

MEDIA RELEASE

14 July 2026

More Aboriginal children accessing early learning, but developmental gap remains

With more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending early childhood education than ever before Australia's peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children says governments must now focus on turning increased participation into better developmental outcomes.

A new Report on Government Services (RoGS) data shows the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children attending Child Care Subsidy-funded early childhood education and care has increased from 3.4 per cent in 2021 to 5.3 per cent in 2025, reflecting the impact of reforms such as the removal of the Activity Test.

Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children said it was encouraging to see barriers to participation beginning to come down.

"We've long said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families face barriers to accessing early childhood education and care, so it's encouraging to see reforms like removing the Activity Test helping more children access early learning," Ms Liddle said.

"That's an important step forward, but it isn't the full picture. We should be measuring success by whether our children are arriving at school developmentally ready, and we're simply not seeing that change happen quickly enough.

"There is plenty of evidence to show what works and how to get that corresponding change.

"Aboriginal community-controlled early learning services see strong and ongoing engagement with families because they're culturally safe, trusted and designed around the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

"These services don't just provide early learning. They support children's development, strengthen culture and identity, and connect families with the services they need."

Ms Liddle said governments already had the evidence but had failed to invest in growing the Aboriginal community-controlled early childhood sector.

"Put simply, the sector hasn't been grown to the scale that's needed.

"The pace of investment in Aboriginal community-controlled early childhood education needs to reflect the urgency of what we're trying to achieve and the outcomes our communities and our government want for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

"The missing piece isn't more evidence, time or a new strategy - it's investment from government in culturally safe services.

"The next phase of reform can't just be about getting more children through the door. It has to be about giving every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child access to the kind of early learning that sets them up to thrive at school and throughout life."

END

For all media queries, please contact Charlie Bowcock on 0417 042 308 or media@snaicc.org.au