas of expertise. It is suggested that these roles sit nationally, allowing for the expertise to be delivered on a needs basis and utilising efficiencies associated with the scale of national delivery. This would seek to complement the jurisdictionally based teams who hold the greater focus on service relationships (see 5.1.3 for further detail).

Examples of national roles and resources could include a national “resource bank”, communications and events (already invested in), workforce support, compliance support, human resource support or financial support. Further, there is an opportunity for the development and distribution of national pre-recorded sessions and online resources for early years services to access in their own time – increasing the reach and accessibility of expertise and resources that have been developed.

5.1.3 Reducing personnel risk as it relates to individual relationships with services

Critical to the success of SNAICC Early Years support is the strength of relationship with services. Services often associate their relationship with SNAICC Early Years Support with specific individuals, rather than the organisation itself. This level of personnel risk should be considered moving forward.

Currently, the SNAICC Early Years Support team invests in their people as a deliberate strategy to support retention. Additionally, SNAICC Early Years Support has demonstrated the ability to maintain and build relationship with services who are experiencing turnover. However, there is an opportunity to further mitigate future personnel risks associated through increased focus on:

- **Documentation:** maintain comprehensive documentation of the needs of the service, the supports provided to service, and future priorities areas.
- **Collaboration:** sharing the relationship with the service across multiple team members (through, collaboration and the specialisation of national team (discussed above).
- **Relationships between services:** the Gatherings and establishment of communities of practices have enabled the development of relationships across and between services – potentially, lessening personnel risk.
- **Improved understanding:** As SNAICC Early Years Support becomes established, the expectations and understanding of what to expect from SNAICC Early Years Support (as an organisation, rather than an individual) will lessen personnel risk.

5.1.4 Ensuring governance structures are appropriate and utilised effectively

In general, the governance structure of SNAICC Early Years Support has been perceived by SNAICC Early Years Support staff and services to have worked well. However, there are some elements of the governance structure that could be strengthened. Particularly, there is a degree of uncertainty around the role and purpose of the State Advisory Committees and the Technical Advisory Group. This is discussed further in Section 2.3.1.

There is an opportunity to ensure the State Advisory Committee is facilitated in a manner that best encourages the engagement of participating members, to ensure the intent of a service decision making power is effectively realised. Consideration should be given to remunerating services on the Committee, to appropriately recognise the importance and value of service voice in the governance processes. It was raised in consultation that the format of the State Advisory Committee may not be conducive to services actively contributing to decision-making – the required time commitment from participants, without remuneration, can sometimes compromise the attendance. Without proper attendance and genuine engagement, the State Advisory Committees may not fully meet their intentions of being a service-led body.

As SNAICC Early Years Support transitions from pilot phase it will be important to consider the most appropriate mechanisms for enabling service ownership and governance of the program. If there are decisions, power and roles that are important to be made at the service level, the conditions required to enable the genuine and informed engagement and decision making by services need to be fostered.

There is also an opportunity to redefine the role of the Technical Advisory Group, and to establish a more regular cadence, to enhance its effectiveness. Given its intended role as a means of providing technical support and expertise, it may also be possible to streamline this objective through having increased in-house specialisation within the National SNAICC Early Years Support team (as discussed earlier).

5.1.5 Strengthening consistency (where appropriate) and equity in access

As discussed in Section 2.4.2, differentiated support has been observed across early years services. This is natural and a key part of the SNAICC Early Years Support model where differentiation is in response to need or context. However, to the extent that differentiation is a result of barriers to access – efforts should be made to continually support equality in access.

Increased structure has been introduced to support effective and consistent prioritisation of resourcing in accordance with need. For example, in SNAICC Early Years Support NSW a “traffic light” system is being utilised to triage support to services and the ACCO Early Years Services Review Checklist is being utilised in WA and Vic.

An assessment of the relative effectiveness of each of these supports has not been made as part of the evaluation. However, there is an opportunity to harmonise these supports across jurisdictions to ensure that SNAICC Early Years Support is continuing to strengthen equity of access and consistency.

Additionally, there is an opportunity to continue to invest in frameworks and procedures that reduce variation. For example, standardised forms and templates to guide interactions and implementing a consistent process for evaluating and responding to requests for support. The intent here is not to displace tailored and responsive supports, but rather to support needs-based responses more effectively and to ensure that contextual barriers to access do not disproportionately favour some services over others.

5.1.6 Consideration of resourcing for SNAICC Early Years Support teams

As SNAICC Early Years Support transitions from its pilot phase, there is an opportunity to revisit the resourcing model to ensure sufficient capacity within jurisdictional and national teams to support the program to meet its objectives (and is directly linked to the level of scale/pace/intensity at which SNAICC Early Years Support can operate). There is opportunity to map the nature of investment required across different service needs and contexts, and how this aligns to national and jurisdictional capacities and capabilities, to more precisely inform a future operating and resourcing model.

For example, the evaluation has previously suggested that an alternative relationship-based model may be more suitable in some geographical areas – for example, where a representative is based in selected regions that are rural or remote, with a Director in a metropolitan area (i.e., a satellite office) – might enable additional on-the-ground coverage and an understanding of community-specific needs, customs, and complexities. This model may also offer a leadership pathway for early years service directors and other employees in local communities.

5.1.7 SNAICC Early Years Support should have intentional collaboration and connection with government, peaks or coalitions

The ACCO system intersects with various government agencies, peak bodies, and coalitions at both national and jurisdictional levels. Currently, while SNAICC holds formal relationships with many of these key agencies and forums, SNAICC Early Years Support engages with these entities in a more ad-hoc manner, without regular touchpoints.

During consultations, government and non-government agencies highlighted the need for improved collaboration to enhance connections to SNAICC Early Years Support. They also emphasised the importance of reducing duplication of services, enhancing understanding of the broader system, and improving role clarity within the system.

There is an opportunity to foster intentional collaboration and connection with these organisations to support complementary services and facilitate knowledge-sharing on key issues in the ECEC sector. This could be achieved through:

- regular meetings to provide an opportunity for ongoing communication, collaboration, and alignment of efforts.
- participation in events to provide platforms for knowledge-sharing, networking, and forging stronger connections.

5.1.8 Opportunities to upskill mainstream services

Currently, SNAICC Early Years Support's primary focus is on supporting ACCOs. The evaluation has identified that many of the tools, resources and practices developed by SNAICC Early Years Support would support better culturally and community responsive practice in mainstream services also – providing an opportunity for heightened impact across the early years system.

The guidance and services SNAICC Early Support provide could be made available more broadly – for example, the provision of training and development programs, resources, and networking. To successfully extend these benefits to mainstream services, there is a need for adequate resources, including staffing and funding, to ensure the support provided to ACCOs is not diminished.

5.1.9 Improving collection and management of quantitative data

During the design of SNAICC Early Years Support, it was expected it would support services with improved data access and sovereignty, and improved capacity to measure and understand service impact. However, throughout SNAICC Early Years Support's implementation, the focus shifted into building leadership capacity. This shift occurred in response to service need and priorities.

Nonetheless, there is an opportunity for SNAICC Early Years Support to improve its data collection and to support services with their own data collection and data management approaches.

It is recognised that, over the past three years, SNAICC Early Years Support has made progress towards improving its data collection activities – including collecting data from services and the development of data dashboards. However, there are still concerns regarding the quality and accuracy of this data, and it is acknowledged that trust-building is an important element in services being willing to share data with SNAICC Early Years Support.

Therefore, the existing data continues to present a risk for SNAICC Early Years Support and is currently not sufficient for SNAICC Early Years Support to provide a value add for services through reducing data and administrative asks from government and others in relation to sector planning, compliance or advocacy; sharing back with the sector and particular services data informed insights and improvement strategies; comprehensive data for impact analysis for the purpose of monitoring, evaluation; or the introduction of new tools and processes to enable services to better engage with and utilise their own data.

While the additional burden placed on services will remain a consideration for SNAICC Early Years Support, there is an opportunity to centralise data support, management, and sovereignty, and potentially reduce the pressure on services. An improved data management system will support reporting, transparency, and development of an enhanced evidence base. Further, there is an opportunity for SNAICC to improve data collection through regular collection mapped against reporting requirements.

This will be most effective if SNAICC Early Years Support can build a value proposition for early years services to provide data and support services – for example, reducing their administrative burden, improving data based guidance and supports across the sector and using data for policy making.

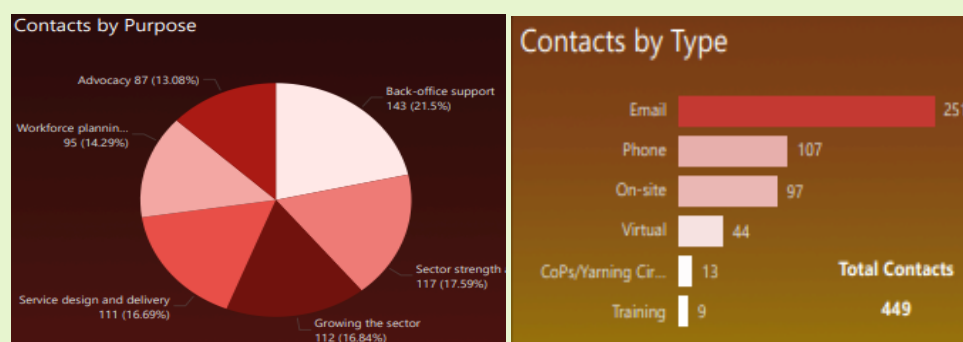
Box 5.1 SNAICC Early Years Support capturing and monitoring data through Power BI

As mentioned above, SNAICC Early Years Support has made progress towards improving its data collection activities. By using Power BI dashboards, SNAICC Early Years Support seeks to document a comprehensive understanding of engagement, children and enrolment statistics and workforce metrics in participating early

years services. This ensures that SNAICC Early Years Support can effectively monitor service needs and requests, tailor support for each service and track progress over time. Noting, the evaluation is unable to determine quality and completeness of the data presented in the Power BI dashboard – this will be a focus of the evaluation in 2025.

The dashboards enable SNAICC Early Years Support to collect data on service requests and needs. These dashboards include information relating to the reason for service contact and the priorities or issues in the different services. SNAICC Early Years Support also collects information on the number of times services have been contacted and the way these services were contacted (i.e. email, phone or on-site) – *see Power BI charts below*. By collecting this information, SNAICC Early Years Support has a greater understanding of the appropriate development supports that should be offered to the different services.

Figure 5.1: Proportion of service contacts by purpose and type

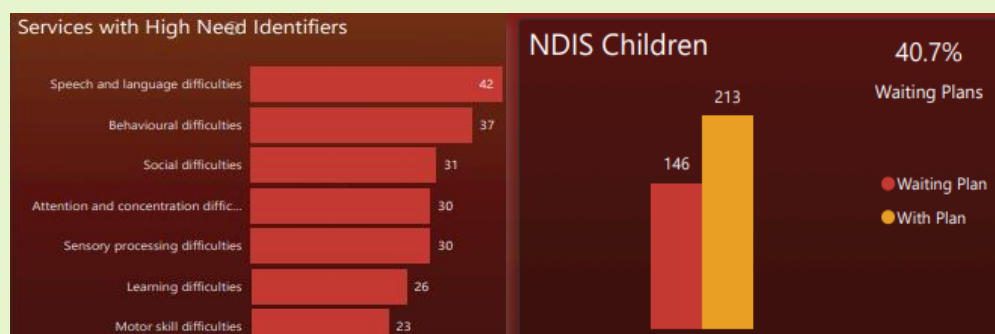


Source: SNAICC Early Years Support

Additionally, SNAICC Early Years Support captures and analyses engagement metrics such as the number of children enrolled compared to those attending. This data helps to identify areas of high demand and areas where SNAICC Early Years Support may need to offer more supports.

SNAICC Early Years Support recognises that services are unique and require tailored supports that cater to each service need. These dashboards capture the proportion of children with high needs in services, the proportion of Aboriginal children, age categories of children, and the number the children with an NDIS plan. These demographic indicators aid SNAICC Early Years Support in monitoring service need, ensuring it provides the relevant tools and development supports for each service that best equip service leaders to meet the needs of children in their service.

Figure 5.2: Children with high need identifiers and NDIS plans



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support

Workforce statistics are also recorded and monitored. This includes the job vacancies across services, number of staff enrolled or completed training. By monitoring this, SNAICC Early Years Support can identify gaps in trainings or qualifications and provide appropriate trainings when required.

Figure 5.3: Staff completion of training and job vacancies in services



Source: SNAICC Early Years Support

The implementation and utilisation of the Power BI dashboard across three jurisdictions has promising signs of value for SNAICC Early Years Support in monitoring service needs and requests, tailoring support for each service and tracking progress over time. However, to fully leverage the benefits of the Power BI Dashboard there is a need for SNAICC Early Years Support to enable consistent and high-quality data input across the jurisdictions – to ensure accurate and complete data.

5.1.10 Monitoring the impact of SNAICC Early Years Support over time

SNAICC Early Years Support should continue to monitor and evaluate the impact of the supports provided – to ensure the program remains appropriate and responsive to service needs, and to build an increasingly robust evidence base as to the value of these supports. This could include regular internal monitoring, the development of a review plan, and improved data collection at the service level (discussed further above).

This will assist in communication and understanding of the benefit of SNAICC Early Years Support and, critically, would inform potential program refinements. There should be consideration of the perspective of families and communities to understand the longer-term impacts of the SNAICC Early Years Support, which has not been a feature of this evaluation given the early stage of implementation.

5.1.11 While the evidence is still emerging, the potential for SNAICC Early Years Support to expand to other jurisdictions and create a truly national program of support is clear

In line with the need outlined in Section 1.1.3 of this report, ACCOs face similar challenges across all of Australia's jurisdictions, with no evidence of similar programs of support operating to fill these gaps. In the first three years of implementation, SNAICC Early Years Support has evidenced its ability to provide localised support, with national backing, across different jurisdictions.

There is evidence of demand in other jurisdictions for a program like SNAICC Early Years Support to exist, as detailed in Section 3.8)

"No other organisation has that culturally responsive lens and way of working. Other jurisdictions are saying that they need that support...the EYS program – that's what's required for this work" – SNAICC staff.

Nationally, there are significant advantages to having a single and centralised point of support across jurisdictions (in combination with regional on-the-ground personnel). A unified approach across states and territories can create opportunities for economies of scale, leading to increased efficiencies and streamlined processes. A truly national program has the potential to enhance resource allocation, reduce administrative overheads, and foster consistent quality across services – for example, through the development of centralised resources and guidance. Moreover, a national program has the potential to align more effectively with broader reform priorities, supporting cohesive policy implementation and driving systemic change across the early years sector.

5.2 Conclusion

In only three years (and while still in its pilot stage), SNAICC Early Years Support has made significant progress in bringing together, empowering, and strengthening a historically underrepresented sector. The strong relationships built by SNAICC Early Years Support have opened up the doors for effective policy influence and development – fostered by a more connected ACCO sector. This has created critical opportunities to work collectively with governments to lift child, family and community outcomes – in an increasingly co-ordinated, cohesive, and culturally strong ACCO service system.

While still in the early days of implementation, emerging indications of impact suggest that SNAICC Early Years Support is progressing toward – and in some cases, already delivering – outcomes in accordance with service need and the theory of change. To date, this has been observed with improvements in service quality and sustainability, which flow directly through to benefits for children, families and communities.

The evaluation presents a range of future considerations regarding how SNAICC Early Years Support can continue to be refined as the program matures and considers further expansion. These span communication, governance, personnel management, resourcing, data collection and monitoring.

Notably, beyond program and/or internal refinements, the ongoing impact of SNAICC Early Years Support is closely tied to the broader policy environment and the conditions under which it operates. Given this, as SNAICC Early Years Support transitions from its pilot phase, it will be important to consider robust and stable policy foundations – including a clear policy framework and long-term vision for the role of an intermediary body in the ACCO early years sector. These should be considered alongside funding certainty, an effective resource allocation program and the governance arrangements that are required to realise the long-term impact aspirations.

Appendix A : List of services

A.1. List of participating services

As discussed in Section 2.3.2, the SNAICC Early Years Support program involves the establishment of a national unit and three state-wide bodies in Western Australia (WA), New South Wales (NSW), and Victoria (Vic).

SNAICC Early Years Support has 17 services in NSW, 6 in WA and 13 in Vic. These services and their locations are outlined in Table A.1. The locations range from major city areas (e.g. Campbelltown, NSW) to very remote areas (e.g. Halls Creek, WA).

Table A.1: Location and remoteness of participating services

Service name	Location	Remoteness
NSW		
Allira Multi-Purpose Gathering Association	Dubbo	Inner Regional
Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Childrens Service	Tamworth	Inner Regional
Cullunghutti Early Learning Centre	Nowra	Inner Regional
Gujaga Multifunctional Aboriginal Children Service Aboriginal Child Care	La Pouse	Major Cities
Illawarra Aboriginal Corporation	Berkeley	Major Cities
Jarjum Bugal Nah - Bunjum Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Ballina	Inner Regional
Maingirba Early Learning Centre	Brewarrina	Very Remote
Nikinpa Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Toronto	Major Cities
Oorunga Wandarrah Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services	Tharawal / Campbelltown	Major Cities
Towri Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services	South Bathurst	Inner Regional
Walanbaa Child and Family Centre	Lightning Ridge	Remote Australia
Waranwarin Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Minto	Major Cities
Winanga-Li Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Gunnedah	Outer Regional
Winnangay Child Care Centre	Berkeley	Major Cities
Wiradjuri Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service	Wagga Wagga	Inner Regional
Yalbilliga Boori Day Care Centre	Cowra	Inner Regional
Yenu Allowah Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Mt Druitt	Major Cities

Western Australia		
Baya Gawi Buga yani Jandu yani u Centre	Fitzroy Crossing	Very Remote
Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre	Thornlie	Major Cities
Halls Creek Child and Parent Centre / Little Nuggets	Halls Creek	Very Remote
Jalygurr Guwan Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service	Broome	Remote
Kununurra Child and Parent Centre	Kununurra	Very Remote
Wanyanyakem Taam – Early Learning Centre (ELC)	Warmun	Very Remote
Child and Parent Centre Swan	Stratton	Major Cities
Gurlu Gurlu Maya Child Parent Centre – One Tree Child and Parent Centre Roebourne	Roebourne	Very Remote
HIPPY	Broome	Remote
Stepping Stones Kununurra	Kununurra	Very Remote
Julyardi Aboriginal Corporation	South Headland	Remote
Broome Youth and Families Hub	Broome	Remote
Ngunga Women's Group ¹⁹	Derby	Very Remote
KindiLink	Broome	Remote
Our Mob Playgroup	Broome	Remote
Victoria		
Berrimba Child Care Centre	Echuca	Inner Regional
Bubup Wilam Aboriginal Child and Family Centre	Thomastown	Major Cities
Bung Yarnda / Lake Tyers Early Learning Centre	Lake Tyers	Outer Regional
Dala Yooro Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre	Bairnsdale	Outer Regional
Gunai Lidje Child Care Centre	Morwell	Inner Regional
Gyndarna Preschool ²⁰	Dareton	Outer Regional
Koori First Steps Pre-School - Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation (Wodonga)	Wodonga	Inner Regional

¹⁹ Note that on some SNAICC Early Years Support documents, WA is noted as having eight services. Ngunga Women's Group has three locations, which would take the total number of services to eight if counted separately. However, we are currently considering Ngunga Women's Group as a single organisation.

²⁰ Technically speaking, this service is located in NSW. However, Dareton / Mildura borders the Murray River which divides NSW and Victoria. As such, despite being 'in between' the two states, it is under the jurisdiction of SNAICC Early Years Support Victoria.

Lulla's Children & Family Centre	Shepparton	Inner Regional
Murray Valley Aboriginal Cooperative Early Learning Centre	Robinvale	Outer Regional
Perridak Burrton Early Learning Centre (Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative Limited)	Brown Hill	Inner Regional
Yappera Children's Service	Thornbury	Major Cities
Yirram Burrton Early Learning Centre (Ballarat & District Aboriginal Co-operative Limited)	Sebastopol	Inner Regional

Source: SNAICC, Social Ventures Australia, ABS Remoteness Area Correspondence Tables

Appendix B : Evaluation Framework

B.1. Evaluation questions

Evaluation questions define the scope and focus of the evaluation. They are high-level lines of inquiry, which link back to the PLM, and define the focus of the evaluation. Deloitte's evaluation team has worked with SNAICC to develop the evaluation questions, building on work previously undertaken by SNAICC. The evaluation questions are grouped according to implementation and impact of the Program. The evaluation team acknowledges that while these lines of inquiry guide us, given the inherent complexity of the Program, there is space for the unknown to emerge. In reference to the evaluation principle of **shared learning**, this space grants us permission to lean into the learning journey along the way both for Deloitte Access Economics and stakeholders.

B.1.1. Evaluation domains

Evaluation questions pertaining to **implementation** inform decision-making and support early years services (and, by extension, families and children involved in the Program) in the stages of the Program. It also determines if the Program have been implemented as intended. Implementation considers the following domains:

Implementation

- A. Awareness & understanding:** The extent to which prospective users, including EYS, the community-controlled workforce, the early childhood sector and government have knowledge and an understanding of the intermediary body, its purpose, and role in supporting the delivery of high quality, responsive and accessible services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families across Australia
- B. Alignment & uptake:** The extent to which EYS and other stakeholders have been engaging with THRYVE, and strategies are integrated in EYS to sustain engagement with the intermediary
- C. Fidelity & quality:** The implementation fidelity of THRYVE and how implementation changes over time to respond to context, insights and feedback
- D. Sustainability:** The extent to which the THRYVE model reflects a sustainable and embedded component of the sector going forward

Evaluation questions pertaining to **impact** determine whether the objectives of the Program are being achieved. Impact considers the following domains:

Impact





- E. Appropriateness:** The extent to which the design of THRYVE is appropriate to meet the needs of EYS, families and children and potential improvements and refinements that can be made to the intermediary model are understood
- F. Effectiveness:** The extent to which initiative objectives are being achieved and to what extent broader SNAICC objectives are being achieved
- G. Cost effectiveness:** The extent to which the funding of THRYVE is efficient in producing outcomes and achieving its objectives
- H. Equity:** The extent to which the THRYVE meets needs and delivers equitable outcomes to EYS and, by extension, to families and children

B.1.2. Evaluation questions

B.1.2.1. Implementation

This Section outlines questions pertaining to the **Implementation** domain. Data collection and analysis activities are designed to uncover answers to these questions. It is acknowledged, however, that these research questions can evolve over time and be refined throughout the evaluation process.

Table B.1: Key evaluation domains pertaining to implementation and related questions this evaluation will seek to answer





Implementation (Description of the key and sub evaluation questions relating to the domains of perception, fidelity, engagement, adequacy and adaptability)		
A	 Awareness & understanding	A1 Is the purpose of the intermediaries well understood by the sector? A2 To what extent do stakeholders believe in the benefits of the intermediary model? <i>(Note: This question is to be asked in early stages of implementation)</i>
B	 Alignment & uptake	B1 How, and to what extent, are the intermediaries used by services and other stakeholders? B2 How, and to what extent, do the intermediaries respond to local needs and context? B3 Are there any changes that could be made to encourage greater engagement?
C	 Fidelity & quality	C1 To what extent are the activities undertaken by the intermediaries in line with intentions? C2 To what extent are the intermediaries embedded and led by the community-controlled service sector? C3 To what extent are learnings feeding into continual improvement?
D	 Sustainability	D1 To what extent is there trust in the intermediary model and bodies? D2 What conditions are required for the ongoing success of the intermediaries?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

B.1.2.2. Impact

This Section outlines questions pertaining to the **Impact** domain. Data collection and analysis activities are designed to uncover answers to these questions. It is acknowledged, however, that these research questions can evolve over time and be refined throughout the evaluation process.

Table B.2: Key evaluation domains pertaining to outcomes and related questions this evaluation will seek to answer

Impact (Description of the key and sub-evaluation questions relating to the domains of effectiveness, appropriateness, efficiency and equity)		
E	 Appropriateness	E1 To what extent does the design of the intermediaries reflect the priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years sector?
F	 Effectiveness	F1 To what extent are the intermediaries realising their intended objectives? F2 Are there any unintended outcomes or impacts observed to be generated by the intermediaries? F3 In what contexts are the intermediaries more likely to create impact? F4 What does the evidence tell us about what a high quality intermediary looks like?
G	 Cost effectiveness	G1 To what extent do the intermediaries represent a value for money offering? G2 What does effective investment look like for the intermediary bodies?
H	 Equity	H1 To what extent are outcomes realised across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities? H2 What does the evidence tell us about who is missing out?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

B.1.3. Data matrix**B.1.3.1. Implementation**

This Section outlines the data sources which will help our understanding and evaluation of the SNAICC Early Years Support design and delivery. Table B.3 provides a summary of the expected primary and secondary data sources and the evaluation questions these sources will seek to address.

Table B.3: Evidence and data required to address the evaluation questions

Evaluation domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
Awareness & understanding	A1	Is the purpose of the intermediaries well understood by the sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which purpose of intermediaries are understood by EYs, communities and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)
	A2	To what extent do stakeholders believe in the benefits of the intermediary program? (Note: This question will be asked in the early stages of implementation)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To what extent EYs, communities and families express belief and commitment to the intermediary Program program 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)
Alignment & uptake	B1	How, and to what extent, are the intermediaries used by services and other stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of how EYS and other stakeholders are interacting with intermediary (quantum and nature of interactions between intermediaries and key stakeholders) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)

Evaluation domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
	B2	How, and to what extent, do the intermediaries respond to local needs and context?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which intermediary bodies are tailored to the individual context Extent to which EYS feel that the intermediary bodies represent them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government) Community case studies
	B3	Are there any changes that could be made to encourage greater engagement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholder feedback on what could be done to encourage greater engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Literature review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)
	C1	To what extent are the activities undertaken by the intermediaries in line with intentions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which activities align with the implementation plan emerging from the co-design process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)
	C2	To what extent are the intermediaries embedded and led by the community-controlled service sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which there community controlled sector leadership and ownership Extent to which EYS are represented in Program leadership and governance structures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Consultations with Program EYS Directors, Educators and other staff
	C3	To what extent are learnings feeding into continual improvement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which the intermediary program is refined over time based on evidence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS
Fidelity & quality				

Evaluation domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presence of mechanisms to refine intermediary program (e.g. evidence of feedback loops, avenues to provide feedback) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations with Intermediaries and Program EYS Directors • Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government) • Community case studies
	D1	To what extent is there trust in the intermediary program and bodies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which key stakeholders trust in the intermediary bodies • Extent to which key stakeholders believe the program should be preserved and/or expanded 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors • Consultations with Intermediaries and Program EYS Directors • Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government)
Sustainability	D2	What conditions are required for the ongoing success of the intermediaries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of any conditions that are established through the outcomes evaluation to support ongoing success of the intermediaries 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and data review • Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors • Consultations with Intermediaries and Program EYSs Directors • Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary bodies, government) • Community case studies

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

B.1.3.2. Impact

This Section outlines the data sources which will help our understanding and evaluation of SNAICC Early Years Support impact. Table B.4 provides a summary of the expected primary and secondary data sources and the evaluation questions these sources will seek to address.

Table B.4: Evidence and data required to address the evaluation questions

Evaluation Domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
Appropriateness	E1	To what extent does the design of the intermediaries reflect the priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years sector?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Level of alignment between intermediary design and priorities as articulated by key stakeholders/past reviews of the sector 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. Intermediary body, government) Community case studies
	F1	To what extent are the intermediaries realising their intended objectives?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements in short and medium term outcomes as articulated in the program logic Identification of any external factors that are important for consideration of intermediary effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. government) Community case studies
Effectiveness	F2	Are there any unintended outcomes or impacts observed to be generated by the intermediaries?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identification and description of any outcomes that are observed and which sit outside the program logic Identification and description of any relationships observed between outcomes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document and data review Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. government) Community case studies

Evaluation Domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
	F3	In what contexts are the intermediaries more likely to create impact?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent to which outcomes differ across various contextual factors (E.g. geography, service type, leadership structure) • Identification of any contextual factors that lead to outcomes being more or less likely to be realised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and data review • Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors • Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff • Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. government) • Community case studies
	F4	What does the evidence tell us about what a high quality intermediary looks like?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In relation to evidence drawn in response to evaluation question G1, identification of the key elements which contribute to the establishment of a high quality intermediary 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and data review • Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors • Consultations with EYS Directors, Educators and other staff • Consultations with other key stakeholders (e.g. government) • Community case studies
Cost effectiveness	G1	To what extent do the intermediaries represent a value for money offering?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of implementation cost as compared to the value of outcomes realised/realised into the future (as established by F1) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and document review • Analysis of F1 evaluation findings
	G2	What does effective investment look like for the intermediary bodies?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assessment of conditions and contexts within which investment is optimised for the intermediary bodies • Assessment of any potential efficiency gains 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data and document review • Analysis of F1 evaluation findings
Equity	H1	To what extent are outcomes realised across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extent of variation in the outcomes as assessed in F1 across key factors (such as geography, regionality, service type) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis of F1 evaluation findings

Evaluation Domain	No.	Evaluation question	Evidence required	Data sources
	H2	What does the evidence tell us about who is missing out?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification and description of service types, family types, workforce types that are not accessing/engaging with services or the bodies • Understanding of data limitations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document and data review • Surveys with Program EYS and non-Program EYS Directors • Consultations with Program EYS Directors, Educators and other staff • Consultations with other key stakeholders (i.e. government) • Community case studies

Source: Deloitte Access Economics.

Appendix C : 2024 Early Years Service Survey

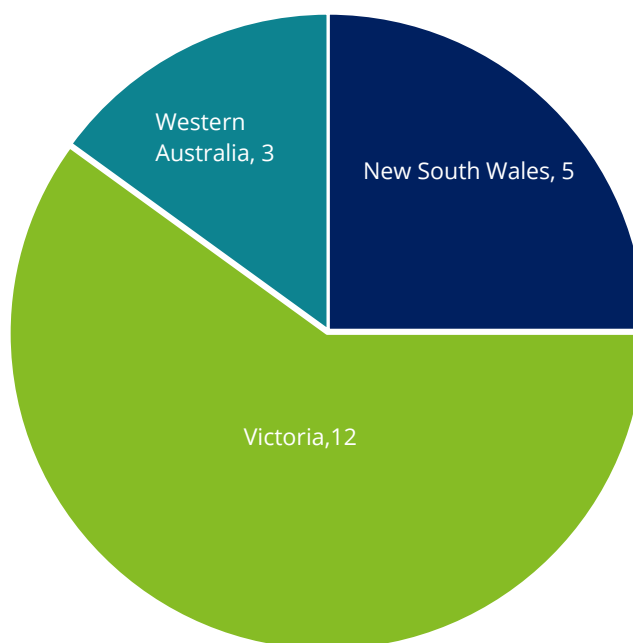
The 2024 Early Years Service Survey was distributed to staff working at participating services via an email. It was open from 8 October 2024 for all jurisdictions – SNAICC Early Years Support State Directors let services know that the survey was coming and encouraged staff to complete it. The survey was closed on 1 November 2024.

Overall, there were 20 respondents across the three jurisdictions. Note that the summary presented in this Appendix only considers the quantitative questions in the survey. The survey also included several free-text questions which are listed in the full questionnaire (see Appendix D).

C.1. Demographic questions

Victoria has the greatest number of responses with 12 (7 in 2023), followed by 5 responses from NSW (12 in 2023), and 3 from WA (3 in 2023).

Chart C.1: Respondent jurisdiction

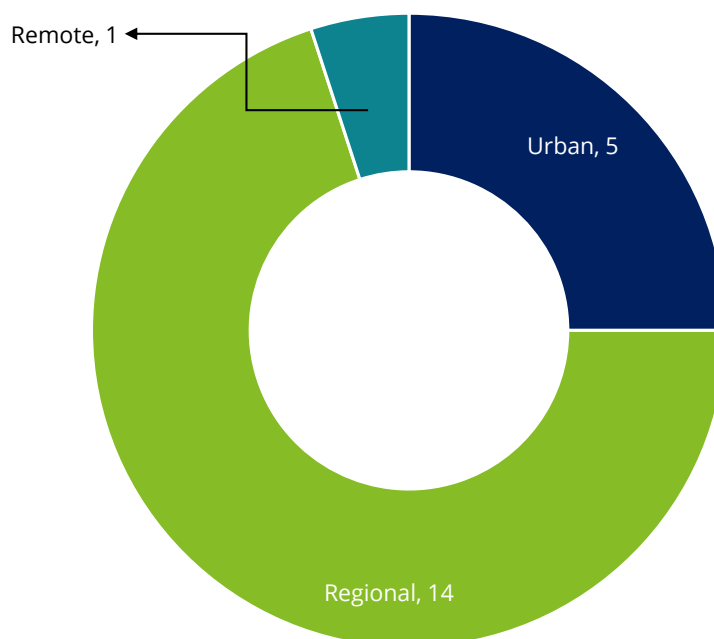


Note: n = 20. Q – Which state is the Early Years Service which you represent located in?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

As expected, most respondents were based in regional services, forming 70 per cent of all responses (see Chart C.2). Five respondents were from urban centres (four in 2023), and one was from a remote service (a decrease from five in 2023).

Chart C.2: Respondent regionality

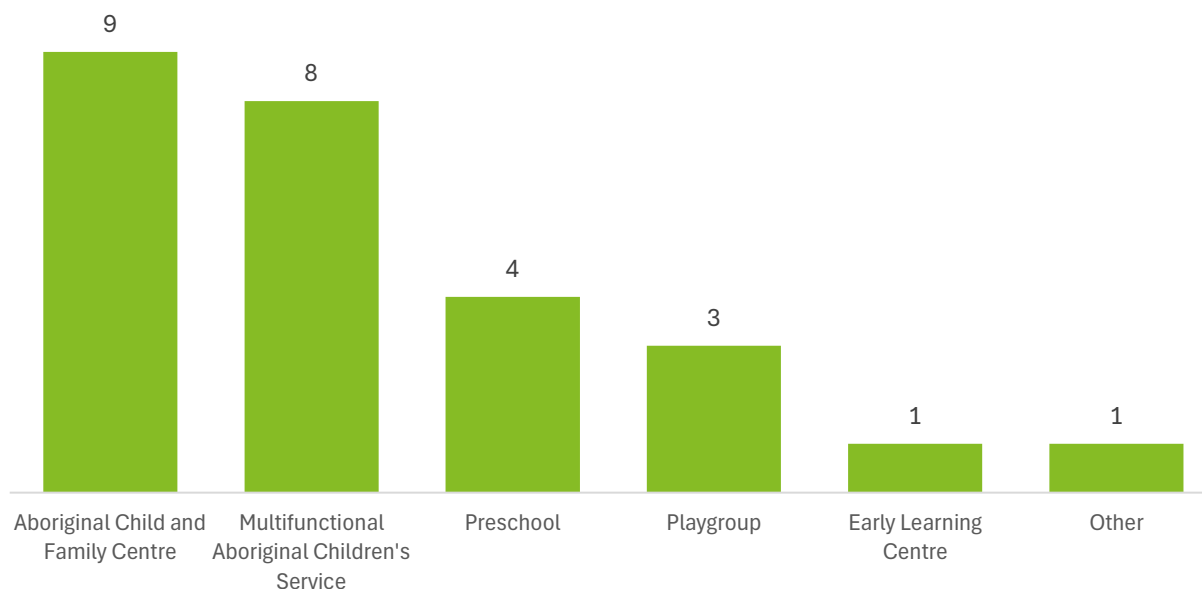


Note: n = 20. Q - Is the early years service which you represent located in a remote, regional or urban area?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

As a new question for 2024, respondents were also given the opportunity to report their service type, selecting all that applied. ACFC and MACS services were the most common, as shown in Chart C.3 below.

Chart C.3: Respondent service type



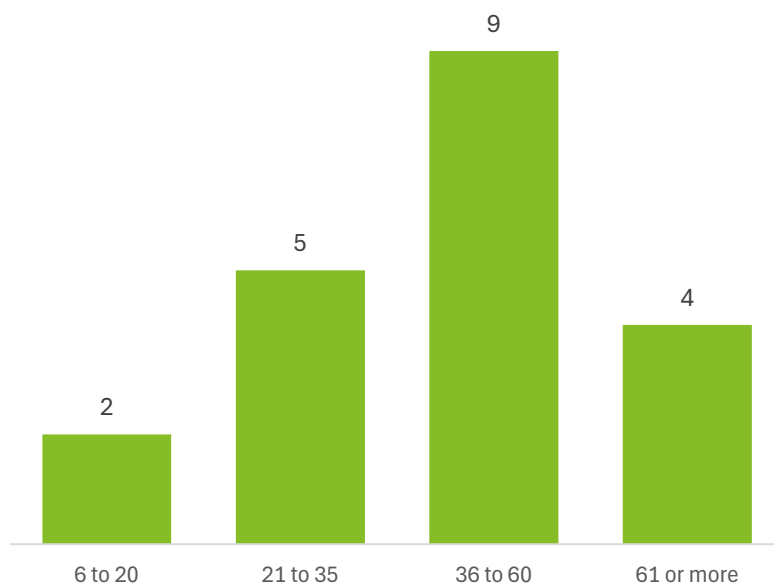
Note: n = 20, but totals sum to 26 as some respondent selected multiple options..

Q - What is your service type? Please select all that apply.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Respondents most frequently had 36 to 60 children enrolled at their service (see Chart C.4). Fewer services reported to have 21 to 35, and a comparable number had over 60 children enrolled at their service. Only two respondents had 20 or less children.

Chart C.4: Respondent service size

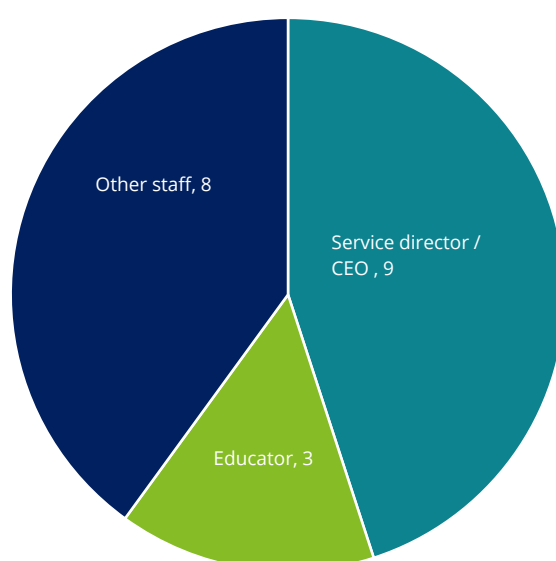


Note: n = 20. Q - How many children are enrolled at the service?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

In the 2024 survey, there was a comparable split between other staff and service directors. Almost half of the respondents selected 'service director or CEO' and eight respondents selected other staff. It should be noted that respondents who selected 'other staff' comprised of teachers, education leaders or assistant directors. Only three respondents were educators (see Chart C.5).

Chart C.5: Respondent role

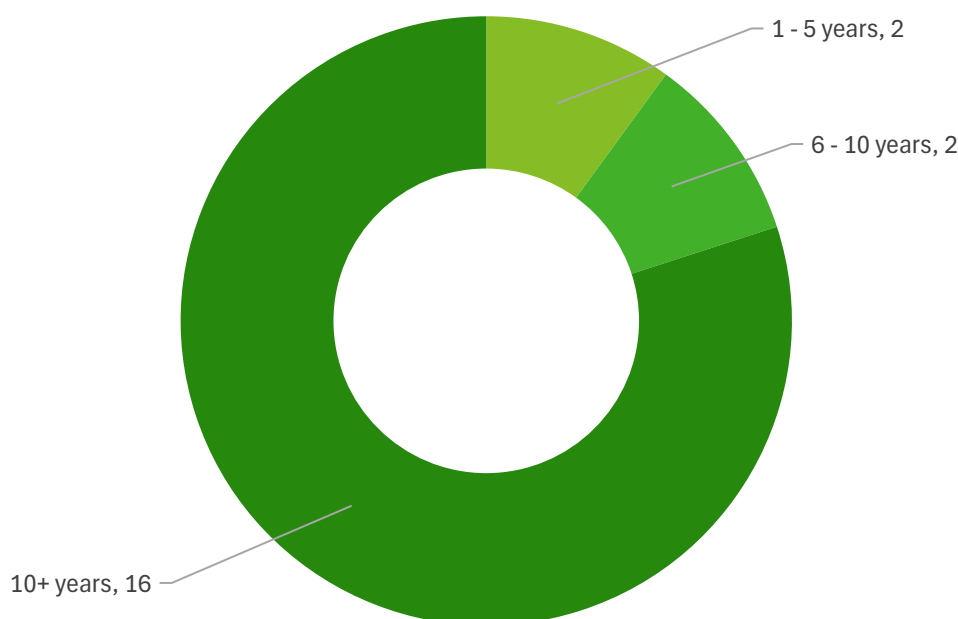


Note: n = 20. Q - What is your role at the service?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Most respondents of the survey were in services that have been established for over a decade (80 per cent) of respondents. Only four respondents were at services that were operational for 10 years or less (Chart C.6).

Chart C.6: Years of operation



Note: n = 20. Q – How many years has your service been operational?

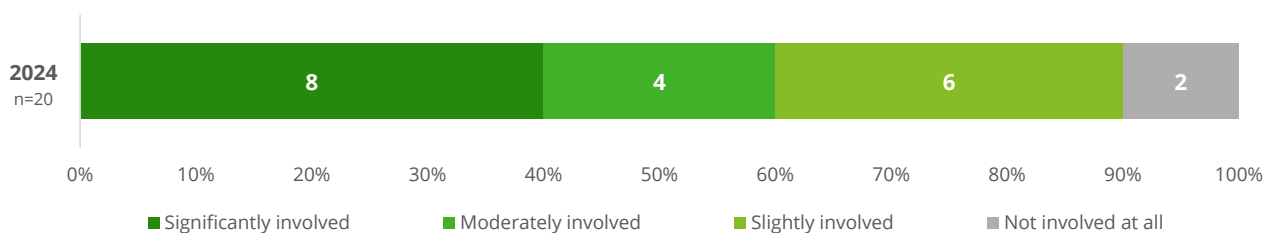
Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

C.2. Engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support

This block of questions comprised of Likert-scale and rating-based questions which asked respondents about aspects of their engagement, awareness, and understanding of SNAICC Early Years Support.

90 per cent of services were at least somewhat involved in the development of SNAICC Early Years Support, shown in Chart C.7. Most frequently, respondents were significantly involved in the development of NAICC Early Years Support, with similar proportions of those who were slightly involved. Only two respondents were not involved in the development of SNAICC Early Years Support.

Chart C.7: Responses to the question 'How involved have you been in the development of [your jurisdiction's] SNAICC Early Years Support?'

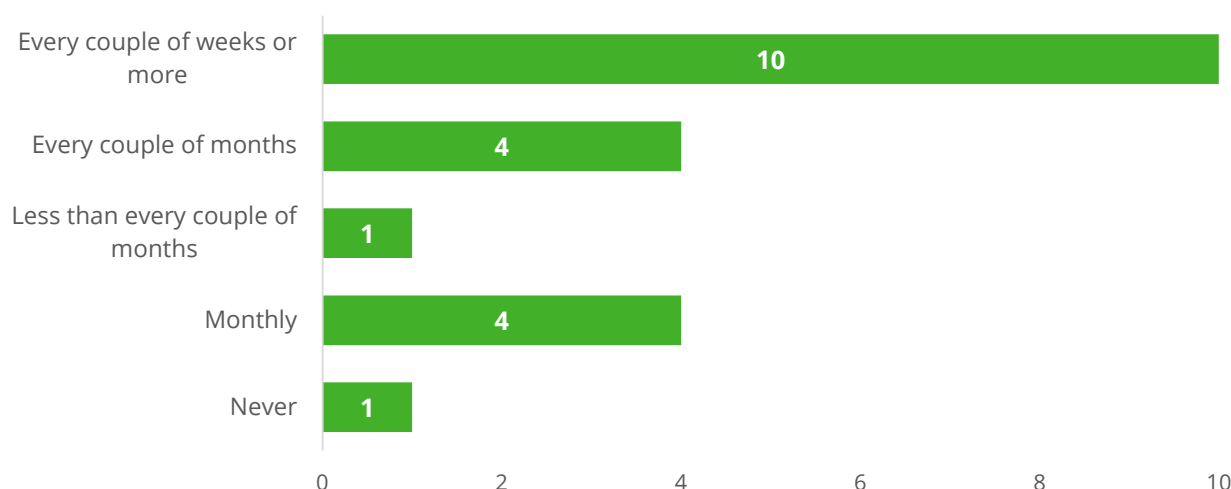


Note: n = 20. Q – How many years has your service been operational?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Respondents were asked to indicate how frequently they engaged with SNAICC Early Years Support. The majority had engagement every couple of weeks or more, as shown below in Chart C.8.

Chart C.8: Frequency of engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support

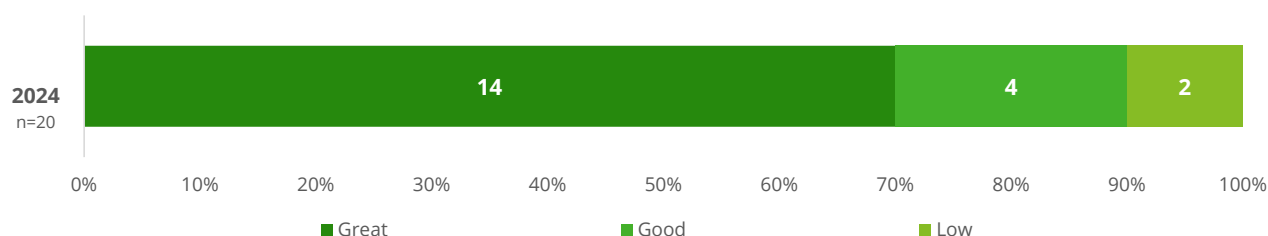


Note: n = 20. Q – How often has your service interacted with SNAICC Early Years Support, over the past year?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Following this, they were also asked to rate the quality of their engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support. The vast majority of respondents felt that the quality of engagement was 'great', as shown below in Chart C.9.

Chart C.9: Quality of engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support



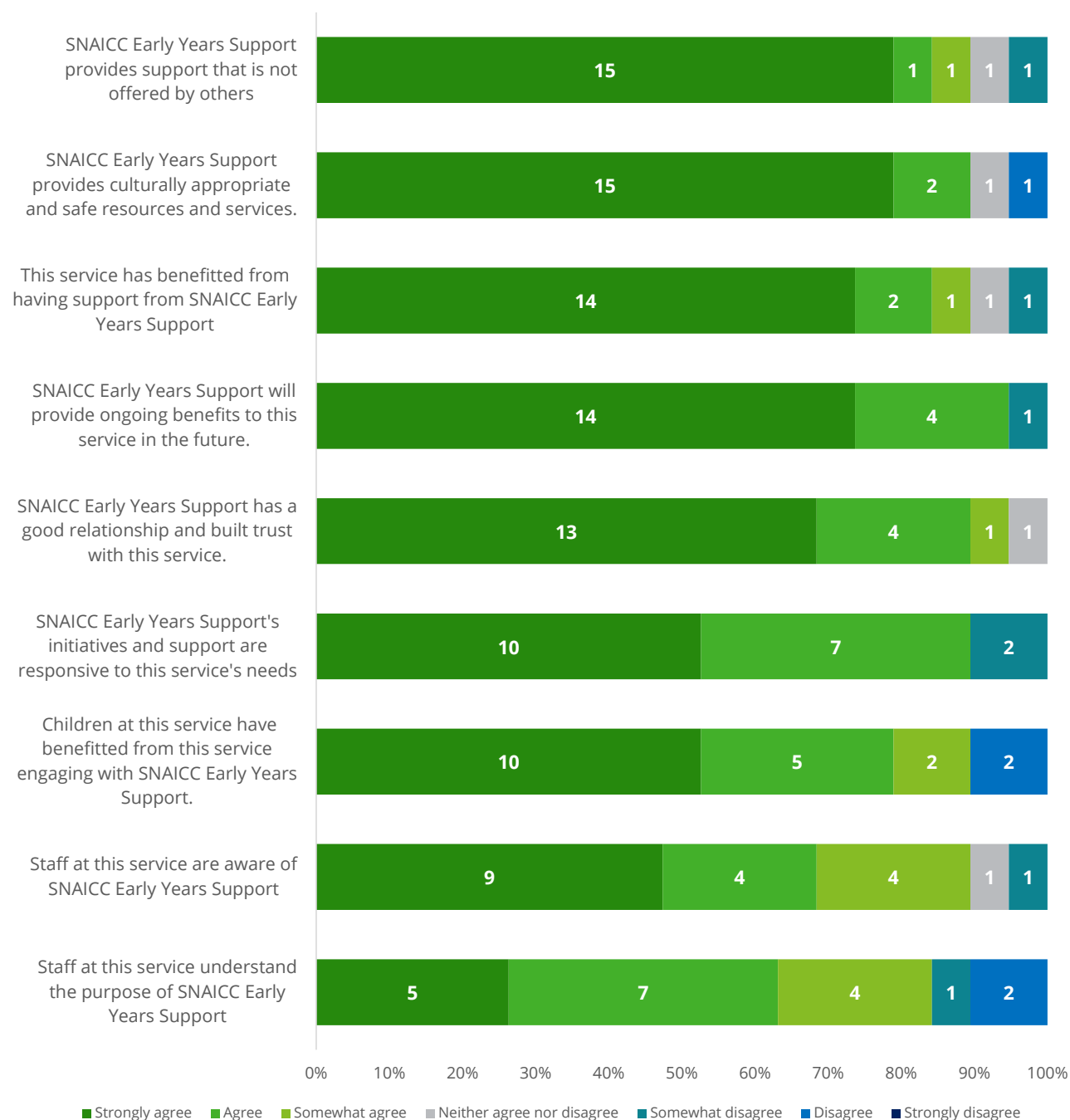
Note: n = 20. Q – How would you rate the quality of your interaction with SNAICC Early Years Support, this year?

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Respondents were then asked to rate the extent to which they agreed with several statements regarding their experience in engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support. Answer were provided on a seven-point Likert scale, and are presented in ascending number of respondents who strongly agreed (Chart C.10). Across all questions, respondents were positive about SNAICC Early Years Support – no areas saw more than three respondents indicate they disagreed, and no respondents strongly disagreed at any stage. 'SNAICC Early Years Support provides support that is not offered by others' and 'SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services' saw the greatest number of respondents strongly agree, both with 15 out of 19 respondents.

Respondents' belief that SNAICC Early Years Support would continue to benefit their service in the future saw the most overwhelmingly positive response, with 18 of 19 respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Closely behind, 17 out of 19 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that *SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services*, that *SNAICC Early Years Support has a good relationship and built trust with their service*, and that *SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to the service's needs*.

Chart C.10: Extent to which respondents agreed with statements regarding SNAICC Early Years Support



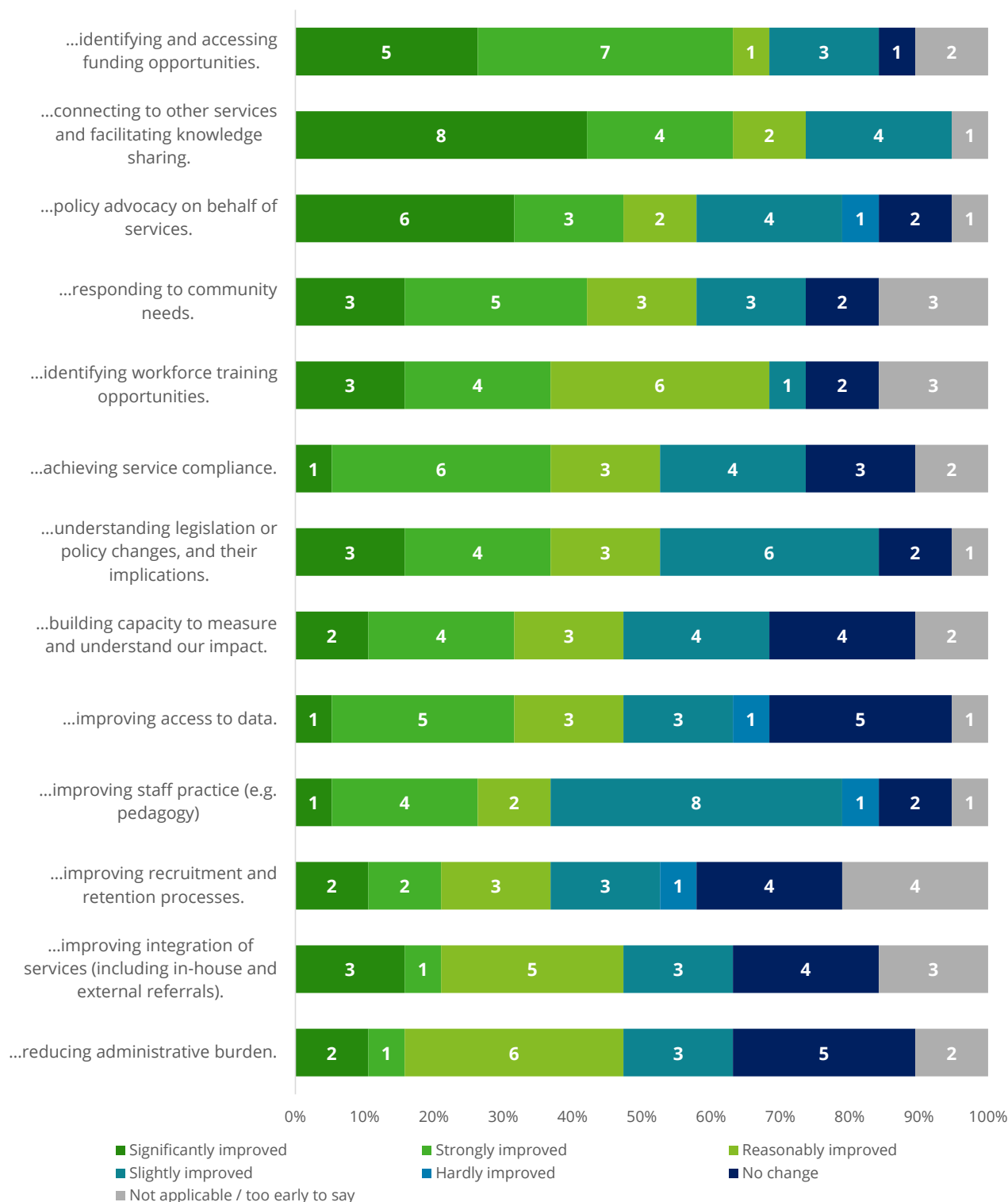
Note: n = 19. Q – Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statement regarding your experience in engaging with SNAICC EYS at your service.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

C.3. Impact of SNAICC Early Years Support on services

In this section, respondents were asked about the extent to which the services extended by SNAICC Early Years Support meet the needs and preferences of their service. Respondents were first asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed that their service had benefitted from engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support in 2024, in certain areas, responding on a six-point scale from 'no change' to 'significantly improved' (Chart C.11). There was also an option to indicate that an area was not applicable, or that it was too early to say whether it had been improved.

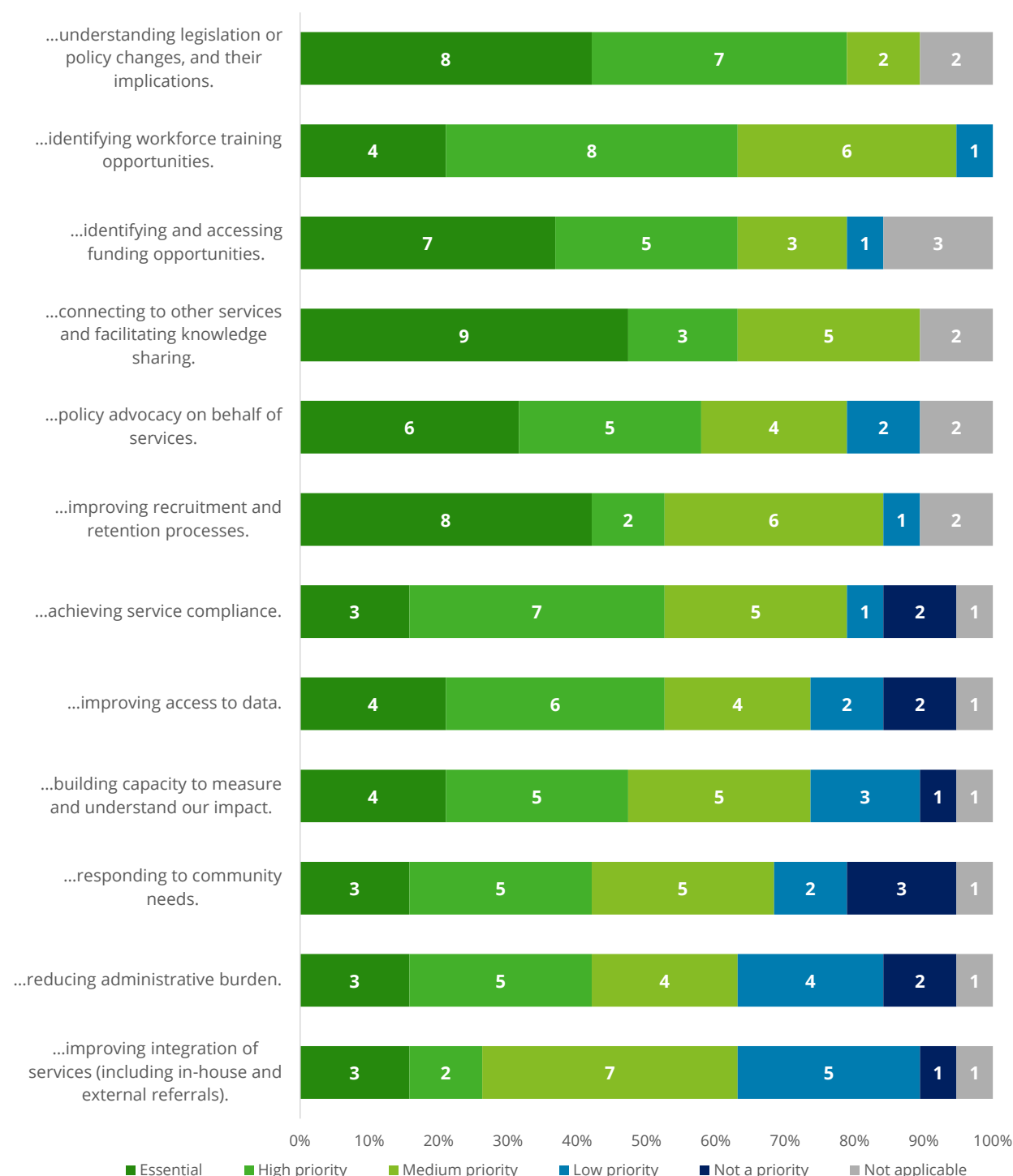
Chart C.11: Areas where services had benefited from engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support (sorted by greatest number of 'significantly improved' and 'strongly improved' responses)



Note: n = 19. Q – Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements regarding how your service has benefitted from engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support this year.
Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Secondly, respondents were asked about the areas where they would like more support. This was a five-point scale from 'not a priority' to 'essential', plus an option for 'not applicable' (Chart C.12).

Chart C.12: Priority areas where services would like further support from SNAICC Early Years Support (sorted by greatest number of 'essential' and 'high priority' responses)



Note: n = 19. Q – Please indicate the extent to which the following are priority areas with which your service, would like further support from SNAICC Early Years Support.

Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2024 Early Years Service survey.

Appendix D : Early Years Service Survey 2024 Questionnaire

D.1. 2024 Early Years Service Survey questions

The questions within the 2024 Early Years Service survey are included in Table D.1 below.

Table D.1: 2024 Early Years Service Survey questions

About your service

In these first few questions we will ask some questions about the early years service you are a part of.

Which state is the early years service which you represent located in?

New South Wales

Victoria

Western Australia

Is the early years service which you represent located in a remote, regional, or urban area?

Remote

Regional

Urban

What is your service type? *[Multiple choice]*

Aboriginal Child and Family Centre

Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service

Early Learning Centre

Preschool

Playgroup

Other *[text box]*

What is your role at the service?

Service director/CEO

Educator

Other staff *[text box]*

How many children are enrolled at the service?

5 or fewer

6 to 20

21 to 35

36 to 60

61 or more

How many years has your service been operational for?

1-5 years
6-10 years
10+ years

Your engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support

This section will ask about your experiences in engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support including what is working well and what could be improved.

How involved have you been in the development of [your jurisdiction's] SNAICC Early Years Support?

Slightly involved
Moderately involved
Significantly involved
Not involved at all

What do you understand to be the purpose of SNAICC Early Years Support?

[Compulsory free text]

How often has your service interacted with SNAICC Early Years Support, over the past year?

Every couple of weeks or more
Monthly
Every couple of months
Less than every couple of months
Never

What do you typically engage with SNAICC Early Years Support for?

[Compulsory free text]

How would you rate the quality of your engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support this year?

Great
Good
Fair
Low
Very low
Not applicable

If you would like to elaborate on your rating, please do so below:

[Optional free text]

Please indicate the extent to which you agree which the following statements regarding your experience in engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support at your service, this year:

Staff at this service are aware of SNAICC Early Years Support
Staff at this service understand the purpose of SNAICC Early Years Support
SNAICC Early Years Support's initiatives and support are responsive to this service's needs
This service has benefitted from SNAICC Early Years Support.
SNAICC Early Years Support provides support that is not offered by others
Children at this service have benefitted from this service engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support
SNAICC Early Years Support will provide ongoing benefits to this service in the future
SNAICC Early Years Support has a good relationship and built trust with this service
SNAICC Early Years Support provides culturally appropriate and safe resources and services

Strongly disagree
Disagree
Somewhat disagree
Neither agree nor disagree
Somewhat agree
Agree
Strongly agree

The impact of SNAICC Early Years Support on your service

This section will ask you about the extent to which the services extended by SNAICC Early Years Support meet the needs and preferences of your service.

Please indicate the extent to which you agree with the following statements regarding how your service has benefitted from engaging with SNAICC Early Years Support this year:

My service would benefit from support in...

- ...identifying workforce training opportunities.
- ...improving recruitment and retention processes.
- ...improving integration of services (including in-house and external referrals).
- ...building capacity to measure and understand our impact.
- ...responding to community needs.
- ...reducing administrative burden.
- ...achieving service compliance.
- ...improving access to data.
- ...identifying and accessing funding opportunities.
- ...understanding legislation or policy changes, and their implications.
- ...policy advocacy on behalf of services
- ...connecting to other services and facilitating knowledge sharing

Significantly improved
Strongly improved
Reasonably improved
Slightly improved
Hardly improved
No change
Not applicable/too early to say

If possible, please provide one or two examples of how your service has benefitted from engagement with SNAICC Early Years Support, this year:

[Optional free text]

Please indicate the extent to which the following are priority areas with which your service would like further support from SNAICC Early Years Support:

My service would benefit from support in...

- ...identifying workforce training opportunities.
- ...improving recruitment and retention processes.
- ...improving integration of services (including in-house and external referrals).
- ...building capacity to measure and understand our impact.
- ...responding to community needs.
- ...reducing administrative burden.
- ...achieving service compliance.
- ...improving access to data.
- ...identifying and accessing funding opportunities.
- ...understanding legislation or policy changes, and their implications.
- ...policy advocacy on behalf of services
- ...connecting to other services and facilitating knowledge sharing

Not a priority

Low priority

Medium priority

High priority

Essential

Not applicable

Feedback and submission

If you have any stories about SNAICC Early Years Support that you would like to share, please feel free to do so below:

[Optional free text]

Do you have any other comments or feedback you would like to add?

[Optional free text]

Limitation of our work

General use restriction

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