

SNAICC

National Voice for our Children

Doing things differently: Funding ACCOs to keep families together

Final Report

Acknowledgement

SNAICC acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. SNAICC's head office is located on the lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation, and SNAICC operates nationally.

SNAICC acknowledges Traditional Owners of all lands and waters across this continent and pays respects to Elders past and present. We acknowledge and respect their continued connection to Country, care for community and practice of culture for generations uncounted.

About SNAICC

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. We work for the fulfilment of the rights of our children, to ensure their safety, development, and wellbeing. We are a community-controlled peak leading systemic and structural reform to protect and advance the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, and their families and communities.

At the heart of SNAICC's work are the principles of community control and self-determination. We advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the design, governance and delivery of policies, systems and services that affect children and families, recognising this as essential to achieving sustained and meaningful outcomes.

SNAICC has a diverse national membership made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, services and individuals working across the child and family wellbeing and early childhood sectors. This includes organisations delivering early childhood education and care, child and family services, family support and reunification services, out-of-home care and kinship care, and services supporting children and young people at risk. As a

national peak body, SNAICC works closely with its members, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and communities, and as a member of the Coalition of Peaks, to ensure that lived experience, cultural knowledge and community priorities are central to our advocacy, submissions and recommendations.

SNAICC works with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, governments and non-Indigenous services to improve policy, service design and accountability, and to support culturally-led, evidence-informed approaches that deliver meaningful and lasting outcomes for children and young people.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

This work was commissioned on behalf of the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership. The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership is a shared decision-making forum between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Australian Governments created under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to improve early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Partnership is co-chaired by SNAICC – National Voice for our Children and the Australian Government Department of Education.

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Glossary

Acronym	Full name of acronym
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO	Aboriginal community-controlled organisations*
ACNC	Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission
Action Plan	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
BUABAH	Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home
Closing the Gap	National Agreement on Closing the Gap (see also “National Agreement”)
Deloitte	Deloitte Access Economics
DSS	Australian Government Department of Social Services
ECCDPP	Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
FaC	Families and Children
FSS	Family Support Services
FTE	Full-time equivalent
IFSS	Integrated Family Support Services
IRSEO	Indigenous Relative Socioeconomic Outcomes
LHS	Left hand side (in charts)
National Agreement	National Agreement on Closing the Gap (see also “Closing the Gap”)
NPYWC	NPY Women’s Council
RHS	Right hand side (in charts)
SACS	Social and Community Services
Safe and Supported	Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021–2031
SCHADS	Social Community, Home Care and Disability Services
SNAICC	SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency

* Throughout this report we refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) as these organisations are defined under clause 44 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We do not use the acronym ATSICCO.

Executive Summary

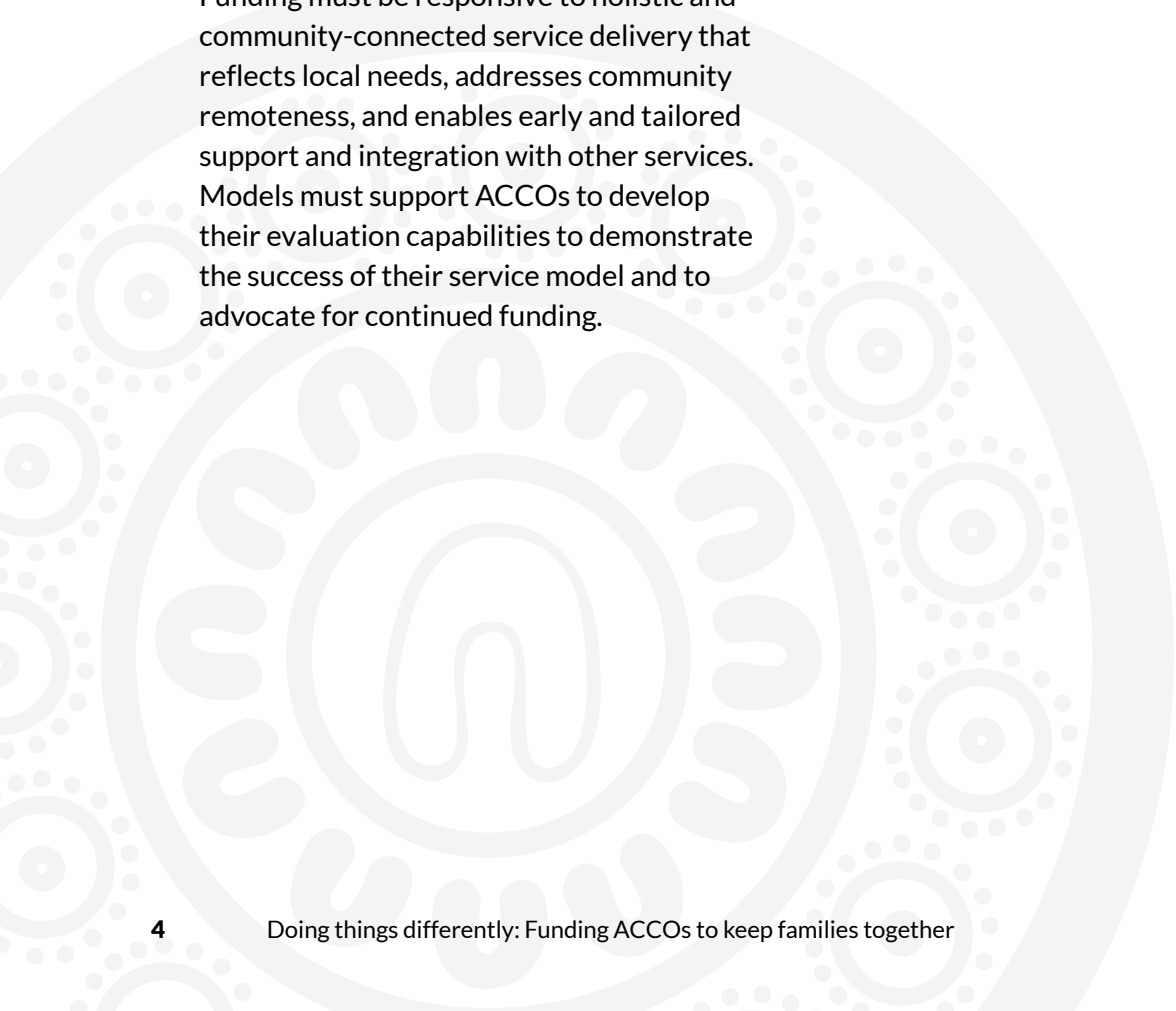
This report presents the findings and recommendations of research on funding model options for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) delivering child and family support services. The findings highlight core principles to guide the design of a funding model that is responsive to the sector and supportive of commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement). The report outlines and assesses funding model options and identifies a recommended funding model and related implementation considerations. Supporting recommendations provide a path forward for progressive implementation of the preferred funding model.

A growing body of evidence highlights that child and family services focused on prevention and early intervention play an important role in promoting children's wellbeing. This includes reducing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the child protection system. A review of relevant academic and grey literature reinforces the distinct child and family support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: holistic and integrated care that is trusted, trauma-informed, relevant to their identities and communities, and which has a strong focus on connection to culture and Country. While research gaps remain, the evidence clearly indicates that ACCOs are best placed to deliver community-led and culturally safe child and family services that meet the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is because ACCOs' holistic model of care, alongside their strong connections and responsiveness to their communities, supports better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Current funding arrangements do not reflect the strengths of ACCO-led service delivery nor do they respond effectively to the needs of services and communities. This report describes a funding environment marked by: administrative complexity that disadvantages ACCOs, inadequate resourcing that fails to recognise the needs of the sector, and rigid funding rules that limit the responsiveness of ACCOs for children and families. Current funding models do not reflect the true costs of holistic, culturally safe and community-led service delivery. This makes it more difficult for ACCOs to create the conditions for their service, workforce, communities, children, and families to thrive.

Five core themes emerged from the consultations conducted as part of the report that characterise the current funding challenges and that underpin a vision for a future fit-for-purpose funding model for ACCOs delivering child and family support services. These themes are:

- **Community leadership and self-determination** – ACCOs agreed that self-determination is fundamental to reform and to the work of their sector. Funding models need to be developed through shared decision-making in partnership between ACCOs and governments, and funding must be supportive of self-determination in program design and delivery. A new funding model should also include an additional cultural loading that values the cultural expertise of ACCOs and their communities.

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- **Administrative simplicity and flexibility**
– ACCOs benefit from consolidated, long-term and outcomes-focused funding that provides them with the flexibility they need to respond to the needs of their communities. A fit-for-purpose funding model would reduce administrative burden and enable ACCOs to deliver services flexibly without restrictive funding timeframes and reporting requirements.
 - **Organisational sustainability and sector growth** – current funding arrangements do not meet the full cost of delivering child and family support services and operating a thriving organisation. Funding models need to reflect the costs of operations, strategic planning, capital infrastructure, governance and investments that strengthen the ACCO-led child and family services sector as a whole.
 - **Holistic and responsive service design** – a whole-of-person and whole-of-community approach to support is one of the defining characteristics of ACCO-led service delivery. Funding must be responsive to holistic and community-connected service delivery that reflects local needs, addresses community remoteness, and enables early and tailored support and integration with other services. Models must support ACCOs to develop their evaluation capabilities to demonstrate the success of their service model and to advocate for continued funding.
 - **Strong and supported workforce** – workforce challenges are significant across the child and family support sector and impact ACCOs disproportionately and uniquely. A new funding model must prioritise long-term contracts and workforce development for staff, including pathways for attracting and retaining local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. It should incorporate considerations related to cultural load to recognise the unique costs that underpin ACCO-led service delivery, including the provision of culturally safe work environments. It must also support pay parity with government agencies and non-Indigenous services.

The report puts forward six principles to guide the design and assessment of funding models, based on the findings from consultations and analysis of directly provided and public data. These principles are:

Funding principles	Description
Self-determination (Community control)	Funding enables services to exercise genuine decision-making authority, with the flexibility to design and deliver supports that reflect local needs and community priorities.
Responsiveness	Funding reflects the diversity of the communities served by the services, responding to varying levels of need and recognising higher delivery costs in specific contexts to achieve a given outcome.
Transparency and simplicity	Funding is allocated through clear, consolidated and consistent processes. Administrative requirements are minimised so services can focus on delivering positive outcomes for children and families.
Certainty and continuity	Funding is stable and predictable, enabling services to plan and invest in workforce, infrastructure and other capabilities that deliver long-term services for community.
Sustainability and equity	Funding meets the full and true costs of culturally strong and high-quality service delivery. Government commits to funding arrangements that are stable, equitable and financially sustainable.
Accountability	Services are accountable for delivering culturally safe, strengths-based outcomes aligned with community expectations. Reporting approaches are proportionate, meaningful, and designed in partnership with services.

This report identifies a recommended funding model to align with these principles and deliver the level and structure of funding that is needed to support ACCOs delivering child and family services. A hybrid model was assessed as the most balanced approach across the principles, particularly given the importance of (i) responsiveness, (ii) self-determination, (iii) sustainability and equity, and (iv) certainty and continuity to ACCOs. The recommended model incorporates:

- **A fixed block component** that establishes a funding floor for every ACCO, supporting certainty, continuity and the ability to maintain core workforce and service capacity regardless of fluctuations in demand.
- **A needs-based component** that adjusts the funding level to respond the following key drivers of need: (i) community size, (ii) location, and (iii) community complexity and need.

The recommended model architecture has also been parameterised for implementation, calculating a ‘Funding Floor’ of approximately \$1.4 million per ACCO and needs-based loadings that consider size, region, and complexity. The report also refers to other implementation considerations including funding terms, establishment costs, and adjustments over time. To deliver this new model, the report recommends an eventual **pooled funding approach**, where multiple agencies combine funding into one shared pool, administered under a single governance structure and through a single commissioning agreement.

The proposed funding model is supported by seven supporting recommendations that have been proposed by SNAICC to guide successful implementation of the model and its core principles:

- **Recommendation 1:** New funding approaches across all governments prioritise self-determination as the foundation of successful reform. This requires that funding reforms reorient existing systems and structures from positioning ACCOs and communities as recipients of government funding to recognising their role as self-governing leaders in service design and delivery.
- **Recommendation 2:** The Australian Government commits to leading a national, systemic and sustainable approach to funding child and family support in the ACCO sector. This will involve partnering with state and territory governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including community-controlled organisations and peak bodies) to develop an agreed pathway towards a coordinated funding model that prioritises early and tailored supports and ACCO-led services.
- **Recommendation 3:** Governments commit to implementation of the funding model in jurisdictional reform as an immediate and urgent priority to increase and strengthen ACCO child and family service delivery. Government agencies create new and amend existing funding programs to embed the principles and architecture of the new funding model and align with commitments under the National Child and Family Investment Strategy.
- **Recommendation 4:** In implementing the Families and Children Activity Reforms, the Australian Government reflects core principles and components of the model in grant guidelines and the design and implementation of grant processes and assessments.
- **Recommendation 5:** Governments strengthen budget decision making processes, particularly within central agencies such as Treasury and Finance Departments, to ensure advice informing relevant budget decisions takes full account of the value of prevention investment in ACCOs, to support the identification and allocation of adequate funding for ACCO child and family services.
- **Recommendation 6:** In implementing the new funding model (and aligned reforms), all governments explicitly and systematically prioritise the sustainability of ACCO services and the growth of the community-controlled sector, including addressing inequities resulting from historical underinvestment in ACCOs.
- **Recommendation 7:** All governments continuously review and scale the new funding model to ensure that funding is responsive to changing contexts and sector growth. Scaling should prioritise meeting child and family need, ongoing investment in the ACCO workforce and provisioning for flexibility.

Introduction

This project seeks to drive better outcomes for children and families by ensuring the ACCOs that support them have the resources and funding they need. It complements key pieces of work, such as the National Child and Family Investment Strategy, to ensure government investment is well targeted to provide the greatest possible impact for families.

Governments across Australia have committed to build the community-controlled sector in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people under Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This project responds specifically to clause 45(d) of the National Agreement:

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations which deliver common services have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities, responsive to the needs of those receiving the services, and is developed in consultation with the relevant Peak body.”
(Closing the Gap, 2020).

The commitment to building a strong community-controlled sector includes a specific focus on strengthening the sectors supporting children and families, reflected in the Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan. This aligns with Closing the Gap Target 12 and the ambition to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent by 2031. Target 12 is currently regressing, with the rate of over-representation worsening year on year. A dramatic shift in approach is needed to change this trajectory and support better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Current funding models and allocation processes do not adequately support ACCO providers of child and family services to do the work necessary to meet Closing the Gap targets for child safety, wellbeing, and development. Building on previously commissioned and published research on funding approaches in integrated early years services, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) was contracted by the Australian Government Department of Education, on behalf of the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) to deliver a research project on funding model options for ACCOs in the child and family services sector. This project delivers on ECCDPP Priority 1B:

“Develop models for adequate and coordinated funding of ACCOs that deliver child and family services, in consideration of the real cost of service delivery, including core functions, capital infrastructure, wage parity and other workforce costs.” (SNAICC, 2026).

The ultimate goal of this project is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to access high quality, culturally safe services that meet their needs. This includes ensuring families can access early and tailored supports to prevent issues escalating and avoid the need for more acute interventions. To support this, the report outlines options for a needs-based funding model to enable the viable operation of ACCOs providing child and family services.

The funding model proposal is informed by consultation with ACCO providers to ensure it accurately reflects the needs of services, including current operating models and cost structures. It is also informed by advice from state, territory and Australian government agencies on their funding approaches and sector needs. It is underpinned by data analysis drawing on information provided directly by ACCOs and in publicly available reporting. The recommendations consider the best evidence-based options for strengthening the sector and ensuring that ACCOs are equipped to deliver the best possible supports for children and families.

This report and the funding model recommendations are intended to be considered in alignment with implementation of the National Child and Family Investment Strategy. This work acts as complementary guidance for how jurisdictions can operationalise a more responsive and effective approach to funding community-controlled child and family supports. The model provides the principles and components that should inform fit-for-purpose funding for ACCOs and which provide a basis for a shared national approach to funding the community-controlled sector, with a focus on early and tailored supports.

The report provides an adaptable model for decision-makers to utilise when pursuing much-needed funding reform in their own jurisdictional contexts. The funding model and any of its components should not be seen as optional and should be implemented fully and consistently. However, it has been designed to embed the flexibility necessary to adjust to differences in community, services and government policy and program settings. Current funding approaches are often reactive and based on historical patterns as opposed to anticipating future demand. The model is designed to support iterative and ongoing processes where governments are continuously working with communities to adapt models to changing needs, demographics, and workforce growth.

Project scope

The ACCO child and family services that have been considered in scope for this project are those that deliver early and tailored supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This scope ensures that the research project can deliver meaningful data, analysis and recommendations, given the breadth of ACCO child and family services that exist. It also complements the national priority to shift investment from tertiary interventions to early support and preventative services. The definition of early and tailored supports is based on the definition from the National Child and Family Investment Strategy developed under Safe and Supported (SNAICC, 2025a). According to the Strategy, early and tailored supports are programs, services and activities that:

- Provide support:
 - pre-birth and/or early in a child's life, with a focus on the first 1000 days from conception to age two; and/or
 - prior to or early in the stages of family challenges; and/or
 - prior to or to prevent further child protection intervention for families already engaged with child protection systems.
- Strengthen preventative and protective factors and address risk factors for children, young people (up to age 21) and families before they escalate
- May be inclusive of and linked to universal service provision, but include additional tailored elements to strengthen families
- Are tailored to address the drivers of child protection intervention, including reflecting the intensive support required for families with multiple and complex needs.

All activities, outcomes, and deliverables in this report have been focused on early and tailored supports that operate in the early intervention and prevention space. Statutory child protection systems and interventions are considered out of scope for this report.

The final report synthesises the research completed as part of this project and presents funding model options for the future of funding ACCOs delivering child and family support services. To support strong evidence-based analysis and recommendations, SNAICC subcontracted Deloitte Access Economics (Deloitte) to lead on financial modelling and collaborate on data analysis and the development of funding model options.

Policy context

Child and family support sits across a large and intersecting landscape of reforms to how governments work with and fund the community-controlled sector to lead and deliver support services. The proposed funding model is intended to complement these national and jurisdictional reforms and to provide a pathway towards a coordinated national approach that would consolidate reform efforts. These reforms include a broad spectrum of active commissioning reforms, place-based funding models, and early intervention reforms at the state and territory level, as well as key national frameworks and initiatives that intersect with the funding model.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement is a landmark document which brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians. Signed in 2020, the National Agreement was developed in genuine partnership between Australian governments and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations.

The National Agreement outlines four Priority Reforms which focus on changing the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Agreement also sets 19 national socio-economic targets across 17 socio-economic outcome areas that have an impact on life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Priority Reform 2 (Building the community-controlled sector) and Target 12 (By 2031, reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent) of the National Agreement relate directly to the early years sector. They provide a roadmap to strengthen ACCOs, and a means by which to measure success. The ECCDPP was established under Priority Reform 1 (Formal partnerships and shared decision-making) and has become a key shared decision-making body. The ECCDPP brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in the early years sector, and governments from all jurisdictions to jointly agree policy reforms which improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031

Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021–2031 (Safe and Supported; Commonwealth of Australia, 2021), seeks to better support children across Australia across a range of areas. Safe and Supported is a framework for all Australian children, young people and families, with a targeted focus on four priority groups that experience disadvantage or are vulnerable to abuse and neglect. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026 (Action Plan; Commonwealth of Australia, 2022) sits alongside the Safe and Supported framework, and brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, Australian governments, and non-government organisations to jointly develop strategies, scoping exercises and plans which improve outcomes for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. In particular, the Action Plan responds to Target 12 of the National Agreement. This research project will also support existing commitments in the Action Plan to transition early supports to ACCOs (Action 2) and to build the ACCO workforce (Action 4).

The Action Plan is supported by the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group, which comprises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and experts in the child and family sector. Its membership includes representatives of peak bodies, leading community-controlled child and family services, academics and Commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Leadership Group works with Community Services Ministers from each jurisdiction through the Safe and Supported Shared Decision-Making Committee, which meets regularly to discuss and agree priorities and actions which give effect to the Action Plan.

The National Child and Family Investment Strategy

The National Child and Family Investment Strategy is a key action under the Action Plan. The Strategy focuses on shifting investment towards ACCOs to deliver an increased proportion of culturally appropriate child and family services. The Australian Government has committed \$10 million over 5 years (2022–23 to 2026–27) to develop the National Child and Family Investment Strategy and an Innovation Fund.

SNAICC worked with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to develop the Strategy, including consulting with state and territory governments, Australian government agencies, ACCOs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and non-Indigenous non-government organisations. The Strategy has been completed and approved through the Safe and Supported Shared Decision-Making Committee.

Families and Children Activity Review

DSS is currently considering reforming Families and Children (FaC) Activity funding programs. The proposed changes under this reform seek to maximise outcomes for children, young people, and families, and support providers to deliver flexible and responsive services.

The proposed changes will apply to the following five FaC Activity programs:

- 1) Children and Parenting Support
- 2) Family Mental Health Support Services
- 3) Communities for Children Facilitating Partners
- 4) Family and Relationship Services
- 5) Specialised Family Violence Services.

DSS are proposing to merge the five above programs into one single national program. The aim of this reform is to better achieve efficiency in the delivery of services, through funding arrangements that streamline administrative requirements and a focus on outcome-based reporting. The revised FaC Activity program structure is proposed to support activities that contribute to two major outcomes:

- 1) Parents and caregivers are empowered to raise healthy, resilient children
- 2) Children are supported to grow into healthy, resilient adults.

The revised funding program will be designed to be flexible, recognising that achieving the above outcomes may not be directly evident through transaction-based contractual reporting.

Under the proposed restructure, funding applications for service provision will be assessed under three activity streams. The three streams consulted on are:

- 1) National programs and information services
- 2) Prevention and early intervention
- 3) Intensive family supports.

Providers will be able to select the stream that best fits their service. Providers who deliver services across multiple funding streams will be able to do so under a single grant agreement, providing flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness.

The proposed changes are underpinned by four priorities:

- 1) Investing early to improve family wellbeing
- 2) Prioritising connected, co-located and integrated services
- 3) Ensuring services are informed by and responsive to community need
- 4) Improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, by increasing the number of ACCOs delivering supports in locations with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

Subject to government confirmation of the final program model, reform of the FaC Activity is a significant opportunity to implement the findings of the ACCO funding model project. Through this process, funding agreement processes may be strengthened to support the growth of ACCO leadership, expand the provision of early and tailored supports, and further the transition of resources and funding to the ACCO sector. This work is in line with the priority reforms of the National Agreement, and the system elements outlined in the National Child and Family Investment Strategy.

Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families

Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families was an initiative led by DSS in partnership with SNAICC and aimed to increase ACCO involvement in delivering DSS-funded family and children activity programs. Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families identified existing knowledge and consulted with ACCOs to identify the strengths, needs, barriers, and opportunities ACCOs experience in accessing DSS funding and delivering family and children activity programs.

The final report identified significant ongoing systemic barriers faced by ACCOs when accessing funding for family and children services. These barriers include competitive grant processes that advantage large established organisations, reporting and administrative burdens that are not supported by core operational funding, and misalignment between how services are funded and the services that communities need. Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families found that ACCOs urgently require sustainable, dedicated, and flexible funding to build on the strengths of the sector in delivering culturally responsive services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Current funding approaches were found to be unsupportive of the right to self-determination. They also do not appropriately value and prioritise the capabilities of the ACCO sector. Currently, funding processes for children and family services are characterised by competitive transactional grant and tender processes that involve service providers submitting proposals or tendering for contracts to deliver services. This process places ACCOs in a position where they must compete with each other, undermining their ability to build partnerships and advantaging non-Indigenous organisations. The process also creates significant costs and administrative burdens and is not consistent with place-based approaches. As a result,

current resourcing for the sector is inadequate, in part due to a large proportion of available funding continuing to be held by mainstream non-Indigenous organisations. This imbalance is influenced by reliance on inappropriate funding processes that value low-cost service delivery provided by non-Indigenous organisations, over other benefits like cultural capability.

The report identified the following recommendations to improve ACCO access to funding:

- Recommended Action 1: Embed community-led decision-making at every stage of funding development and allocation
- Recommended Action 2: Prioritise ACCOs as providers of children and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- Recommended Action 3: Invest in the growth, development, and sustainability of ACCOs through core-functions funding
- Recommended Action 4: Reduce administrative burdens across the system
- Recommended Action 5: Increase investment in and support for ACCO-led research and evaluation
- Recommended Action 6: Build government capacity to work better with ACCOs.

Notably, it was found that non-enforceable commitments by government or non-Indigenous organisations to increase ACCO funding or transition funding to ACCOs would be unlikely to be sufficient to overcome ongoing underinvestment. Recognising the critical role that ACCOs play in delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children, Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families recommended that a suitable proportion of funding should be quarantined and made available specifically to ACCOs. This proportion should be determined by reference to the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who

receive services and their need. Through this process, government can ensure that funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services would not be directed to non-Indigenous organisations and prevent non-Indigenous organisations from competing with ACCOs for much-needed funding.

The findings of the Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families report show that fundamental changes to the FaC Activity funding program are urgently required. This ACCO funding model project is aligned with and supportive of the findings and recommendations of Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families. This project acknowledges that implementation will require significant cross-government and cross-departmental collaboration – along with true shared decision-making with the ACCO sector.



Literature Review

A review of the relevant academic and grey literature highlights the distinct child and family support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the importance of community-led service delivery for providing holistic and culturally safe support. Evidence also highlights that existing funding models are not proportionately and appropriately resourcing the community-controlled sector to provide integrated services and meet the needs of their communities, including the need for consistency in skilled workforces. Through the review, four themes emerged as guiding principles for effective child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Investment in community control

Self-determination is and should be central to any work focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, communities, and the services that support them. AbSec and the Aboriginal Legal Service's (2021, p. 8) Honouring Family is Culture framework sets out an organising approach where self-determination and public accountability are the foundation on which legal, policy, funding, and infrastructure reforms must be built to drive change.

Community control is one expression of self-determination that needs to be recognised and invested in as legitimate and essential self-governance. Self-determined and community-controlled bodies are best placed to lead and provide supports that drive better outcomes for communities. Culturally safe child and family support requires that providers not only understand the community but that supports are led and delivered by community. Research by Waller et al. (2022) on perceptions

and experiences of parenting programs among First Nations peoples recommends a community-led approach to programs where community expertise and resources are used to support whole-of-community ownership and engagement.

Community ownership is a distinct organisational model with different requirements for resourcing and supporting governance and operations. It is not possible to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families without investing in and adequately funding collaboration and community-control in service design and delivery (Lee-Hammond, 2013; Closing the Gap, 2020). As stakeholders and partners in Closing the Gap, community-controlled organisations need to be funded not only to provide services but to strengthen themselves and their sector and engage in shared decision-making processes under the National Agreement (Closing the Gap, 2020). One essential component of this engagement in shared decision-making is working in genuine partnership to design cost-benefit analyses and evaluations that clearly identify and value culture and its impact on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Cumming & Faulkner, 2024).

Working in partnership is a core component of Closing the Gap and the Safe and Supported framework, as well as of successful service design and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Strong partnerships facilitate quality services and programs that are culturally safe and have community buy-in (Ussher et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2024). Genuine partnership requires transformation on the part of government and non-Indigenous parties (Closing the Gap, 2020).

Limited commitment to genuine partnership and shared decision-making is currently delaying what is required to drive reform (Productivity Commission, 2024).

Partnerships are essential to systemic change but are complicated by power imbalances and discordant ways of working and understanding the world (Cullen et al., 2020). Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation has developed a model of systemic decolonisation in interagency partnerships (Cullen et al., 2020; SNAICC, 2022a). This enhances workforce capability through shared language and collective learning around colonisation and racism, generating individual, organisational and systemic decolonisation to disable power structures (Cullen et al., 2020; SNAICC, 2022a). Taking action to decolonise agencies and create strong and genuine partnerships requires investment in the ACCO sector as knowledge leaders and partners.

Currently, community-controlled services rely on a mix of funding sources to create sustainability. Navigating these different streams is a burden for organisations and awareness of new funding sources and their appropriateness for each service needs to be supported (KPMG, 2020). These patchwork funding arrangements result in inequitable access to services and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, especially those with the highest support needs (SNAICC, 2024a). With a variety of program- and service-based funding streams, ACCOs are not supported to resource their organisational development, including recruitment and retention of skilled local workforces.

Evidence shows that flexible block funding can support success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (Moran et al, 2014; SNAICC, 2024a). Flexible funding enables flexible service delivery, which is particularly important for trauma-aware and culturally responsive support (Chamberlain et al., 2022a; Stanley et al., 2014).

Key elements and principles that contribute to a thriving and effective community-led organisation/space include community-ownership, self-determination, sustainability, and strong governance (Kingsley et al., 2021). Organisational elements such as governance and financial sustainability create the environment required for services to be integrated and culturally responsive. Stable, core funding is essential for supporting the governance capabilities and accountability mechanisms of community-controlled organisations (Moran et al., 2014).

Many of the child and family support programs that have been implemented, whether by ACCOs or non-Indigenous services, are not able to be comprehensively evaluated because of how data is collected and reported. An evaluation of the Queensland Government's investments in community-based referral and secondary family support services found that there is not enough data being collected on the impact of family support services, and that there needs to be a stronger focus on measuring outcomes that are meaningful and reflect the progress of families (Queensland Child and Family Commission, 2021). In order to demonstrate their strengths and impact, particularly to governments, ACCOs need to be funded to develop their own data and evaluation capabilities to tell their stories their way.

ACCOs also have unique workforce funding and development needs. In remote communities, staff working at community-controlled services need professional qualifications and experience, cultural skills, and proficiency in holistic ways of working (Bourke et al., 2024). To be responsive and successful, community-controlled organisations also need to employ local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff (Bourke et al., 2024; Bowes & Grace, 2014). Uncertain funding prevents ACCOs from being able to build and maintain a stable local workforce and invest in their development (SNAICC, 2025a). Funding approaches and investment frameworks also need to prioritise

strengthening the ACCO workforce to ensure pay parity between community-controlled and non-Indigenous services (SNAICC, 2025a). Investment in workforce development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforces also needs to consider the risk of moral injury for staff who are working within mainstream systems that harm families (Chamberlain et al., 2022b). Furthermore, while local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers have a deeper understanding of community needs, they also have increased personal accountability to community.

Appropriate and effective funding for ACCOs is underpinned by five core principles: certainty, control, reliability, responsiveness, and administrative simplicity (SNAICC, 2024a). These principles are aligned to the strengths and needs of ACCOs as unique service providers and as voices of community. In the child and family support space, national frameworks are prioritising investment in early and tailored supports, which focus on preventative and early intervention services, strengthening protective factors, and addressing risk factors for children and families (SNAICC, 2025a). Investment in early and tailored supports and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children require shifting funding to the community-controlled sector, and towards funding levels proportionate to need (SNAICC, 2025a; SNAICC, 2023). Currently, only six per cent of child and family services funding goes to ACCOs (SNAICC, 2024b), while proportionate funding would be 30–40% (SNAICC, 2023) based on levels of child protection intervention. Appropriate funding for community-controlled services needs to be both higher in value and transformed in how it is structured and accessed.

Holistic wellbeing and support needs

Holistic and integrated care is consistently identified in the literature as essential to high-quality and culturally appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Children and young people have a strong understanding of their own wellbeing needs as holistic and based on an interconnected network of factors where family, culture, and community are central (Priest et al., 2015; Smallwood et al., 2022). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members similarly characterise their wellbeing needs as bringing together socio-economic factors such as housing, financial security, and employment (Lowell et al., 2018; Prehn et al., 2024) with connection to Country, community, and culture (Tootell et al., 2024). A review by Butler et al. (2019) identified nine interconnected dimensions of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: “autonomy; empowerment and recognition; family and community; culture, spirituality and identity; Country; basic needs; work, roles and responsibilities; education; physical health; and mental health.” Measures of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are diverse and distinct and responding to families requires tailored and holistic support from services seeking to improve outcomes.

Child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities operates on a continuum, from early and preventative supports to intensive services and supports for families already involved with child protection, such as family restoration. ACCOs work closely with children and families to understand their needs and provide critical support in coordinating services and advocating for families with other service systems, including schools and government agencies (SNAICC, 2015; SNAICC, 2022b). ACCOs prioritise family participation and leadership in decision-making, supporting families to be actively engaged in decisions about what their children need and what service they

will receive (AbSec, 2017; SNAICC, 2022a). Evidence-informed and successful child and family support programs focus on making long-term and positive changes for families to improve health, safety, and wellbeing (Social Compass, 2020). Supports for families are extremely tailored, comprehensively assessing and responding specifically to the needs of that family (SNAICC, 2022b). Services also engage the whole of community to strengthen connections and support networks for sustainable support and improved social and economic outcomes (AbSec, 2017).

An improved and national approach to early and tailored supports for children and families is the first Focus Area of Safe and Supported (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). Priorities under this Focus Area highlight the importance of integrating government services and systems, developing multidisciplinary models, and strengthening the interface between child and family services and other services that address determinants of child safety and support family wellbeing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2021). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan under Safe and Supported focuses on investing in the community-controlled sector and working across portfolios to address the social determinants of child safety and wellbeing (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022). The associated National Child and Family Investment Strategy reiterates the importance of early supports that address the co-occurring factors that impact the risk of child protection involvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (SNAICC, 2025a).

The evidence consistently supports holistic service provision as a priority for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families. For child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to be effective, it must be not only culturally appropriate but integrated, recognising and responding to the child and/or families' needs as a whole (Barrett et al. 2022; Moore, 2021; Toombs et al., 2021). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

in their early years, evidence supports a focus on early intervention and holistic programs that support parenting, early learning, and health in tandem (Bowes & Grace, 2014).

In Australia, the Integrated Child and Family Support Centre service model operates at hundreds of sites across the country and delivers wraparound support for children and families (Social Ventures Australia, 2021). Community-controlled services are unique providers of Integrated Child and Family Support Centre models, best placed to provide this holistic support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities (Social Ventures Australia, 2021). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-managed services have been successfully delivering holistic programs and managing thriving organisations for families and communities (Morley, 2015). The ACCO sector excels in wraparound support and holistic models of care, due in large part to their deep understanding of and accountability to their local communities (SNAICC, 2023).

AbSec's (2017) Aboriginal Intensive Family Based Service Plus model recognises the diversity of challenges that children and families are experiencing when they need support. It proposes intensive and time-limited supports provided in the home that link families into a holistic system of services and supports. While one program or service cannot address every need continuously, ACCO ways of working model best practice in considering what families need and providing a holistic network of support where children and families feel heard and cared for as whole people. Services designed by and for community emphasise 'tailored, holistic and coordinated support' (Queensland Family and Child Commission, 2021) that is grounded in culture, community, and healing.

ACCOs are essential providers of early and integrated support for children and families, but the way they are funded does not recognise the need for and their strengths in holistic care. Under current funding arrangements, ACCOs

are limited in their ability to meet the holistic needs of their communities and the objectives of frameworks such as Closing the Gap and Safe and Supported (SNAICC, 2023). They are often unable to exercise self-determination and decision-making authority in what services they provide and how, meaning supports are less responsive to community needs and goals (SNAICC, 2023). Increasing provision of holistic, early, and tailored supports requires shifting funding and services to ACCOs (SNAICC, 2025a). Currently, reviews suggest that the majority of ACCO services are crisis-related, with less than a third focused on early intervention and prevention (McCalman et al., 2025). Research found that funding agreements drove the characteristics of services, with community-controlled organisations likely to receive funding for crisis-oriented services while non-Indigenous, non-government organisations were more often funded for preventive programs (McCalman et al., 2025). Evidence also indicates that workforces are not supported to work in integrated ways that improve the access to and quality of services (Barracough et al., 2021). Greater investment in early intervention and holistic support is essential for all children and families, but funding ACCOs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is critical to ensure services are responsive to their wellbeing needs and utilise the strengths of cultural ways of raising children (SNAICC, 2025a).

Providing new and holistic services comes with compounding challenges for services. Short-term funding cycles for programs such as social and emotional wellbeing supports make it difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to sustainably provide the services their communities need (Onnis et al., 2019). When services are supported to integrate programs and expand offerings, they create opportunities for sustainability and iterative evaluation that improves practice over time (Onnis et al., 2019). In the early childhood education and care sector, analysis of funding

sources found that ACCOs were accessing up to eight different grant and funding streams from the Commonwealth in addition to 2–12 streams in their state or territory to deliver their services (SNAICC, 2024a). Each grant program and funding source has its own scope, contract duration, and administrative requirements that make delivering a suite of complementary services difficult to manage for any organisation, and especially so for smaller, community-based ACCOs.

Trust and trauma-informed practice

The literature strongly supports the importance of trust in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support, particularly on positive service outcomes and willingness to seek support. Research into the appropriateness of wellbeing and mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people found that children and youth were very reluctant to seek help and would only do so if they had a strong sense of safety, trust, and relationality with the service provider (McCalman et al., 2022). Similarly, privacy and trust were the most important elements of maternal care and support identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women (McCalman et al., 2023). While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents recognised the value and need for supports such as parenting programs, they would often delay or avoid seeking out these services due to a lack of trust in providers and apprehension regarding cultural safety (Waller et al., 2022).

ACCOs develop trust with families by tailoring their services to the family based on genuine engagement, comprehensive assessment, coordination, and a focus on positive outcomes (Tilbury, 2015). The approaches modelled by community-controlled organisations build relationships with family members and kinship networks by matching case workers with families and keeping caseloads lower to ensure workers have the time and space to communicate

authentically with families and establish trust (Tilbury, 2015). While ACCOs generally have a strong reputation in the community, trust and relationality with each family is still a priority (SNAICC, 2022a). Programs such as Waminda's Nabu Aboriginal family preservation and restoration do not assume or expect trust between families and the service in the first instance and focus on establishing relationships and trust through shared cultural understanding, deep listening, yarning, and critically reflective practice (SNAICC 2022a). Community-controlled organisations value trust as highly as the children and families they support do and invest a commensurate amount of time and resources into strong and trusting relationships.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, distrust of child and family support services is connected to the past and ongoing trauma of children being removed from their parents when or shortly after they sought care and support (Chamberlain et al., 2022a). Outside of child protection involvement, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have also often experienced higher rates of stress during the perinatal period and been less likely to report being treated with kindness and respect by service providers when seeking care than non-Indigenous women (Parker et al., 2014). Trust in services is based on demonstrating understanding, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families have distinct needs, experiences, strengths, and values that must be understood to establish trust in providers. Building this trust takes time and requires investment in prioritising reciprocity and strong relationships (Bowes & Grace, 2014). Trust is an essential component of trauma-aware and culturally safe support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families (Fiolet et al., 2023; Chamberlain et al., 2022a).

Trauma and trauma-informed practice are critical considerations in what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need from family support. The time when a person with previous experiences of trauma becomes a parent and

their child's early years can be deeply distressing but is also an important opportunity for healing and processing (Fiolet et al., 2023). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been repeatedly exposed to both individual and intergenerational trauma since colonisation, and without support these experiences can affect parenting and continue a cycle of intergenerational trauma impacts (Fiolet et al., 2023; Reid et al., 2022). Parents who have a history of trauma related to childhood maltreatment have unique support needs in the perinatal period and in raising their children, and holistic responses focused on protective factors such as financial security, social and family support, and parent training can significantly improve outcomes (Chamberlain et al., 2019).

Critically, mainstream child protection and child and family support systems are not only not responsive to the trauma of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families but often actively traumatising. Established systems are built around assessing the risk of and intervening in potentially unsafe home environments, and do not consider the trauma that can and does result from being removed from home, family, and community (Chamberlain et al., 2022b). Trauma is multifaceted and complex, and child and family services systems are often focused on trauma that occurs inside the family rather than trauma caused by systems and socio-economic environments. Responding to trauma requires trauma-informed and integrated practice that brings together streams of service delivery and support to provide holistic and sustainable care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to heal and thrive (Onnis et al., 2019). Trauma-informed practice is a pillar of successful child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, alongside similarly essential principles such as strengths-based approaches and community leadership (Newton et al., 2024).

Community-controlled organisations prioritise trauma-informed practice as a foundational component of their services. ACCOs consider trauma and healing to be essential to care and support that responds to the interconnected needs of their communities (SNAICC, 2023; VACCHO, 2025). While it is also important to improve the capabilities of mainstream services to respond to trauma, First Nations-led services have demonstrated they are best suited to provide trauma-informed and culturally safe child and family support (Wright et al., 2019). Government funding is part of strengthening trauma awareness and responsiveness across the system (Wright et al., 2019). The deep community and cultural knowledge of ACCOs means that they understand trauma as it is experienced by their communities and are able to tailor their services to meet needs and support healing at crucial points in families' journeys. Demonstrating excellence in trauma awareness is part of how ACCOs establish trust with their communities as safe spaces to seek support.

Connection to culture and community

While there are common determinants of child and family wellbeing that are shared across all Australian families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families have distinct needs associated with connection to Country, culture, and their communities. Engagement with culture is positively associated with better social and emotional wellbeing outcomes for First Nations young people internationally (Doery et al., 2022), and connection to Country and culture are critical strengths and protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families (Canuto et al., 2019). Cultural connection is fundamental to the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and requires connection to family to foster and strengthen cultural identity and belonging (Krakouer et al., 2017). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents consider strong cultural identity as essential to their wellbeing and build and

maintain this identity by knowing and connecting to their own Country and community, as well as connecting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and communities more broadly (Tootell et al., 2024). Culture and relationality, with their community, service providers, and families, also support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to heal from complex trauma (Reid et al., 2022). Literature also highlights that culture is also a protective factor for children experiencing vulnerability and trauma, including family violence, and that maintaining connection to culture is essential for long-term recovery and healing (Sorby et al., 2023).

Strengths-based approaches are fundamental to good practice in health and wellbeing services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Askew et al., 2020). Services that are culturally safe understand the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity that empowers people and communities (Askew et al., 2020). When services are not strengths-based and culturally aware, they perpetuate harm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by being unresponsive to their stories and instead continuing experiences of racism and feelings of powerlessness (Smallwood et al., 2022). Successful parenting supports have culture at the centre, and prioritise including other family, kin, and community members in programs focused on raising and caring for children (Toombs et al., 2021). Research into supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through feeding practices and mealtimes similarly found that creating space for connection with family and community and using strengths-based approaches led by community and employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers were foundational strengths of these supports (Chilman et al., 2024). The importance of strengths-based approaches is reflected in the Safe and Supported Framework and Action Plan, which are aligned to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theory of Change explaining how the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander leaders, communities, and organisations will create better outcomes for children and families (Commonwealth of Australia, 2022).

Understanding of the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comes from community, as service providers, Elders, leaders, and peers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men described an eagerness to participate in more parenting programs, especially programs where they could connect and learn with other fathers (Canuto et al., 2019). Similarly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers valued early intervention parenting programs that emphasised peer support (Ussher et al., 2016). In response, researchers recommended strengths-based program design that recognised the resilience of mothers (Ussher et al., 2016). Another study focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fathers reinforced the importance of gathering places where fathers can connect with peers and services that celebrate the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fatherhood (Clifford-Motopi et al., 2022). In Canada, an Elders Mentoring Program helped pregnant mothers and their partners through fostering a multi-generational support network and improving cultural security within the support environment (Oster et al., 2021).

Cultural safety is a critical enabler of successful parenting programs, and a lack of cultural competency is a barrier to access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other culturally and linguistically diverse families (Molloy et al., 2022). Data shows that parenting programs are underused, and that less than one per cent of families who are estimated to have a child at risk have accessed a high-quality parenting program (Molloy et al., 2022). Parenting support is a core component of early and tailored child and family support (SNAICC, 2025a), but mainstream services generally do not have the cultural safety skills to deliver trusted and effective parenting programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents want to learn and get support from each other in a way that strengthens

their community connections and celebrates them and their identity. Community-controlled services provide that deep understanding and the space for peer-to-peer connection and support.

A study by Stanley et al. (2024) evaluated the feasibility of a co-created cultural program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, finding that participants found the most enjoyment and value in learning about and sharing culture, connecting with community and peers, and going out on Country. Researchers determined that programs supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, especially those focused on cultural connection, need to be flexible and responsive to the voices of communities and Country (Stanley et al., 2024). Adaptability is a necessary component of child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with services and programs needing to be flexible and sensitive to the needs of individuals and families, as well as the local community context (Stock et al., 2013).

Having strong cultural governance of a service has facilitated success in Intensive Family Support Services (Social Compass, 2020). In these services, community leadership has led to diversity of supports across service sites where providers have adapted the practice model to provide the specifically culturally appropriate support that local communities need (Social Compass, 2020). In Mparntwe/ Alice Springs, Central Australian Aboriginal Congress' Targeted and Intensive Family Support Services have been delivering place-based supports based on a bi-cultural model (SNAICC, 2022b). In this model, Congress' deep community knowledge and connection is the foundation of responsive service delivery (SNAICC, 2022b). Current funding approaches are not sufficiently flexible to support community-controlled services to adapt their offerings, restricting organisations to government-defined programs and deliverables that may not be responsive to families (SNAICC, 2024a).

Equitable and culturally safe service provision focuses on critical reflection and addressing personal and structural biases to deliver care that is culturally safe as defined by the person and their community (Curtis et al., 2019). While non-Indigenous services can improve their practice towards cultural safety, ACCOs understand what cultural safety and cultural responsiveness means to their communities and families. Deep and intimate knowledge of the community accessing support is an essential component of culturally safe and successful services and programs for First Nations children and families (Oster et al., 2021). Community-controlled services have that knowledge embedded in their operations, governance, and service provision. They understand community because they are community, and are by nature a hub of culture, community, and connection to Country.

Conclusion

The literature strongly supports the unique strengths and role of ACCOs in meeting the distinct child and family support needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. ACCOs provide holistic support that addresses the interconnected domains of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, which current funding and workforce development approaches do not adequately support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also have distinct values and needs regarding the trust they have with service providers and the capacity of services to be trauma informed and responsive to personal and intergenerational trauma. Child and family support that is effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families requires a deep understanding of their identities and communities, and a strong focus on connection to Country and culture.

The findings of this evidence review reinforce that children and families need community-led support that celebrates their strengths and is responsive to their holistic wellbeing needs, and that ACCOs are best placed to provide that support.

Research has demonstrated that successful support programs for First Nations children and families are co-designed with or led by communities. Community-controlled services embed the community buy-in and voice to deliver flexible and tailored supports and create shared spaces where children and families can connect with their community. These relationships with community and being able to share and seek support from service providers, Elders, and peers who understand them is one of the most valuable components of child and family support programs. ACCOs also support connection to Country and culture, which is a core determinant of wellbeing and a protective factor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout their lives.

While the evidence is clear that ACCOs are leading in successful supports for children and families, it also highlights the barriers they currently experience in securing funding that is sustainable and fit-for-purpose. The administrative complexity of different funding streams and short funding and grant cycles create complex conditions for ACCOs trying to resource their services and often leave services underfunded in a system that privileges larger organisations with economies of scale and more capacity for a focus on operations and growth. When ACCOs are funded appropriately and supported to establish important support structures such as strong governance frameworks, they thrive, but current funding models do not provide the level or flexibility of funding to meet that threshold.

Adequate funding for ACCOs needs to recognise the strengths of their service model and resource their governance, operations, infrastructure, and workforce development to strengthen services and the sector at large. Funding also needs to have flexibility built in to ensure that services can adapt their offerings to meet the needs of their local communities and continuously improve their practice and the outcomes they deliver for families. While research is limited on the specific conditions and considerations for funding community-controlled services, the evidence that is available supports dedicated models where flexibility and community leadership are prioritised.

ACCO Child and Family Support Model

Community-controlled organisations operate distinct service models to meet the needs and embed the values of their communities. In child and family support, ACCO service models expand on what might be considered core child and family service provision to deliver a holistic model of care for families that is grounded in cultural safety and community connection. ACCOs know what works for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families – a holistic and strengths-based early intervention model of support. This model responds to the diverse needs of children and families and how service and support systems need to be integrated to provide accessible and effective supports. A fit-for-purpose funding model for ACCOs needs to be responsive to the diversity of the ACCO sector as well as their shared support model.

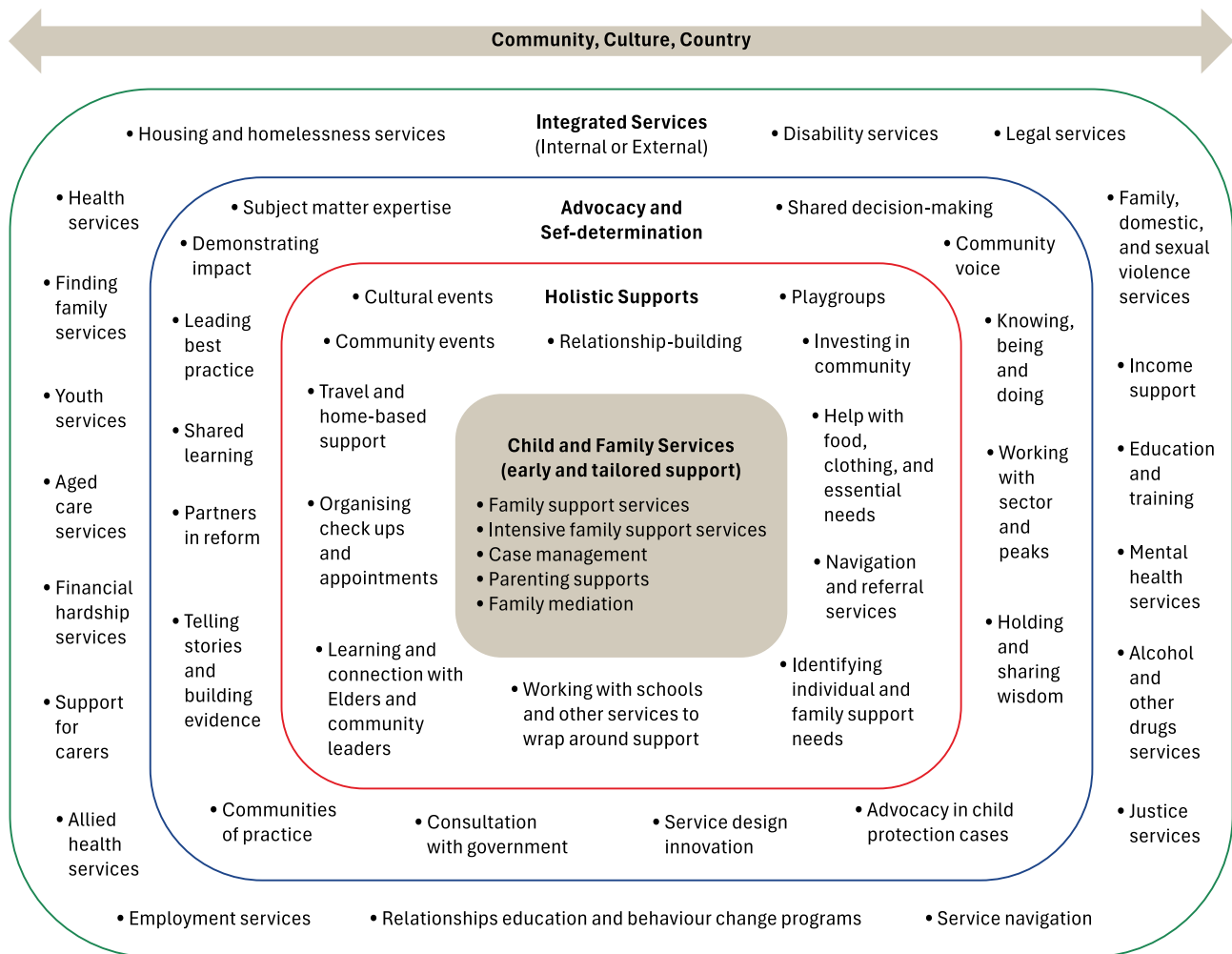
The ACCO child and family support service model sits within the broader framework of how ACCOs provide support for their communities. By wrapping around children and families with strong connections to community, culture, and Country, ACCOs embody a strengths-based approach to support. Led by representatives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ACCOs start from a foundation of cultural safety and responsiveness and have a strong understanding of the varied and complex needs of the children and families they support. ACCOs see and treat child and family support needs as interconnected to other cultural, health, social, and economic needs that need to be addressed for children and families to thrive. The ACCO service model works concentrically,

building supports in relationship to each other to create a strong and supportive ecosystem where families feel safe and connected. The model visualisation in Figure 1 presents a non-exhaustive list of the roles that ACCOs play and the services they want to be able to provide (or see provided) to their communities.

No single organisation can provide all these services for all the individuals and families in their community that need support, but ACCOs think about the suite of services they do provide as part of this web of supports. The ACCO service model is always looking beyond what the service itself is funded to provide, with the 'no wrong door' approach as fundamental to their way of working. The model seeks to ensure that children and families accessing any kind of support service are provided with other essential supports and connected with other services that address their holistic needs.

This project focuses on early and tailored child and family supports, noting that ACCOs are rarely, if ever, providing only these services. The proposed funding model is considered to be the core funding level required for child and family support service provision, with the assumption that other funding sources would be resourcing additional programs and service streams. The funding model is intended to be used alongside other funding streams, including models such as the one put forward in the Funding Model Options for ACCO Integrated Early Years Services (SNAICC, 2024a), to support ACCOs to deliver holistic services with more effective resourcing levels and structures.

Figure 1: ACCO Child and Family Support Model



Engagement and analysis

It is evident that current funding models have not set ACCOs up for success. The current funding landscape has been designed by and for the mainstream non-Indigenous sector and is not responsive to the distinct needs, contexts, and strengths of ACCOs. National frameworks such as the National Agreement and Safe and Supported have recognised the need for increased and transformed investment in the community-controlled sector as essential partners in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

This project has sought to build on that foundational understanding and the existing body of evidence on the unique role of ACCOs (as highlighted through the Literature Review) through in-depth consultation with sector and government stakeholders. Stakeholder engagement for this project has focused on specific questions about child and family support funding to develop a detailed understanding of precisely how and why current funding models are failing and what a new funding model needs to deliver to be successful.

The key questions for the engagement phase have been focused on:

- The extent to which current resourcing of early and tailored supports is addressing the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, including identifying unmet needs.
- How ACCO ways of working in early and tailored child and family supports:
 - integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, kinship relationships, and cultural authority
 - address the holistic wellbeing and development of children and families
 - reflect ways of knowing, being and doing in practice and operating models for early and tailored supports.
- Challenges and opportunities for improvement in funding processes, including funding cycles, procurement approaches, reporting and monitoring.
- Strengths, gaps and limitations in current funding models for early and tailored supports, including examples of promising practice.
- Funding implications of navigating service delivery relationships with non-Indigenous organisations and any cross-subsidisation/supplementation of funding through other sources such as donations/fundraising.
- Other funding considerations including infrastructure, and workforce issues such as wage parity, recognition of cultural expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, workforce competition, recruitment and retention challenges, and additional resources needed to remunerate staff adequately.

Engagement process

The project has used mixed methods to collect qualitative and quantitative data from a broad range of ACCOs delivering child and family supports. Data collection has been iterative, and activities have overlapped to enable delivery within the overall project timeline and provide stakeholders with multiple opportunities to engage with the project. SNAICC has prioritised capturing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community voice

in consultation, promoting engagement opportunities through its strong network of 150+ member organisations and network of state-based peak bodies, sector networks, and partners. SNAICC has also engaged representatives from state, territory and Australian government agencies responsible for child and family policy and programs through existing relationships with these agencies including as members of shared decision-making forums such as the ECCDPP and the Safe and Supported Shared Decision-Making Committee.

The engagement process has sought to gather key stakeholder perspectives to fully understand the current funding challenges and essential components of a new approach to funding community-controlled child and family support. Consultations have been designed in alignment with the previous approach for the Funding Model Options for ACCO Integrated

Early Years Services project and intended to facilitate robust engagement while minimising the time burden on participants. The views and information provided by participants have been directly incorporated into the recommendations for a new, dedicated funding model that recognises the strengths of ACCOs.

The engagement process has been underpinned by principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and reciprocity, prioritising ACCOs' preferences for how they provide information to the project and how it is used. Data collection for the engagement process has occurred across six phases, including testing draft findings and recommendations with participants. Each of these phases is focused on different participant group/consultation methods to ensure all key stakeholders have the opportunity to engage at the time and in the way that they choose.

Table 1: Engagement activities and participants

Engagement Activity	Stakeholder Group	Number of Participants/ Responses
Survey (October – November 2025)	Community-controlled child and family service providers	18
Sector Forums (November 2025)	Community-controlled child and family service providers, SNAICC members	24
Interviews with ACCO Representatives (October – November 2025)	Community-controlled child and family service providers, peak bodies	20
Data Request (September – November 2025)	ECCDPP government members, government agencies with portfolio responsibility for child and family services	7
Interviews with Government Representatives (November 2025)	ECCDPP members, public servants working in agencies with portfolio responsibility for child and family services	19
Total Participants		88

A survey guide was developed in parallel with the Literature Review and in alignment with the survey guide previously used for the Funding Model Options for ACCO Integrated Early Years Services project. The full survey guide is available at **Appendix B**, and includes questions related to contact information and consent for data use, as well as substantive questions focused on ACCO perspectives on current funding models and opportunities for transforming approaches.

Questions were developed and finalised collaboratively between SNAICC and Deloitte, with a focus on minimising the time requirements of the survey to facilitate higher engagement rates. Experiences with previous research projects led by SNAICC have indicated that surveys are unlikely to be completed by a high proportion of services invited to respond. Where a high volume of responses has been recorded, the response rates to substantive questions have usually been low and decreased over the course of the survey. Of the 18 responses to this survey, nine were completed, with one being a double up of a previous response. Due to low sample size, analysis of these eight completed responses did not allow for disaggregation of results to understand differences across ACCOs, and contexts could not be quantitatively analysed. These responses have been incorporated into the findings from the interviews with ACCOs and the sector forums for thematic analysis to inform this report and guide the principles of funding model recommendations.

Alongside the survey link, SNAICC members were invited to attend one of three sector forums focused on this project. These forums were held in the first and second weeks of November and delivered online via Microsoft Teams. Forums ran for 60 minutes and were structured around five key questions (listed at **Appendix B**). The forums were designed as an open opportunity for ACCO services to provide input into the project and discuss child and family support funding in general. SNAICC recorded 36 registrations across the three forum dates, and 24 attendees. Participation was generally high, with most forum attendees responding to at least one question. At the end of each forum, attendees were encouraged to respond to the survey and to follow up with the SNAICC project team for an individual interview if they had more to share.

Individual (or small group) interviews with ACCOs were incorporated into the engagement process to support more in-depth conversations with key stakeholders. The first series of these interviews was held in October with members of the ECCDPP and SNAICC's Board and Council. These organisations were selected for initial interviews because of their engagement with the early strategic planning of the project. SNAICC interviewed 12 representatives from across six community-controlled service providers and peak bodies in October, focusing on the seven key questions at **Appendix B**. Interviews were intended to be flexible, with participants guiding discussion according to their understandings and priorities regarding funding. This was to provide opportunities for participants to raise funding issues that may not be apparent in a more structured interview process. At the end of each interview, participants were asked to provide additional funding, financial, and workforce information in writing. Documents provided by interview participants have been reviewed by SNAICC and Deloitte to inform analysis and financial modelling. The second series of interviews with ACCO representatives commenced in November, with a further eight representatives interviewed.

In November, SNAICC commenced similar individual interviews with public servants representing government agencies with responsibility for child and family support services in every jurisdiction. Government members and partners of the ECCDPP were invited to this series of interviews and asked to nominate any additional colleagues from their agency to attend and discuss the funding context in their jurisdiction in more detail. As with the ACCO interview series, meetings were 60 minutes and structured around the key questions listed at **Appendix B**, with supplementary questions based on any returned data requests. As part of this engagement phase, SNAICC completed interviews with 19 public servants across eight government agencies.

Government agencies also received a data request in September, seeking information about funding sources and programs in their jurisdiction that fund ACCOs to deliver child and family support services. Agencies were asked to focus on early and tailored supports and provide some key figures and characteristics of the funding programs that ACCOs are accessing and/or eligible for in their jurisdiction. Responses have informed financial modelling and analysis of consultation findings, and a list of the programs identified across these responses is at **Appendix C**. This list is presented as a non-exhaustive overview of the number and types of funding programs that ACCOs might be accessing under the current funding model to resource child and family support services for their communities. Analysis has also drawn on data requests returned through SNAICC's 2025 Family Matters Report, which asked government agencies for the proportion of child and family services funding going to ACCOs and invested in family and intensive family support.

Consultation findings

Findings from the engagement process have reinforced the insights from the Literature Review and previous SNAICC research – community-controlled services deliver the best possible support for children and families, but funding models are not responsive to their strengths and needs.

Across ACCO and government stakeholders, the consensus was clear that ACCOs achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, and that there is a need for increased and reformed investment in the growth and sustainability of the community-controlled sector.

Stakeholders also agreed that there is a broad-based challenge associated with shifting investment from the tertiary child protection system to early intervention and prevention (or early and tailored supports).

Through analysis of the outcomes from the engagement process, five key and interdependent themes have been identified as core principles of funding community-controlled child and family support. These themes engage with the challenges of current funding models, the distinct role of ACCOs, and the vision for future funding approaches that are fit-for-purpose.

Theme 1: Community leadership and self-determination

ACCOs are not just service providers. They are voices of community, leaders in self-determination, and partners in initiatives like Closing the Gap and other shared decision-making forums. Transformational funding reform needs to consider reframing the relationship between governments and ACCOs towards a framework that recognises ACCOs as community governance leaders with distinct roles drawn from expertise and community accountability, while governments act as systems stewards.

The National Agreement commits all Australian governments to working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but services generally reported that they were not being funded to work in partnership or engage in the frequent consultations with government they were often asked to participate in. Multiple services spoke to being invited to sit on advisory groups, engage in consultation, and provide their expertise to other sectors but receiving no funding to support that work or recognise the knowledge and authority they are contributing. While ACCOs were often being asked to participate in consultations with government, many had no formal shared decision-making power in any of these spaces. Services and peaks were clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be at the table for funding decisions and share in decision-making that impacts their services and communities.

ACCOs were also supportive of increasing access to meaningful data so communities could be better equipped to lead conversations with government. One peak body reflected on there being little to no investment in peaks and other ACCOs to build their own data sets and infrastructure, which is not responsive to the need for communities to drive their own destinies and stories through data. Investment in self-determination and community-controlled

advocacy needs to include resourcing for establishing and maintaining an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence base and improved information-sharing with ACCOs. This will ensure they are able to bring their voices and priorities to government proactively rather than reacting to government-led options.

Government agencies spoke to work that is underway in their jurisdictions to improve and embed shared decision-making, but the consensus from public servants and ACCO representatives was clear that there is much more work to be done.

In Victoria, the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has been interrogating how they engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making about funding and designing programs, and have an executive committee made up of representatives from the Department and ACCOs. They have observed successful examples of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in service design in the residential care space, where Innovation and Learning Grants have funded ACCOs to lead on model development.

In Western Australia, the government has been investing in flexible procurement approaches and working with ACCOs to strengthen their capacity to engage in procurement. The government is now focused on feedback from communities that they want to be more involved in co-design and shared decision-making in how services are designed.

The New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice referred to their new Family Preservation system as a promising example of designing an approach to funding and reform in partnership with ACCOs.

The Australian Government highlighted the Improving Multidisciplinary Responses program as their 'North Star' example for what can be done when departments design and implement programs in partnership with ACCOs.

The Australian Capital Territory Government spoke about the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body's role in voicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives and concerns to government. In addition, the ACT Budget and Wellbeing Impact Assessment process requires agencies to consult with the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and/or the Aboriginal Service Department Branch on business case proposals if they have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and/or if they align with Closing the Gap and the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement.

These approaches represent promising practice in shared decision-making driving program and funding design, but ACCOs need to be funded to engage and lead in these processes. One service noted that the burden of transforming systems sits with ACCOs, and that governments are generally not taking the lead in making change themselves and proposing alternatives to their current ways of working.

ACCOs were in strong support of self-determination as a core principle of everything that is talked about in relation to ACCOs. Services wanted ACCOs to have the authority to design their own programs to suit the needs of communities rather than fitting into governments' ideas of what works. Reflections emphasised that ACCOs do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander business every day, grounded in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. Feedback indicated that the role of government should be to listen to what ACCOs need, provide the funding, and let ACCOs lead on doing the work that they do best. For services, self-determination was essential for their own self-governance, as well as in relation to the principles of individual agency and supporting families to choose their own pathways. ACCOs prioritised listening to what is most important to families and responding to their own perspectives on their needs, rather than focusing on pre-determined measures of success.

Under the ACCO ways of working, families not only share but are centred in decision-making. Whether or not self-determination was explicitly stated, every ACCO engaged in consultations agreed that communities and the organisations that serve them need to be able to determine for themselves what their needs are and what supports are required to respond to them.

ACCOs were also focused on the cultural strength of their service and embedding culture in everything that they do. Though culture is a defining characteristic of ACCOs and a necessity for responsive service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, services were generally not funded for their cultural expertise and practice. One jurisdiction indicated that they generally fund ACCOs at a higher price point to recognise cultural expertise, but that there is no funding methodology that clearly articulates this. Both government and ACCO representatives in New South Wales called attention to the Family Preservation system, which incorporates a 30% cultural loading (Department of Communities and Justice, 2025) into funding to recognise the difference in how ACCOs do business and the unique skills and expertise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and their staff bring. Other services were extremely supportive of this approach and figure and stated that cultural loading would be remunerating community members for their work as well as investing back into community itself. ACCOs also wanted funding to recognise and be responsive to the cost of remunerating Elders and other cultural educators outside the service for their expertise. Elders and community leaders want to pass on their knowledge to children and families, but many rely on education and consulting work for their livelihood and need to be appropriately remunerated for their time and expertise. This knowledge also constitutes cultural and intellectual property that needs to be recognised and paid for.

Case Study: Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home

The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA) is a statewide ACCO providing services for, and promoting the rights of, children, young people, families, and communities in Victoria.

Bringing Up Aboriginal Babies at Home (BUABAH) is VACCA's targeted response to the chronic and persistent over-representation of Aboriginal children in Victoria's child protection system. The program is an Aboriginal-led early intervention model designed to prevent the removal of Aboriginal babies at birth by providing culturally grounded support during pregnancy, ideally prior to Child Protection involvement, and to support ongoing connection to family, culture, and Community.

As an Aboriginal-designed and delivered intervention, BUABAH is based on the understanding that cultural safety is a primary protective factor for Aboriginal children and families. The model is underpinned by VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways framework, which embeds cultural practice elements into service delivery and guides practitioners to work relationally, holistically, and in ways that privilege Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing. BUABAH practitioners focus on strengthening safety before birth by building trust, addressing practical and systemic barriers, and strengthening family and community support networks.

Despite strong evidence of success (Wise & Pittman, 2024), BUABAH has yet to receive discrete program funding. VACCA is currently sustaining the ongoing delivery of BUABAH through flexibility and innovation, leveraging existing Family Services funding despite the absence of dedicated program investment. The success of BUABAH relies on a complexity of work and a level of cultural expertise that falls entirely outside standard funding structures.

Essential but unfunded elements of the model include ongoing community engagement to support referrals, partnership work with hospitals and maternity services, cultural training for non-Aboriginal staff and networks, and supporting Aboriginal practice leadership and peer support.

When working with families, BUABAH practitioners focus on trust and relationship building to create safety, use their cultural knowledge and community connections to support family finding, connect with community, provide service navigation and advocacy, strengthen families' self-advocacy and decision-making capacity, and celebrate culture. These activities require deep cultural expertise that often goes unfunded but is critical to the success of the program.

BUABAH reflects a broader pattern across the ACCO sector, where Aboriginal organisations develop effective, culturally responsive solutions to systemic issues without funding that adequately recognises or resources the true cost of culture. VACCA is currently undertaking a dedicated cost of culture analysis and looks forward to sharing the results.

A fit-for-purpose funding model needs to be:

- Developed through **shared decision-making** in partnership between governments and ACCOs
- Supportive of **self-determination** in program design and delivery
- Inclusive of **cultural loading** that recognises and values the cultural expertise of ACCOs and their communities.

Theme 2: Administrative simplicity and flexibility

Government and ACCO representatives agreed that one of the core challenges of current funding approaches is the administrative complexity and rigidity of funding arrangements. Representatives from government agencies in the states and territories estimated that an ACCO in their jurisdiction was likely to be accessing at least five to 10 funding programs from their department alone, in addition to funding sources across other departments and the Australian Government.

Insights from service providers aligned with these estimates, with one ACCO stating that they had 11 funding agreements for the current financial year and another referencing 12 contracts for a small service. ACCOs also felt that these funding programs are largely disconnected and do not 'speak' to each other, requiring the organisations to patch together disparate funding sources to create viable service delivery. Services have spoken to the difficulty of coordinating so many different contracts, especially when they have separate application, reporting, and acquittal requirements that fall due at different points in time and are often repetitive. Government representatives highlighted work to align new contracts, rollovers, and commissioning processes with quarterly cycles to minimise inconsistencies, and the need for new funding approaches to be coordinated with existing processes at the jurisdictional level. Administrative requirements grow over time as the service expands, and both ACCO and government representatives have

highlighted the challenges of meeting these requirements when services do not have the same level of infrastructure and experience with contract procurement and management as large non-Indigenous organisations.

ACCOs consistently expressed that they want their service to grow, become more compliant, and provide more services to communities, but said the administration that comes with that growth is often very difficult or even untenable for the organisation to manage. Services highlighted the need for staff with policy and procedure writing, tendering, administration, reporting, and compliance skills and the failures of current funding models to cover the costs of the time and expertise required to effectively manage funding. Even larger ACCOs reported that they had no dedicated tender writing or contract management staff, while large mainstream organisations generally have whole dedicated teams. Currently, these functions are falling on staff whose substantive roles are working directly with children and families, and time spent on administrative work is time taken away from their work supporting families. One organisation spoke to the pressure from government agencies to reduce their management fees from 20% to 10% or even five per cent, which further limits their capacity to manage administration and to evaluate and improve service delivery. Another service agreed that governments usually only want to pay 10 to 15% as a corporate levy, which does not adequately cover administrative and operational costs.

For ACCOs, part of the administrative burden of government funding is the focus on outputs and Key Performance Indicators that are not aligned to how their organisation measures success. Services expressed that they are focused on outcomes for children and families, and that funding agreements should align with that priority. ACCOs felt that the high administrative burden does not translate into strong accountability, and that outcomes-focused reporting is more aligned to what communities need and expect. However, services cautioned against an approach where outcomes-focused funding reporting became an exercise in proving outcomes to governments to maintain funding, rather than proving outcomes to and for communities.

ACCOs engaged through this project said they were happy and willing to report on data that is meaningful and contributed to key reforms like Closing the Gap, but that current reporting requirements are often restrictive. Reporting requirements were described as difficult to navigate, especially when reporting on less structured and formal supports that governments may not recognise. ACCOs felt that governments are asking for evidence in 'Western ways' and that funding agreements are not responsive to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities tell their stories and understand progress. Funding also does not generally cover the cost of evaluation and learning, which would support ACCOs to demonstrate the success of their service model and advocate for continued funding. In remote areas, the lack of formally evaluated and endorsed programs in the region makes it particularly difficult for ACCOs to put together an evidence-based proposal for government funding.

Flexibility was a focus across the engagement process. Insights from participating ACCOs highlighted how funding rigidity makes it difficult to provide culturally safe, responsive, and holistic services to children and families in their communities. Current funding models are highly prescriptive, and ACCOs felt they could not redirect funds and adapt service delivery to meet need because of the nature of funding contracts. Many of the ACCOs engaged through this project also rely on philanthropic funding to fill funding gaps and to provide more flexibility. One service described the difference in being able to call a philanthropic funder to discuss outcomes and talk about reallocating funding where it will have the most impact.

Government agencies reported priorities in their jurisdictions to make funding and particularly procurement processes more flexible by expanding tendering and applications beyond written submissions and restructuring procurement to recognise the strengths of ACCOs as service providers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In New South Wales and Western Australia, governments have invested directly in supporting ACCOs to build their capacity in grant applications and tender writing.

While flexibility in the process of applying for funding is an important step towards more responsive funding approaches, ACCOs were focused more on flexibility in how they use their funding and demonstrate outcomes. Services also highlighted the need for flexibility in using and reinvesting underspends. Some ACCOs had success in reallocating underspend from programs that were not well matched to community need and investing those funds into other supports that are more holistic and responsive. Other services spoke to the challenge of being unable to use their underspends and having to return this funding to governments. ACCO representatives were in strong support of being able to move funding around and reinvest underspends to respond to the needs of communities and strengthen their service.

Funding periods were a consistent and common challenge across consultations. Short funding cycles put immense pressure on ACCOs, and government representatives expressed that they also see the challenges imposed by time-limited funding. These challenges included programs being slow to start and dropping off towards the end of a short-term contract due to the lack of certainty for the service and their staff. Twelve-month contracts were repeatedly cited by ACCOs as extremely difficult to manage and long-term funding was a key priority, with five-year contracts preferred to provide certainty and stability for organisations.

Several jurisdictions including Western Australia, the Northern Territory, and New South Wales indicated that they prioritise five-year funding agreements where possible, with Western Australia and New South Wales describing specific policies that either mandate or preference five-year contracts. Public servants indicated that governments' risk appetites have a significant impact on long-term funding arrangements, and that five years is likely to be the tolerance to balance the need for investments to be agile and accommodating to change and innovation. While government representatives highlighted some examples where short-term or one-off grants may be appropriate, core long-term funding is required to support constancy and minimise the administrative burden for organisations accessing that funding.

Even where longer-term funding agreements were in place, ACCOs spoke to the extreme difficulty of renewals not being confirmed until the initial agreement has expired (or is very close to expiry), which limits their ability to plan and complete administrative work in time. Both ACCO and government representatives highlighted that ACCOs are over-represented in short-term funding contracts compared to non-Indigenous services.

A fit-for-purpose funding model needs to be:

- **Simple** to navigate, including applications, reporting, and acquittals
- **Consolidated**, to minimise the number and complexity of funding agreements
- **Flexible**, in both the administrative requirements and how the funds can be used
- **Outcomes-focused** rather than prioritising outputs, volume metrics, and Key Performance Indicators
- **Long-term**, with five-year funding periods preferred.

Theme 3: Organisational sustainability and sector growth

ACCOs often expressed being in 'survival mode', with little to no capacity for forward planning or investment in their sustainability as an organisation because of funding shortfalls. Both ACCO and government representatives reinforced that the ACCO sector has not had the same historical and sustained level of investment as the non-Indigenous sector, creating significant inequities in infrastructure and operations. Multiple ACCOs expressed that they were continuously struggling to meet current service delivery needs and did not have the space or resourcing to prepare for expansion, plan strategically, or invest in service improvement. Comparatively, services and government agencies referred to the decades of recurrent funding that have enabled non-Indigenous services to build and maintain their economies of scale and operational models.

ACCOs stressed that they have the capacity to establish and maintain a thriving operation, if they had the proper resourcing to do so. They expressed that current funding models assume the capacity that comes from the kind of sustained resourcing and investment that ACCOs have not had access to in the ways large non-Indigenous organisations have. Research focused on the social and community services sectors at large has found that funding often does not meet needs for organisational and sector sustainability, and that there has been a persistent undervaluation of the workforces, false assumptions that services can cross-subsidise, and a lack of investment in indirect costs which together have created systemic funding shortages (Social Ventures Australia & the Centre for Social Impact, 2022; UNSW Sydney, 2021).

Backbone funding and support was a high priority for ACCOs, and one that was acknowledged consistently by their funding agencies in consultation. ACCO services

generally lacked the dedicated support teams needed to streamline operations like human resources, finance, and governance. One service highlighted that they received no funding for senior leadership roles, which are the key positions for setting and driving the strategic direction and growth of the organisation. ACCOs often had a high cost of doing business, especially for services in regional and remote areas, and current funding models do not cover the day-to-day costs of running an organisation.

Government agencies agreed that funding is focused on service delivery, and that ACCOs are over-represented in the short-term funding contracts that generally do not provide for operational costs. Services felt that current funding models often expect ACCOs to compete with non-Indigenous services despite a massive disparity in size, scale, and supporting infrastructure. ACCOs wanted to invest in capacity-building but generally had no funding to do so. One representative stressed that governments need to respond to that gap and that ACCOs should not be made to 'beg for the basics'. Services were concerned about their longevity and sustainability, largely because of how valued and depended on they are within their communities. One service emphasised that it is communities who need the investment, not services themselves, and funding needs to be focused on longevity and sustainability of support for families.

ACCOs stressed that growing the ACCO sector is a priority funding principle and a pillar of the National Agreement (Priority Reform 2). The consensus was clear that current funding models are not investing in sustainable sector growth, even where investment in ACCO-led service delivery is increasing. Services spoke to the costs that ACCOs have often never received any funding for at all, including start-up and operational costs. The ACCO sector cannot effectively grow and strengthen without that investment in the fundamentals of establishing and operating a sustainable and thriving organisation.

Case Study: KWY Aboriginal Corporation

KWY Aboriginal Corporation was established in 2011 from conversations with local Aboriginal Elders around the need for Aboriginal-led responses for families addressing health, wellbeing, and safety. They provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities with culturally responsive support services to build positive change across a suite of programs that focus on family safety, social and emotional wellbeing, cultural supports, and child development. KWY provides services across the Adelaide area as well as five additional regional locations in South Australia. For the 2024–2025 financial year, over 1,500 families accessed services delivered by KWY across 37 programs. In 2025–2026, the number of programs has grown to 45 operating across the state.

To meet diverse needs across programs, KWY prioritises deep connections with communities and investing in research to keep informed of community needs and priorities and align their work to community-driven solutions. KWY has also identified a significant gap in South Australia in funding for ACCOs to deliver culturally safe services, which non-Indigenous organisations are not equipped to provide. A culturally embedded, community-led approach combined with holistic, multidisciplinary support defines KWY's way of working. Across KWY services, practitioners incorporate cultural mapping, family-led decision making, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child-rearing practices, positioning culture as the foundation for healing, empowerment, and long-term wellbeing for children and families. Current funding arrangements mean that KWY is always having to be agile – developing funding proposals as opportunities arise to address ongoing service gaps in South Australia. KWY is currently accessing funding from nine government agencies to fund its operations and service delivery, which is a time and resource intensive process for the organisation.

KWY emphasises that there needs to be consideration of the funding that ACCOs have historically not received at all or received very little of compared to non-Indigenous organisations. Community-controlled organisations often started with no government funding and no structural support to establish themselves and their service. Organisations that never received any real investment in start-up, operations, infrastructure, and governance costs are still having to piece together the resources to keep their service running. These costs only increase as a service grows, while funding arrangements generally assume an existing level of organisational sustainability that ACCOs have generally not been supported to establish. KWY is still absorbing the costs of office fit-outs, repairs, and security and technology upgrades that are necessary to maintain safe, functional, and culturally responsive workplaces but put constant pressure on their budgets. Future funding models need to incorporate these ongoing operational and infrastructure costs to ensure that ACCOs can operate in safe, modern, and culturally appropriate contexts that match the scale and complexity of the work they deliver.

Services and government agencies also highlighted the diversity within the ACCO sector and that, even when funding targets ACCOs, much smaller and newer services struggle to compete with the larger and more established organisations. ACCO representatives generally indicated that they did not want to compete with other ACCOs for funding, and that the competitive tender approach discourages collaboration and whole-of-sector strengthening. One service cited an example of refusing to compete for a particular funding program in their jurisdiction, and instead multiple ACCOs coming together to support one application. A public servant echoed this in another interview, highlighting the opportunity for ACCOs to work together and support each other to capacity-build and access funding, and for non-Indigenous organisations to partner with ACCOs in this space as well. This approach is aligned to SNAICC's (2025b) proposed Nest and Nurture Model, which would support the establishment of new ACCO services in the early years sector with SNAICC acting as a backbone support for these new organisations. Services engaged through this project also referenced successful partnerships with non-Indigenous services where they have been able to support transition to ACCO-led delivery over time by utilising the resources of a larger organisation.

Physical infrastructure was another funding gap that emerged as a common challenge for ACCOs. Services discussed having outgrown their current premises and not having any funding to invest in capital infrastructure despite a demonstrated increase in demand and service provision. One service cited infrastructure as one of their leading cost drivers, including ongoing maintenance and repairs for ageing buildings and facilities. Another reflected on having to stop providing immunisation services for children in the community, because of the lack of space. Where ACCOs had been able to grow their capacity, they sometimes could not expand their service footprint because of the lack of suitable space. One ACCO described their service as

'bursting at the seams' when describing their current building, which was purpose-built in the 1980s and cannot accommodate the growth of the service. Another service referred to being unable to rollover and save funding for investment in infrastructure because of funding rules and instead having to apply for capital funding in every instance. For other services, the main challenge with infrastructure was not owning their premises and having no scope of adapting the building for multipurpose service delivery.

A fit-for-purpose funding model needs to prioritise:

- **Operational costs** of doing business, including human resources, IT, governance, and project management
- **Strategic planning** by resourcing ACCOs to think ahead and continuously improve their service
- **Capital infrastructure** including ongoing maintenance costs and expansion
- **Sustainability** and longevity of the organisation and service delivery
- **Whole-of-sector strengthening** by investing in ACCOs to establish, grow, and collaborate.

Theme 4: Holistic and responsive service design and delivery

Participants in the engagement process for this project agreed that one of the defining strengths of ACCOs is their whole-of-person approach to service delivery. Responding to communities and their needs is at the heart of everything ACCOs do, and funding needs to be able to support that agile and holistic model of support. From the perspective of government agencies, wraparound service delivery was a high priority

but subject to significant challenges because of the architecture of government. Public servants said that the most important, as well as the most difficult, piece of funding reform is coordinating agencies and investment to share in the same goals and work to the same framework. In the ACT, representatives highlighted the Closing the Gap Sub-Committee, where Cabinet members are brought together with members of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body to discuss Closing the Gap priority areas including housing, education, children, youth, and families and coordinate responses. Also highlighted by the ACT was the need to consider different approaches to funding for organisations that may work across multiple regions or states, according to what best meets the needs and circumstances of the organisation.

For ACCOs, funding being consolidated and responsive was critical to their ways of working and responding effectively to community need. One service identified that funding agencies need to wrap around services the way that services wrap around children and families. Wraparound funding, as with wraparound service delivery, centres flexibility and responsiveness to ensure organisations can meet families where they are and provide the supports that are most important when and where they are most needed. At the Australian Government level, a key opportunity for providing that wraparound support is at the systems steward level, with DSS providing supportive structures that enable coordinated investment and strategic guidance for the sector.

When describing the strengths and characteristics of their service, ACCOs frequently emphasised their focus on tailoring supports to the child and their family on an individual level. ACCOs emphasised how much of their time and resourcing goes into building and strengthening relationships with families and understanding their needs. It was important for ACCOs to highlight that community connection and engagement is an ongoing and constant priority with associated costs for their service.

ACCOs provide a unique breadth and depth of support to their communities and often act as a first point of call for families experiencing a wide variety of challenges and concerns. Services said that they prioritised responses to these challenges, whatever their nature and scope. Funding agreements may have a clearly defined scope of service provision, but ACCOs do not turn families away because their needs are outside of that scope. Incidental costs for urgent supports such as purchasing food, clothing, and helping with transport are not covered by funding but make a significant difference for children and families and are fundamental to those essential relationships between families and services. One ACCO cited the brokerage funding they receive for homelessness services as a model that would be useful in child and family support to help provide necessities for families experiencing crisis. This means that services are going above and beyond their resourcing to provide those essential integrated supports, including emergency relief, that build trust and improve outcomes for families at crucial junctures. One service highlighted brokerage funding as an important component that is often missing from child and family service funding. This ACCO noted that they received brokerage funding for their housing support services (a fixed figure per person to support meeting immediate essential needs) but that their child and family programs have no brokerage attached, limiting how they can support families with essential material needs.

The evaluation of the Intensive Family Support Service (IFSS) noted that IFSS providers were only permitted to spend five per cent of their grant funding on brokerage and that any brokerage expenditure required extensive documentation and demonstration of how other emergency relief funds had already been exhausted (Social Compass, 2020). IFSS providers highlighted that the limits and strict requirements around brokerage were not aligned to the needs of families and the value of providing essential goods and services such as clothing, food, and preparing meals (Social Compass, 2020).

As identified in the Literature Review, trauma-informed practice is a particularly and distinctly important component of ACCO-led service delivery. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have unique experiences with trauma and services need to be responsive to that trauma and to support healing through holistic care. For some communities, trauma may be especially prevalent and focused on specific experiences such as domestic, family and sexual violence and harmful substance use. One ACCO highlighted the importance of upskilling and supporting their staff and service to engage directly and safely with trauma, and the challenges that have arisen from other service spaces shying away from conversations that engage with trauma. ACCOs and government agencies were both cognisant of the trauma and distrust associated with government departments, especially those with responsibility for child protection systems.

Child and family services need to approach supports with a trauma-informed and cultural healing lens, which requires holistic and community-led models of care. ACCOs were focused on supporting healing through strengthening identity and belonging and responding to the distinct needs and experiences of families in a way that is culturally safe and sensitive to trauma. For ACCOs, trauma-informed supports necessitated a flexible approach to respond to complex needs. The complex needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are connected to histories and ongoing experiences of trauma and marginalisation, including socioeconomic disadvantage, racism, child removal, and colonisation. ACCOs had different program cost and workforce requirements to respond to complex needs effectively and safely, including the need for home-based supports, intensive and specialised supports, proactive outreach, and connection points with other service providers and systems.

Remoteness was a core consideration for services and government agencies. Feedback was in strong agreement that funding approaches often do not reflect or respond to the difference between metropolitan, regional, and remote communities and the cost of delivering services in these regions. ACCOs were strongly supportive of a remote index being applied to funding to meet those additional costs, particularly given the higher costs of travel for ACCOs that prioritise frequent in-person engagement with communities and delivering supports on Country and in community. In order to provide wraparound support, services are often 'running around' regional and remote communities to transport children and families to service locations, including healthcare appointments, because there is no reliable transport available to them. Geographic location was a leading cost driver for ACCOs in remote areas, and government agencies also highlighted how remoteness impacts costs for their department. One service located in the Torres Strait highlighted that they service two islands that can only be reached by helicopter and 15 communities that require chartering planes to reach, which are exorbitant costs that funding does not understand or cover. Another service referred to the costs of safety equipment while travelling to remote communities, including satellite phones. Services also spoke to the distinct support needs of remote communities, including delivering services in language. In remote communities, English is often not a first language for families and delivering supports in local language is essential not only for cultural connection but also accessibility.

Case Study: Yalu

Yalu Aboriginal Corporation (Yalu) is a Yolŋu led community organisation operating across remote communities in East Arnhem Land. Since 2020, Yalu has expanded its work to deliver a broad range of children and family support programs grounded in strong community leadership and Yolŋu knowledge systems including the principle that “women and children are sacred.”

Yalu supports children and families experiencing deeply complex and interrelated challenges, including child malnutrition, developmental delay, domestic and family violence, intergenerational trauma, overcrowded housing, and economic hardship. Staff work holistically with children and families and often step into roles to fill service gaps that they are not formally funded to deliver.

Yalu receives funding through multiple grants from the Australian and Northern Territory governments. These contracts vary significantly in size, consistency, and flexibility. Some funding grants provide supportive structures, including the ability to apply remote or administrative loading. Others are less flexible, short term, or require changing program focus each year even when programs are effective. Yalu often combines multiple funding sources to create services that meet community needs. While this blending of funds allows for responsive delivery, it does not cover the full scope of work required and is not always sufficient or sustainable.

The remote context significantly amplifies the cost of service delivery, which is rarely captured in funding arrangements. Essential goods must be transported by barge, electricity is powered by diesel with substantially higher fuel costs, and public liability and workers compensation insurance premiums are elevated due to geographic and environmental risk.

Workforce capacity is constrained by a lack of available housing - a major barrier preventing Yalu from expanding programs, recruiting specialist staff, or taking on additional responsibilities. Yalu is committed to building a new precinct including a community hub for all service delivery, staff accommodation and short- and medium-term housing for family reunifications of children in out-of-home care, but cannot progress without infrastructure investment. Overcrowded housing in the community also prevents timely reunification of children in care.

Infrequent social services visits such as Births, Deaths and Marriages visits mean families often wait long periods to obtain identification needed to access essential services. This also creates added challenges for community members needing identification for work and board commitments.

Despite these challenges, Yalu’s strengths as an ACCO delivering early and tailored supports are significant. Approximately 96% of Yalu’s workforce is Yolŋu, enabling services to be delivered in language, in culturally safe ways, and with deep kinship knowledge. The organisation’s governance structure is rooted in community control and emerging leadership, with strong mentoring and capability building approaches in place. Yalu has also developed and delivered their own culturally tailored training to improve staff training in community-specific issues, using flexible funding to bring specialist practitioners in. This investment has increased staff capability, community engagement, and local employment while strengthening Yalu’s ability to deliver holistic services.

Yalu wears many hats in the community, supporting families to access services well outside their formal scope and often stepping into roles expected by other agencies but not funded. Their pragmatic approach, cultural authority, and trusted relationships place them in a unique position to provide responsive, effective support. However, current funding models do not reflect the full extent of this role or the additional costs of delivering services in a remote context.

Both ACCO and government representatives reflected on the difficulty of funding being concentrated in tertiary systems, with very little left for investment in early and tailored supports. There is a significant opportunity for shifting investment towards early intervention and prevention at the Australian Government level, where agencies are not intervening in the tertiary child protection systems in the states and territories and focused firmly on early supports to prevent interactions with those statutory systems. At the state and territory and at the service level, reflections focused on the difficulty of pulling money away from the 'pointy end' of the system where services and agencies feel so immediately responsible for children and outcomes but emphasised that reducing over-representation starts with early supports. In the ACT, representatives have reported early successes in diverting families through early intervention processes and family-based decision-making. These processes are supported by investments in early supports. For ACCOs, these supports range from very early and broad-based services like playgroups, homework clubs, cultural activities, and community connection to intensive family support services that keep families in crisis out of child protection systems through high intensity and tailored supports.

Services and governments were interested in how to prioritise and incentivise early intervention and prevention, as well as quarantining money that is saved at the out-of-home care end for reinvestment into early supports. This might look like increased Australian Government funding for jurisdictions that are prioritising early supports and requiring that any funding that is freed up by lower rates

of children in care must be dedicated to child and family support programs. ACCOs emphasised that funding that has been tied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services must also be quarantined to be reinvested in ACCOs when services are recommissioned to ensure that services are not losing investment over time and across funding and tendering cycles.

This focus on tertiary interventions often manifested in funding arrangements for early supports. ACCOs' flexibility to connect with children and families before they are engaged with child protection systems is limited by referral pathways and eligibility requirements. ACCOs reflected on opt-in programs that are tied to child protection referrals or notifications having low engagement from communities and families who were distrustful of supports that seemed to be led by or closely tied to child protection agencies. One service spoke to a department-led program having extremely low uptake in community to the point of having a large underspend for that service that they wanted to be able to redirect into community-led supports. The concentration of funding after child protection intervention limits the resources ACCOs can direct towards early and tailored supports according to need as it is defined by their communities rather than by government agencies. Increased funding in early intervention and prevention would not only provide ACCOs with more flexibility and control to deliver gold standard services but would also begin to address over-representation in child protection systems at the early and critical opportunities where families can benefit most from lower intensity and lower cost interventions.

ACCOs were also focused on how they integrate with other services to provide whole-of-person supports for children and families whose needs extend beyond what is classified as child and family support. Services wanted to prioritise healthcare, early learning, assessments and supports for disability and developmental delay, and connecting with schools to wrap around children in their first thousand days and support them continuously through childhood and adolescence. While the provision of these services is out of scope for this project and report, ACCOs reflected on the time cost and difficulty for families in navigating these systems, and the need for their service to be able to support that journey and establish relationships with other services to provide a seamless transition.

Services were also cognisant of the high rates of disability and developmental delay in their communities, including for young parents with small children. ACCOs need to be able to identify, understand, and respond to disability early to ensure that families are equipped with the information and support they need to seek assessments and ongoing supports for themselves and their children. These priorities incur additional costs associated with workforce development and managing relationships with services. Early identification of health and wellbeing needs for children is critical for both their ongoing quality of life and minimising the cost of late intervention, which costs Australia an estimated \$22.3 billion annually (Minderoo Foundation, 2025).

While public servants agreed that holistic service delivery was a priority for their agency and a strength of ACCOs, it was raised that this has not been comprehensively evaluated. Evaluation is usually at a program rather than a provider level, meaning that while governments might evaluate any one of the programs delivered by an ACCO, they do not analyse or get to see the whole picture of that service. Governments were interested in the tangible benefit of a whole-person approach that incorporates all

these different funding streams and supports, and ACCOs were similarly focused on being able to effectively demonstrate and report on the outcomes that their holistic and tailored models of support achieve for communities. Telling that story effectively would require investment in evaluations that consider the outcomes of the whole organisation and all the services, formal and informal, they provide. If these evaluations could be completed, they would strengthen the evidence base for increased and ongoing investment in ACCOs as 'community hubs' that deliver better outcomes for families across multiple domains.

A fit-for-purpose funding model needs to be responsive to:

- **Holistic service delivery**, including costs associated with emergency relief, brokerage funding, and trauma-informed practice
- **Community connection** and the need to tailor supports to individual children and families
- **Remoteness** by recognising the difference in the cost of service delivery in regional and remote communities, including ACCOs who provide supports outside their local area
- **Early and tailored supports** by incentivising and prioritising funding being directed to early intervention and prevention rather than tertiary systems
- **Integration** with complementary services to provide whole-of-person care
- **Evaluation** to investigate and demonstrate the value of holistic service delivery and inform future investment priorities.

Theme 5: Strong and supported workforce

The workforce is at the heart of service delivery, and challenges associated with workforce attraction, retention, and development are front of mind for the sector. While services indicated that workforce challenges are endemic across the child and family support sector, ACCOs also had distinct workforce needs and were disproportionately impacted by broad-based workforce considerations.

ACCOs emphasised that even when funding is available, they often do not have the staff to be able to deliver on those programs or the capability to recruit them quickly. This was a major challenge associated with short-term contracts, where ACCOs felt they did not have enough time to recruit, onboard, and have staff ready to deliver a service when the total contract duration was only 12 months. Both services and governments agreed that a program, especially a pilot, takes at least six months to establish and refine, at which point a short-term contract is halfway to expiry. Multiple ACCOs spoke to losing staff because they could not provide contract renewals in time, with government decisions on funding often made a month or less before a contract expires. To maintain continuity of employment, contract staff would need to start looking for another role at least two months in advance if they do not have assurance that their current contract would be extended. By the time decisions are made about funding, it is often too late to retain the staff and services have to recruit again to staff the program. This constant cycle of recruitment is disruptive for ACCOs and service delivery and causes significant losses in program knowledge and productivity.

ACCOs wanted to be able to provide certainty to their workforce but were generally unable to do so because of contract terms. Services felt it was particularly difficult to attract skilled staff when they cannot offer long-term contracts or permanent roles. Turnover created by funding cycles also made it very difficult for ACCOs to

invest in supporting staff to move into leadership roles and look towards succession planning. ACCOs spoke to their service being dependent on a few long-term and highly knowledgeable personnel and being concerned about the future of the organisation when those leaders retire. Services valued their staff very highly and wanted to be able to establish a strong and secure workforce, but systemic barriers made this difficult to even plan for let alone implement when the organisation is constantly piecing together short-term funding to survive.

A distinct workforce priority for the ACCO sector was the need for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. Local staff not only bring the community connection, lived experience, and cultural knowledge that makes ACCO-led service delivery so strong, but also enabled ACCOs to invest into their community by providing these work and training opportunities. Services were strongly committed to employing local staff and investing in training and upskilling those staff, including supporting them to attain formal qualifications. This is a long-term investment, and while ACCOs said they wanted to invest that time and money in their communities, funding arrangements generally do not support it. In order to stand up and deliver programs quickly, ACCOs were often relying on non-Indigenous and relocated staff, which incurs its own costs associated with upskilling these workers in local community contexts and cultural safety. Funding arrangements also often required ACCOs to employ workers who have certain qualifications, which can be difficult to align with the other expertise that is most valuable to ACCOs. For services in remote areas in particular, there may be no qualified social workers living locally in their community, meaning they have to recruit from outside the region to fill a required role. These staff may be accredited but lack some of the most important skills needed for ACCO-led service delivery, including fluency in local languages and community connection.

Workforce supply in remote areas was a significant challenge for services. ACCOs in remote and very remote areas faced extreme difficulties in attracting staff when the local supply was not there and they could not offer relocation incentives. While larger non-Indigenous services and governments can often provide housing and subsidies for travel and essential services for workers in remote locations, ACCOs could not afford these same supports. In areas such as northern Western Australia, housing is limited and completely unaffordable, meaning staff often could not relocate to the local area even if they were willing to cover costs themselves. Remoteness was also a challenge for training staff, with the cost of external qualifications being prohibitive especially when travel is required to complete courses. Even for Board and senior leadership roles, travelling from a remote community to complete training such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors course would be extremely difficult and costly.

Training was a high priority for ACCOs in consultations. Services were very invested in upskilling their staff, especially their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff,

and were often self-funding workforce development as a priority. ACCOs felt it was very difficult to get staff through external training in terms of both the lack of funding and the time commitment of taking staff away from service delivery. Where larger organisations may be able to set aside whole days for planning and workforce development for all staff, ACCOs were constantly trying to manage workloads and training priorities to ensure uninterrupted service delivery. Services expressed that training costs and funding need to consider proper remuneration for staff for the hours they allocate to training and professional development, and that workers should not be made to pursue training outside of work hours. A number of ACCOs had made sure to provide study leave (one service provided two hours every week for all staff) and pay for training hours but did so out of their own pocket. It was also important to services that staff be recognised for completing these trainings with pay increases. Services reiterated that they need to have the time, space, and resources to invest in their community members and support them to upskill and to attain qualifications.

Case Study: NPY Women's Council

NPY Women's Council (NPYWC) is an Anangu-led organisation delivering health, social, and cultural services in the Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara region of Central Australia. Their services include child and family well-being, youth, domestic and family violence, aged and disability, traditional healers, and desert weavers programs.

NPYWC began as an advocacy body in 1980 focused on the need for Anangu women to have a voice in conversations on land rights, policy, and cultural affairs. In 1993, NPYWC was funded to provide services and is now a leader in the provision of human services in the region. NPYWC works across 26 desert communities across 350,000 square kilometres in the cross-border regions of Western Australia, South Australia, and the Northern Territory.

NPYWC faces various intersecting funding challenges that impact their operations. The Child and Family Wellbeing Service manages 12 different contracts of varying lengths to deliver services, with fragmented funding that is often program and State and Territory specific.

Management of these contracts creates a significant administrative burden, in particular managing rising costs in remote regions. Organisational infrastructure and dedicated support teams are often under resourced. This short-term funding also creates difficulties in attracting and retaining staff.

Funding also does not reflect the realities of operating a service across borders. State-based funding does not extend across borders, which makes consistent service delivery difficult. State governments also have different rules for rollover of funding, which can leave some areas without critical services. NPYWC Chairperson, Mrs Margaret Smith, stated in the consultation that NPYWC should have greater autonomy and choice how funds are spent in their region. In addition, there are high operational costs for service delivery in remote areas, impacting vehicles, fuel, accommodation, and safety equipment expenses. These are often not reflected in funding models.

The value in flexible funding and capacity-building funds is evident. In one contract, NPYWC used capacity-building funds and some underspend to expand Anangu employment and development within the Child and Family Well-being Service program. This investment resulted in an increase from five to 18 Anangu team members within six months and created opportunities for skill development in areas such as breastfeeding training that has enabled ongoing support to the community. Adequate and flexible funding would enable NPYWC to design and deliver the creative and innovative approaches that meet community needs.

ACCOs also spoke to the colonial load (also referred to as cultural load) that their staff carry and the pressure it puts on them as workers and people. Burnout was a problem for many services, with staff doing extra work and unpaid overtime to deliver outcomes for children and families. Services felt very strongly that local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were the best placed people to do the work because they know and have a deep understanding with community, but that this connection means they can never 'log off' from work. ACCOs wanted wraparound support for their staff as well as children and families, and one service stressed that the question that needs to be asked is not just what services need from the workforce but what the workforce needs from their organisations. Cultural safety was a priority for ACCOs not just in their service delivery to families but for their staff, and services wanted to be able to provide supports such as professional and cultural supervision and employee assistance programs. ACCOs also spoke to providing cultural leave and leave for staff on Sorry Business without the funding

to support that. Services were self-funding the culturally responsive supports that their workforce need but emphasised that they need these workforce supports to be properly funded for sustainability.

One of the most significant challenges for ACCOs in attracting and retaining a skilled workforce was pay parity. Services were frequently losing staff to higher paying roles in government or the non-Indigenous sector and did not have the funding to offer competitive wages. One service noted that their pay rates are aligned to the Social Community, Home Care and Disability Services (SCHADS) Award but cannot afford to offer wages at a high enough pay point to attract the workforce they need. This service indicated they would generally need to be offering a SCHADS Level 5 and above to be competitive. Services also wanted to be able to pay above award to factor in cultural loading and recognise the expertise and skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff bring to the work. Where larger ACCOs and peaks had been able to match government

wage levels, they reported a significant increase in the quality and quantity of applicants they attracted. Being able to offer competitive wages was especially important for recruiting to senior positions, where ACCOs needed and valued strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership but were often unable to match the remuneration level that these leaders could obtain in government.

An opportunity identified by both ACCO and government representatives was transitioning staff between government or non-Indigenous organisations and ACCOs. In the Northern Territory, the Department of Children and Families cited a pilot program where staff working in the Department will transition to working in the sector. ACCOs referred

to successful examples of partnering with non-Indigenous organisations and supporting their staff to work in those larger services based on the strong relationship between the two organisations and recognition of their cultural expertise and experience. One service highlighted that because workforce challenges are not exclusive to ACCOs, government tended to hold onto their staff rather than supporting secondments and other opportunities to embed skilled workers in ACCOs, which undermined working in partnership. ACCOs reflected on being able to provide a value proposition to workers who get to experience working in a community-controlled setting, and the need for governments to facilitate these transitions.

A fit-for-purpose funding model needs to prioritise the following in relation to workforce:

- **Long-term contracts** to enable ACCOs to offer permanent roles
- Investment in and the costs associated with attracting and retaining **local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff**
- **Training and workforce development** including recognition of the time cost for staff and the service in taking their workers out of service delivery
- **Cultural loading and safety** including the costs associated with ACCOs providing culturally safe work environments
- **Pay parity** with government agencies and non-Indigenous services.

Building a better funding approach

The analysis presented in this section draws on a range of data sources to build a clear picture of how ACCOs are currently funded and the implications for future funding design. This includes:

- The current funding landscape for ACCOs, and complexities in accessing multiple sources of funding
- Workforce needs in delivering child and family services, and the specific challenges faced by ACCOs in attracting and retaining a workforce with the right skills and experience
- The cost structure of child and family services, including identifying key cost drivers for ACCOs
- The real costs of service delivery, and any implications for developing a funding approach that better reflects the needs and operating contexts of ACCOs.

Data sources underpinning analysis

The report draws on a range of data sources as summarised in Table 2. While the analysis draws on the best available evidence, several limitations should be noted. The data collected to date from ACCOs represents a small sample, which constrains the ability to draw sector-wide conclusions and may not be representative of the diversity of ACCO perspectives.

Table 2: Data sources underpinning analysis

Source	Analysis undertaken	Caveats
Financial and workforce data supplied by individual ACCOs	Used to examine cost structures, revenue sources, and workforce profiles.	Data was provided by four ACCOs. The small sample limits the ability to generalise findings.
Program data provided by State/Territory Governments regarding program funding for ACCOs	Data was collected from State/Territory Governments on individual early and tailored child and family support programs, including the total value, number of ACCOs receiving funding, and total ACCO funding. This data was used to examine the complexity of existing delivery and funding of child and family services across jurisdictions.	Data was provided by seven agencies. Provided data varied in completeness, and differences in program definitions and reporting conventions may affect comparability across jurisdictions. Jurisdictions note that funding/ expenditure data for ACCOs is limited, and manual workarounds are often required to build this information.

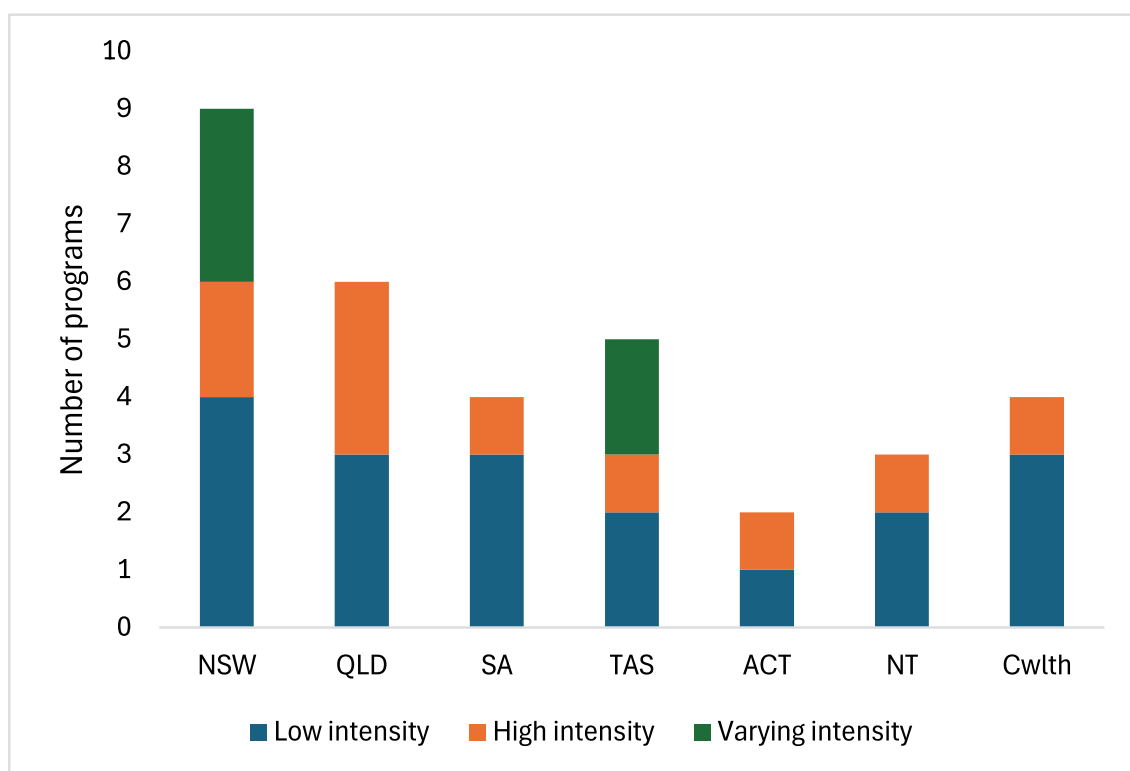
Source	Analysis undertaken	Caveats
Family Matters data (2023–24)	Data was collected from State/ Territory Governments on their total spending on different child and family services, funding to ACCOs, and number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accessing services. This data was used to understand funding directed to ACCOs in delivering child and family services.	Aggregate figures are directly reported by state and territory governments to SNAICC. Due to different counting rules these figures may not match those reported in the Productivity Commission's Report on Government Services. Jurisdictions note that funding/expenditure data for ACCOs is limited, and manual workarounds are often required to build this information.
Survey of ACCO child and family service providers	Provided sector insights on cost drivers, workforce needs, and principles for funding model design.	Completed survey responses received from eight ACCOs. Consequently, data should be interpreted with caution.
Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) data	Used to understand costs and revenue for ACCOs and other charities delivering child and family services.	ACCOs and child and family services cannot be directly identified within this dataset. Two proxies were therefore adopted: • Matched ACCOs: SNAICC engaged organisations matched through their Australian Business Numbers (n=21) • Potential ACCOs: Large charities delivering (i) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, (ii) services for families and (iii) services for children (n=6,748).
Australian Bureau of Statistics data	Used for benchmarking and understanding variation in wages and operating costs across relevant occupations and industries.	ACCO businesses and workers cannot be isolated within these datasets.

Theme 1: Complexity of existing funding

In 2023–24, ACCOs received a total of \$248 million in funding for early and tailored supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (SNAICC, 2025).¹ This represents 40% of total child protection expenditure for ACCOs.

Funding for family support services (FSS) and intensive family support services (IFSS) is drawn from a wide range of sources, including from different levels of government, different government agencies, and different programs within a given agency. Based on program data provided by governments, there are four programs by the Australian Government, and between two to nine programs at the state and territory level (Chart 1).

Chart 1: Number of programs by jurisdiction, child and family services



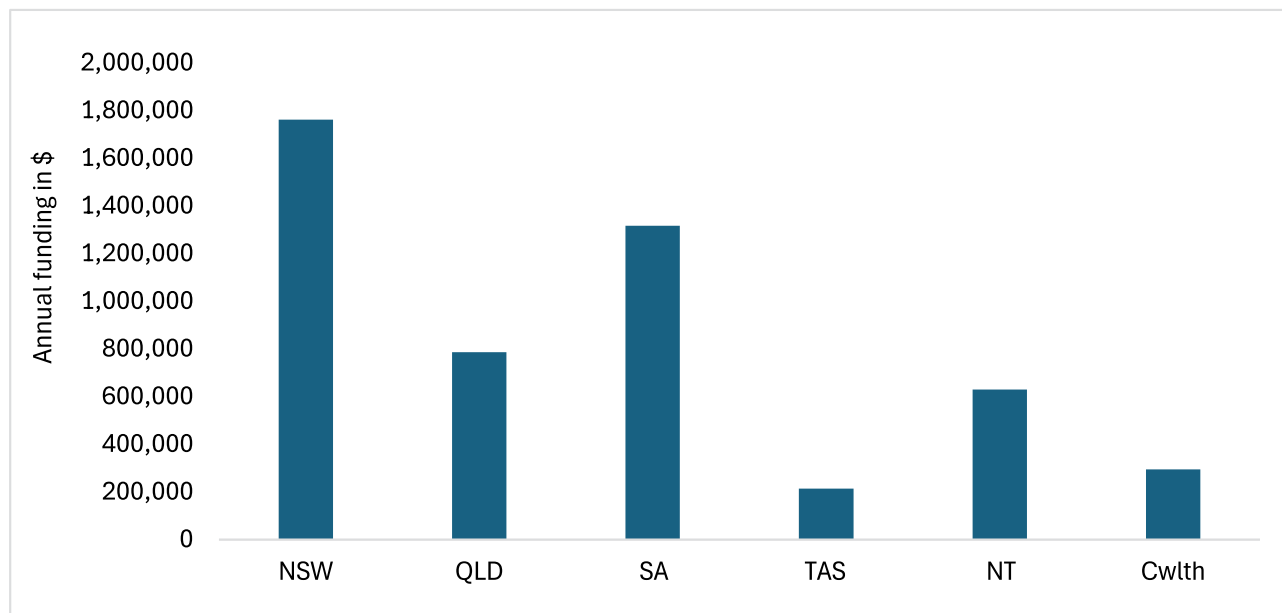
Source: Deloitte analysis of state/territory child and family services program data submitted to SNAICC.

Note: Not all programs listed in Appendix C are included in the chart data as some programs are considered out-of-scope. The categorisation of program intensity is based on program description, with protective intervention programs excluded. No data is available for VIC and WA.

The average funding received per ACCO to deliver FSS and IFSS programs can differ substantially between jurisdictions. As illustrated in Chart 2, average annual funding per program for ACCOs ranges from approximately \$215,000 in Tasmania to \$1.7 million in New South Wales. The funding per program figures are indicative and should be interpreted with caution due to data limitations. Stakeholders noted that compiling expenditure data for ACCOs can be complex and often requires manual consolidation across multiple sources. There are also risks in reporting funding at the ACCO level where the number of organisations is small, as this may allow individual organisations to be identified.

¹ Family support services attracted \$146 million (25%) in funding and intensive family support services attracted \$102 million (17%) in funding.

Chart 2: Average annual funding per program for ACCOs by jurisdiction, child and family services



Source: Deloitte analysis of state/territory child and family services program data submitted to SNAICC.

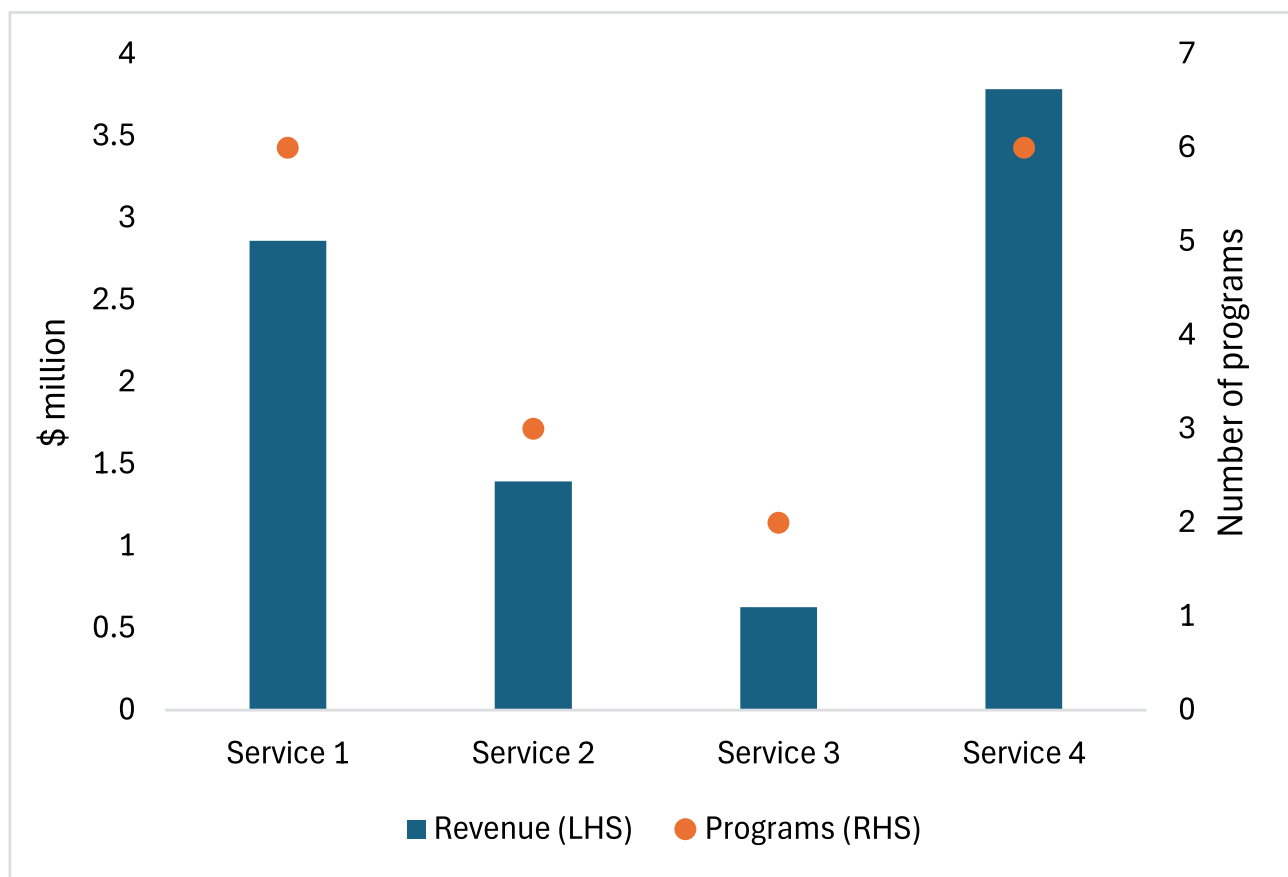
Note: Funding is assumed to be annual. Averages include both FSS and IFSS program funding data.

Protective intervention services data is excluded.

The fragmentation of funding creates a significant administrative load for ACCOs who must secure and manage multiple grants to deliver a coherent service offering. Financial data from a small sample of ACCOs indicates that the typical ACCO receives \$2.1 million in child and family service-related funding spread across four separate programs (Chart 3).

This administrative burden is compounded by the breadth of services many ACCOs deliver beyond core child and family supports, such as parenting programs, counselling, and maternal and child wellbeing services. Each of these services may be funded through yet another set of programs and reporting arrangements.

Chart 3: Child and family service funding for individual ACCOs



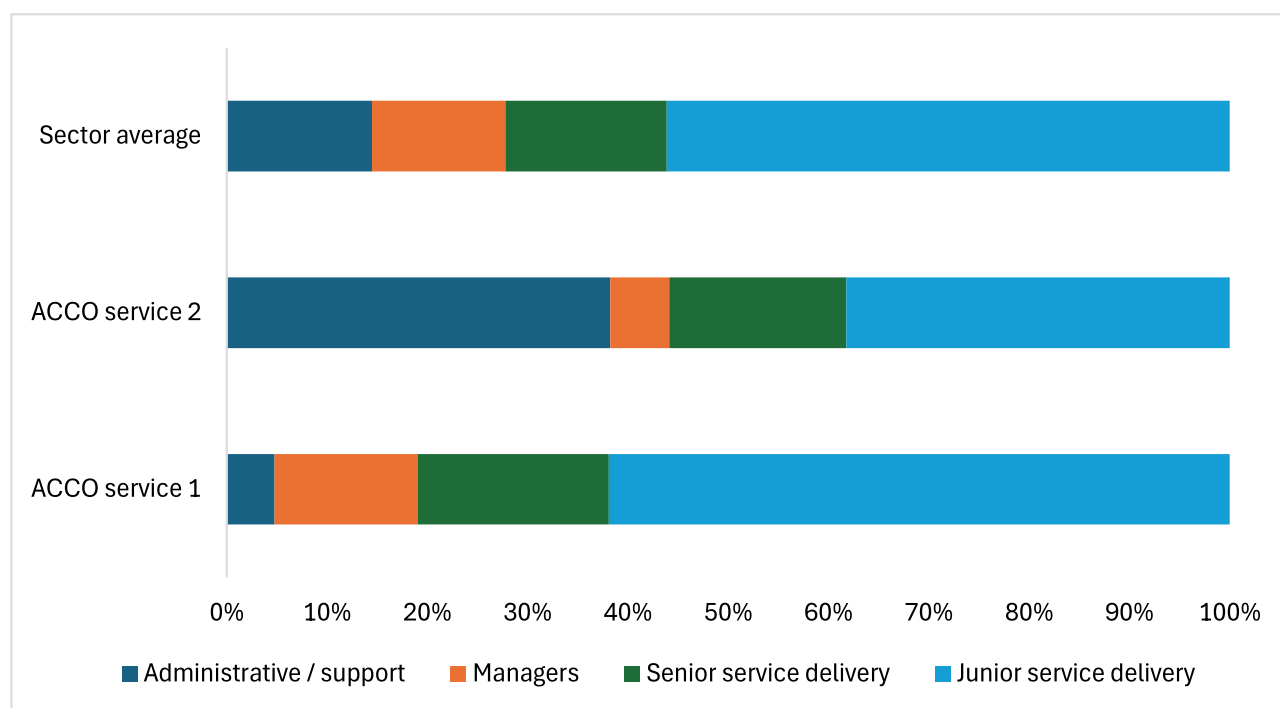
Source: Deloitte analysis of financial and other supporting data submitted to SNAICC by individual services on the revenue received from specific programs.

Theme 2: Workforce challenges faced by ACCOs

Child and family services rely on a workforce with a broad mix of skills across direct service delivery, management, and operational support. Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census data shows this diversity across the sector more broadly, with:

- 13% of Full-time Equivalent (FTE) workers in managerial roles
- 14% of FTE workers in administration and support roles
- The remaining 70% of workers are in service delivery, with an approximate 80-20 split between junior support workers – including community support workers and family support workers – and senior support workers – including program coordinators, team leaders, cultural advisors (Chart 4).

Chart 4: ACCO workforce by occupation type



Source: Sector average based on ABS Census of Population and Housing 2021 for ANZSIC 4-digit industry Other Social Assistance Services. ACCO-specific workforce profiles based on financial data provided by ACCOs. Senior service delivery staff includes program coordinators, team leaders, cultural advisors, while junior service delivery staff includes community support workers and family support workers.

While this diversity of roles is also seen in the workforce profile information provided by a small number of ACCOs, there can be significant differences in the workforce needs of individual providers, highlighting the importance of flexibility and differing community needs. Survey responses further highlight the unique workforce requirements based on ACCOs, including the need for:

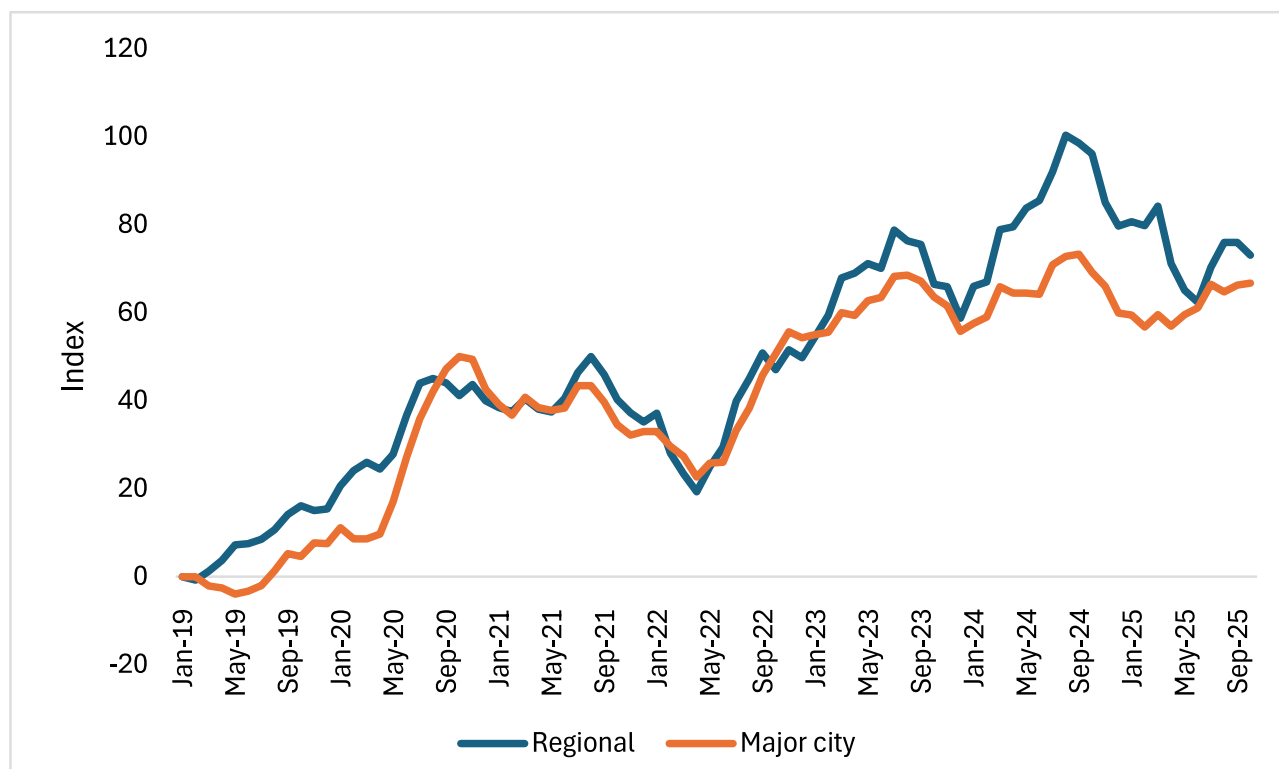
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers (100% of survey respondents)
- Local workers (88%)
- Workers with cultural competency (88%).

These requirements narrow the pool of suitable applicants and can intensify workforce pressures, particularly in regional and remote areas. Survey responses identified several ways in which the current funding model affects ACCO workforce needs, including challenges in:

- Attraction and retention of local staff (75% of respondents)
- Competitive remuneration and pay parity (63%)
- Workforce and professional development (50%)
- Attraction and retention of skilled and qualified staff (50%).

Broader labour market trends reinforce these concerns. Since 2019, job vacancies for frontline service delivery roles have grown faster than for the broader economy, as indicated by the Internet Vacancy Index. The gap is particularly pronounced in regional locations, suggesting that ACCOs face disproportionate challenges in filling roles, particularly as they are often located in areas with thin labour markets (Chart 5).

**Chart 5: Internet vacancy index for service delivery workers relative to broader economy
(0 = January 2019 levels)**



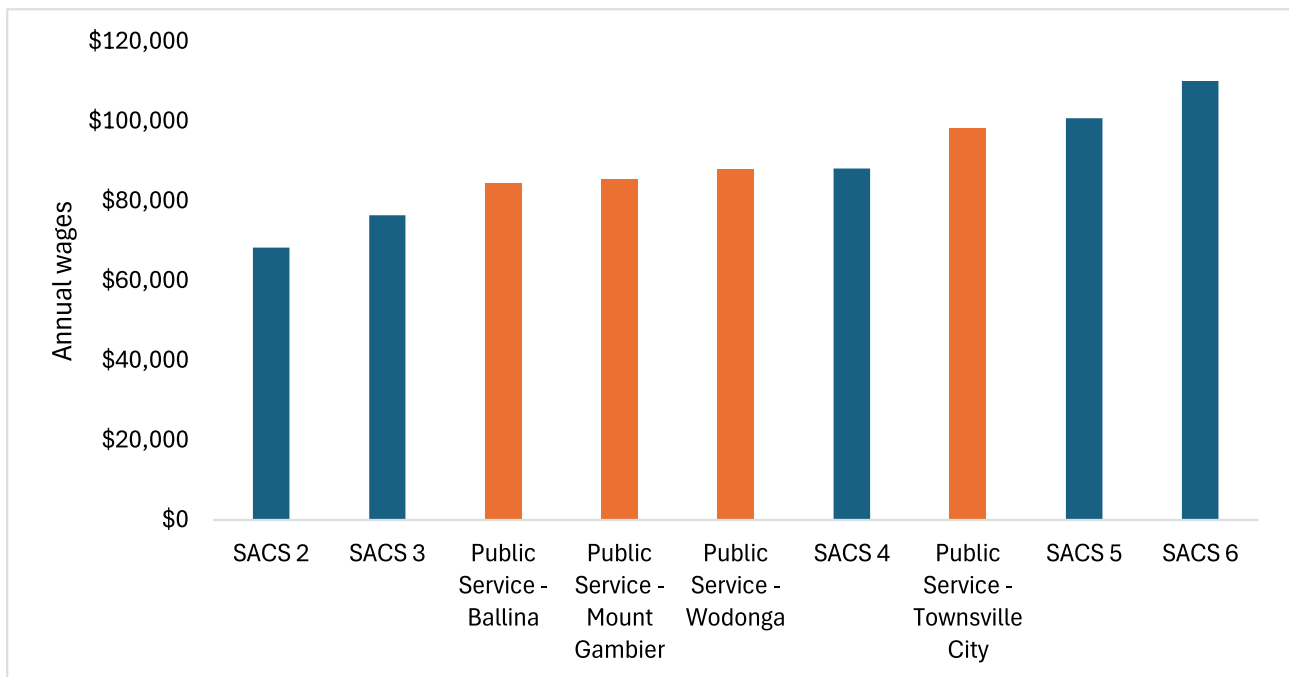
Source: Jobs and Skills Australia. Service delivery workers proxied by the following ANZSCO 4-digit occupations: (i) welfare support workers, (ii) welfare, recreation and community arts workers, (iii) social workers, and (iv) counsellors. These occupations account for 93% of service delivery workers employed in other social assistance services.

Analysis of award wages under the SCHADS Award shows that since the implementation of the Equal Remuneration Order, full-time workers at Social and Community Services (SACS) Level 4 and Level 5 typically receive wages on par with competing public sector occupations (Chart 6).

However, ACCO staff employed at lower levels (such as SACS 2 or SACS 3) would face stronger competition from higher-paid public sector roles (Chart 6). Workforce data from one ACCO suggests that junior service delivery positions are typically employed at SACS Level 2.1, while senior service delivery positions align with SACS Level 5.2.

The SCHADS Award is currently being reviewed on the basis of gender undervaluation by the Fair Work Commission. The Fair Work Commission's determination could affect how ACCO staff are classified and therefore affect future wage costs for the ACCO sector.

Chart 6: Comparison of annual full-time salary across public sector roles in select locations and SCHADS award wages



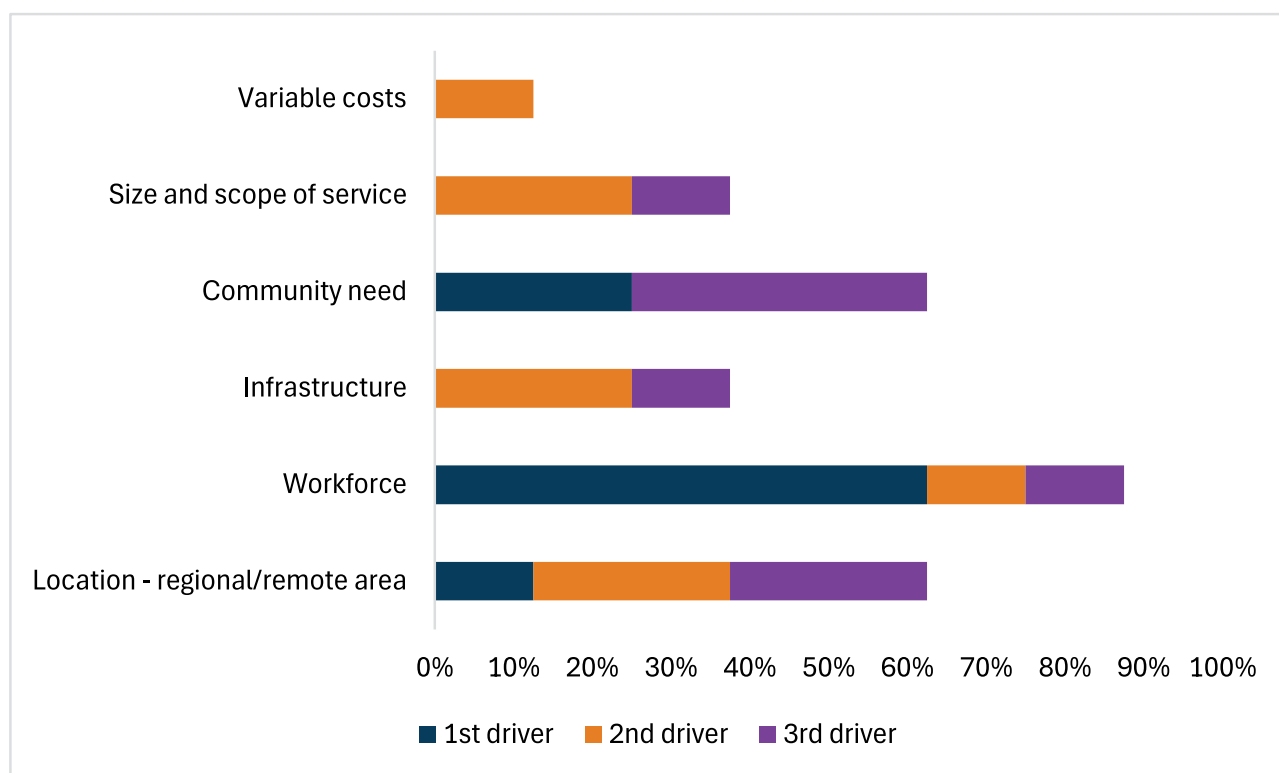
Source: ABS Census data, SCHADS award. Selected locations include existing areas where ACCOs operate. Public sector refers to full-time employees working in Public Administration and Safety roles within ABS census data.

Theme 3: Responsive to cost drivers

Understanding the cost structure of ACCOs delivering child and family services is critical to designing a funding model that is responsive to differences in community need, workforce requirements and service context.

Survey respondents indicated that staffing (workforce) is the largest driver of costs (Chart 7). Approximately 90% of respondents listed workforce as one of the top three drivers, with 63% of survey respondents selected it as the greatest driver.

Chart 7: Key factors that drive costs for service delivery



Source: Survey responses (n=8).

This aligns with evidence across multiple datasets showing that labour accounts for an average of 60% of total costs (Table 3). Among the non-labour costs, data from an illustrative ACCO suggests major expenditure categories include program materials (22%), utilities, cleaning and maintenance (17%) and travel and accommodation (16%).

Table 3: Estimated proportion of total expenditure deriving from employee wages

Estimation approach	Share of expenditure allocated to labour costs
Source 1: ACNC analysis	
Potential all child and family services (n=6,748)*	56%
Matched ACCOs (n=21)	70%
Source 2: ABS Input-Output analysis	
Residential and social assistance services	64%
Source 3: IbisWorld analysis	
Personal welfare services	55%
Average	60%

Source: As noted in table. *Potential ACCOs include large charities delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, children and families.

After labour costs, survey respondents identified community need and location as being the next most important factors in driving costs. However, based on the government data received, funding calculations for child and family programs typically do not contain 'multipliers' that consider these types of need.

Noting that there is insufficient financial data to support the modelling and analysis of cost differences between ACCOs, the best available evidence on the potential magnitude of these cost differences include:

- **Regionality:** Regional and remote delivery affects cost structures through lower achievable caseloads. This results from: (i) additional time spent travelling which reduces face-to-face delivery time, and (ii) the lack of specialist support services in these communities which increases the workload for child and family support staff. In Queensland, caseloads for intensive family support workers in regional areas are anecdotally around half those in metropolitan locations (Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2024). This effectively doubles labour requirements, implying a loading of around 60%. Comparable loadings are applied elsewhere in other sectors; for example, a loading of up to 80% is applied to very remote schools (Independent Schools Australia, 2024), and up to 75% within the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (Department of Health and Aged Care, 2024).
- **Complexity and community need:** Higher levels of disadvantage and complexity is likely to require more intensive supports, which increases staffing needs. In schooling, a loading of up to 50% is applied for schools in the most disadvantaged areas. However, for the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme, a loading of up to 300% is applied for services in low socioeconomic areas with high years of potential life lost. The best available evidence on how staffing requirements are likely to differ based on intensity of family and child services is presented below.

There are varying estimates in the caseload supported per FTE staff in IFSS delivery. Estimates prepared for DSS state that the minimum caseload per FTE staff is approximately eight families (Social Compass, 2020), while Queensland guidance suggests that this caseload may be as high as 18 (Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2024). Conservatively, the analysis presented in the subsequent section (Recommended funding model architecture) assumes a minimum caseload of eight families per FTE staff.

IFSS service delivery was estimated to be 3.5 times more intensive than FSS service delivery based on the average of the following estimates:

- Family Matters data suggests FSS programs are currently funded at \$13,200 per child, with IFSS programs funded at **1.5x** the rate of FSS programs (\$20,000 per child).
- Productivity Commission data suggests FSS programs are currently funded at \$2,900 per child, with IFSS programs funded at **5x** the rate of FSS programs (\$14,000 per child).
- Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (2026) data on child and family services suggests that the FSS direct delivery time is **4.2x** the rate of FSS delivery time.

This estimate suggests that the caseload supported per FTE staff in FSS delivery is approximately 28 families.

Theme 4: Real cost of service delivery

Evidence suggests that current funding models typically do not account for true costs of service delivery. Typical funding agreements often only account for overhead (or indirect) costs of between 10–20% of overall costs. Actual overhead costs are often higher, averaging around 33% of total costs (Social Ventures Australia, 2022). Based on a survey of community organisations in the ACT, the proportion of respondents who indicated that their current funding does not cover the true cost of delivering services increased from 61% in 2016 to 79% in 2021 (Cortis, Blaxland & Adamson, 2021).

Analysis of publicly available ACNC data was undertaken to understand the current contribution of government funding towards ACCO expenses. Approximately 62% of costs incurred by potential ACCOs can be supported through government revenue, with the remaining covered through donations, alongside revenue from goods and services and from investments (Table 4). For the matched ACCOs, this proportion is substantially higher at approximately 92%. This could potentially indicate ACCOs' reduced ability to raise alternative sources of revenue, which highlights the importance of government funding settings to their service delivery relative to other services.

Table 4: Government revenue as a proportion of service expenditure

Provider type	Revenue from government	Government revenue as a proportion of expenditure
Potential all child and family services (n=6,748)	60%	62%
Matched ACCOs (n=21)	89%	92%

Source: ACNC.

Another way to consider the sufficiency of existing funding is based on bottom-up costings of the various components of service delivery. Note that this is limited to IFSS on a per child basis given more readily available guidance on labour requirements. While analysis was not available for FSS, it was assumed that similar patterns would likely apply.

As shown in Chart 8, the analysis finds that while the existing typical funding of \$20,000 per child for higher intensity supports can cover labour costs, it is less than the true costs of delivery. In particular, it is unlikely to support:

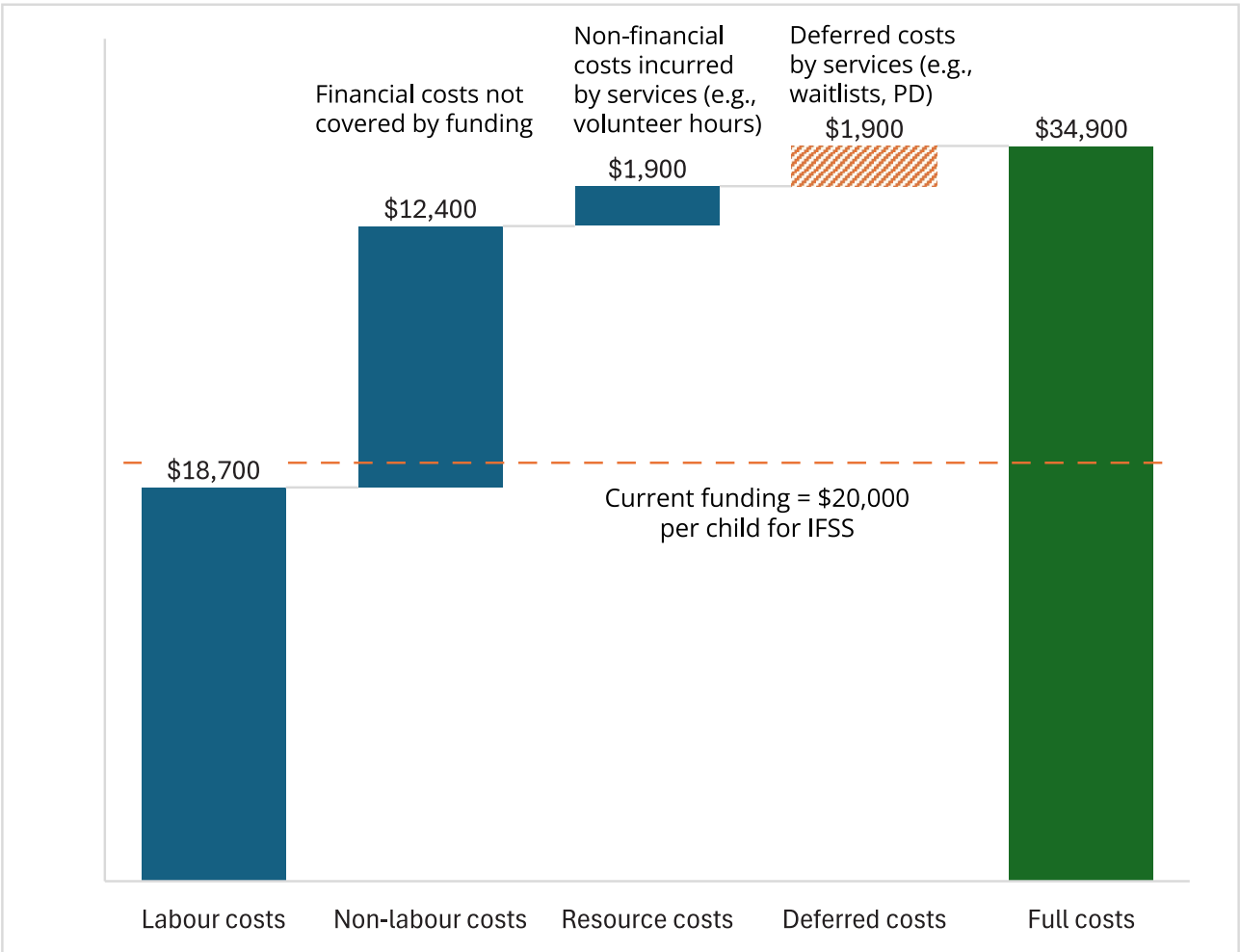
- Non-labour costs incurred by services in service delivery based on the typical cost structure.

- Non-financial costs incurred by services. Based on the survey, services rely on a range of non-financial adjustments to cover resource costs, including donations (67%), unpaid overtime (33%) and volunteers (33%). It is estimated that volunteers and overtime represent 10% of labour costs.²
- Costs that should be incurred but may be deferred by ACCOs due to insufficient funding. This could include professional development and/or training opportunities, upgrades to facilities, or waitlists for service provision. Given high levels of uncertainty, this was assumed to be 10% of labour costs.

² Analysis of ABS census data suggests that full-time employees in social assistance services worked an average of four additional hours of overtime per week. Based on the ACNC, the average child and family service ACCO has seven to 11 volunteers. Based on average volunteering hours, it was estimated that volunteers contribute up to 5% of the total workforce.

Several factors contribute to ACCOs having higher real costs of service delivery than expected. ACCOs are commonly small and localised providers and as a result have less capacity to fill gaps in government funding using their own reserves, volunteers, or income from donors or commercial operations, relative to larger providers. Additionally, the current funding model is based on low expectations for overhead costs, driven by pressure over time for funds to be directed to frontline activities, competition to lower overheads, and the under-reporting of full costs by organisations (Cortis, Blaxland & Adamson, 2021).

Chart 8: Sufficiency of existing government funding in meeting full costs of delivery



Source: Deloitte analysis of Family Matters 2025 data provided by SNAICC, ABS Input-output tables, ACNC and IbisWorld data. Labour costs estimated based on the assumption of \$128K per service delivery FTE (SACS 5.1, including oncosts), and assuming a caseload of 5–8 children per annum (Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs, 2024).

Recommended funding model architecture

The recommended funding model architecture for early intervention and prevention child and family services delivered by ACCOs is informed by evidence gathered across all stages of the project, including:

- System objectives informed by the policy context and project scope.
- Best practice for delivering high quality, culturally safe and responsive services for families based on the literature review. This is supplemented with insights on how and why current funding models are failing and what a new funding model needs to deliver to be successful, identified through stakeholder engagement and data analysis.

This section outlines:

- The principles that should guide funding model design, reflecting what is required for funding to effectively support the broader system level objectives.
- The development and assessment of funding model options, leading to the identification of a preferred funding model architecture.
- Implementation considerations, including parameterising the model, considerations of funding sources, and identifying other implementation issues.

Figure 2 graphically illustrates the approach taken to develop the preferred funding model option.

Figure 2: Overview of approach to develop preferred model option

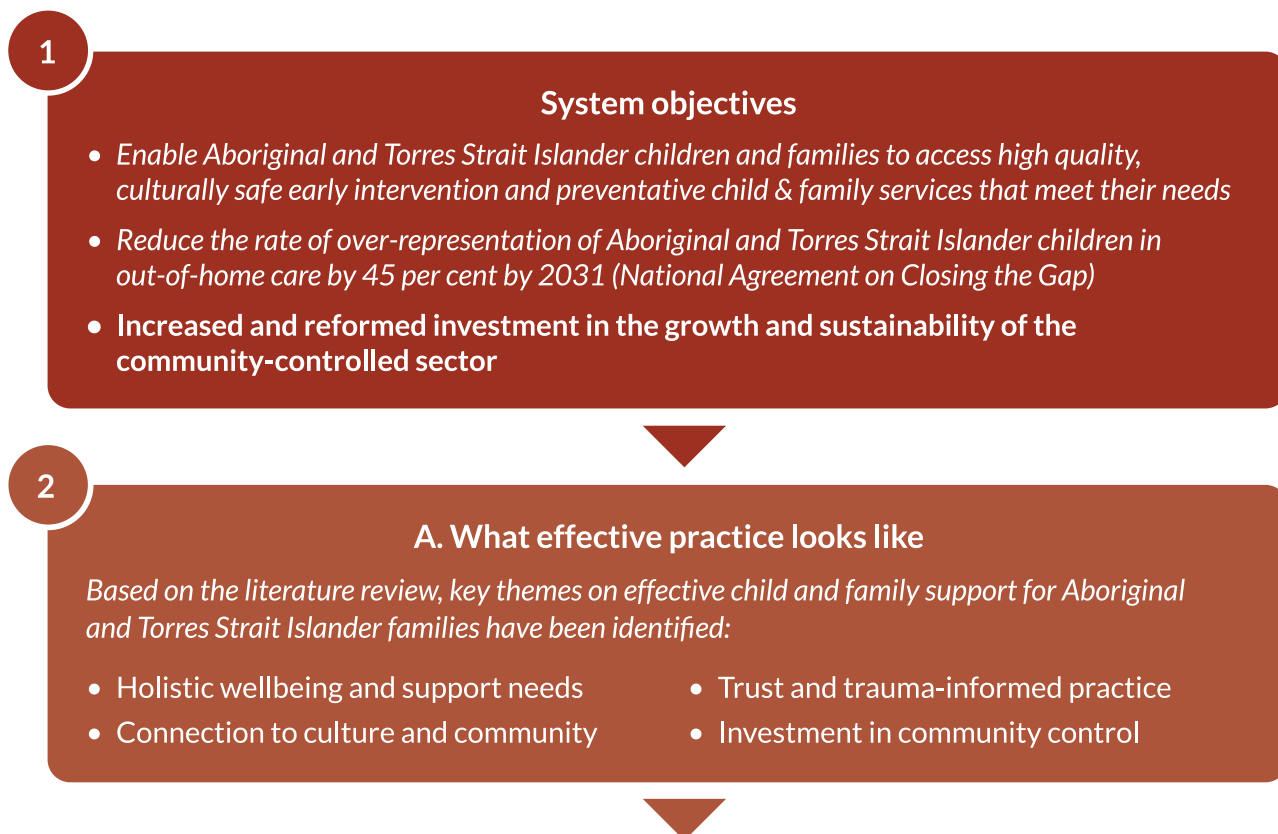
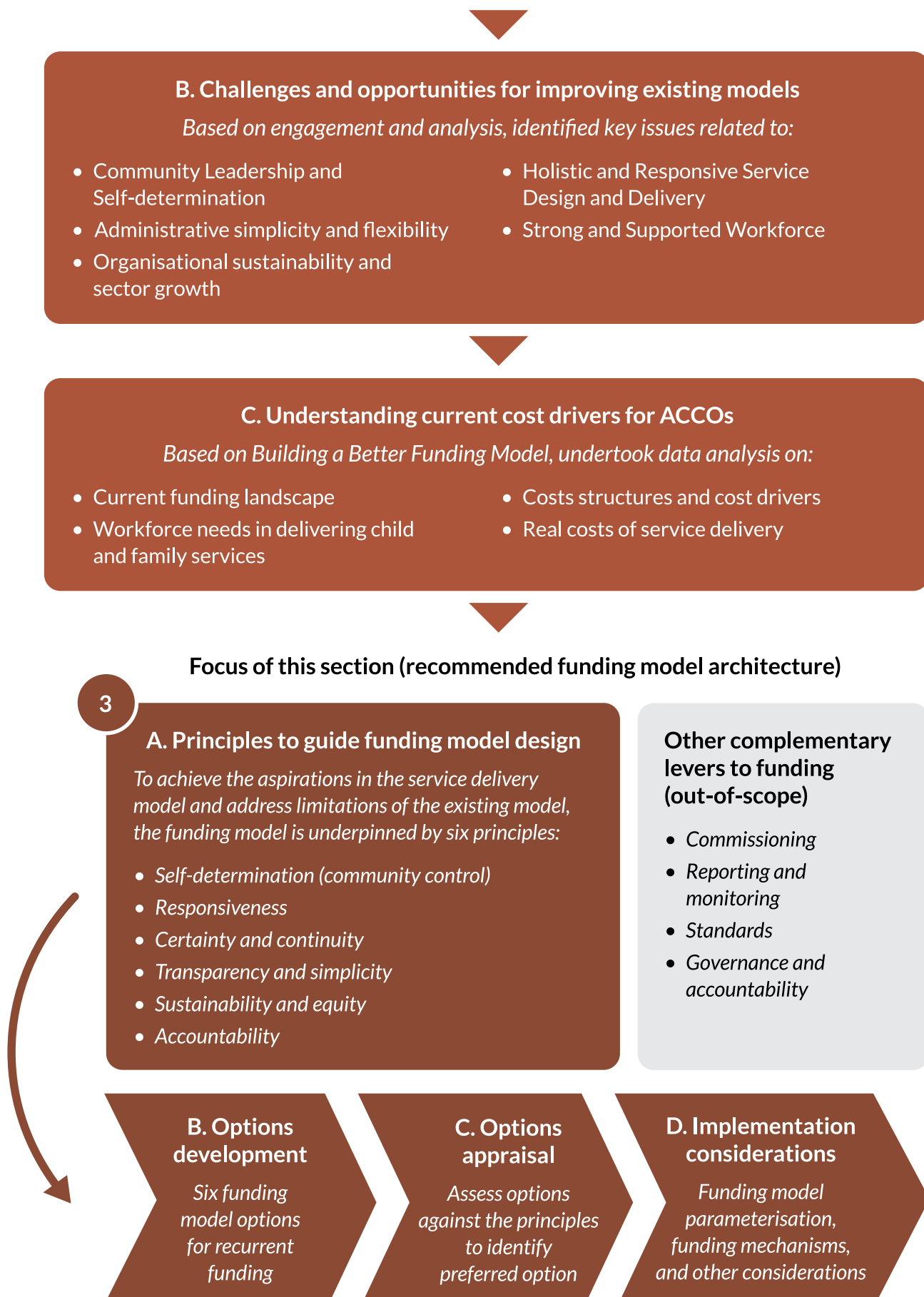


Figure 2 (continued)



Principles of funding model design

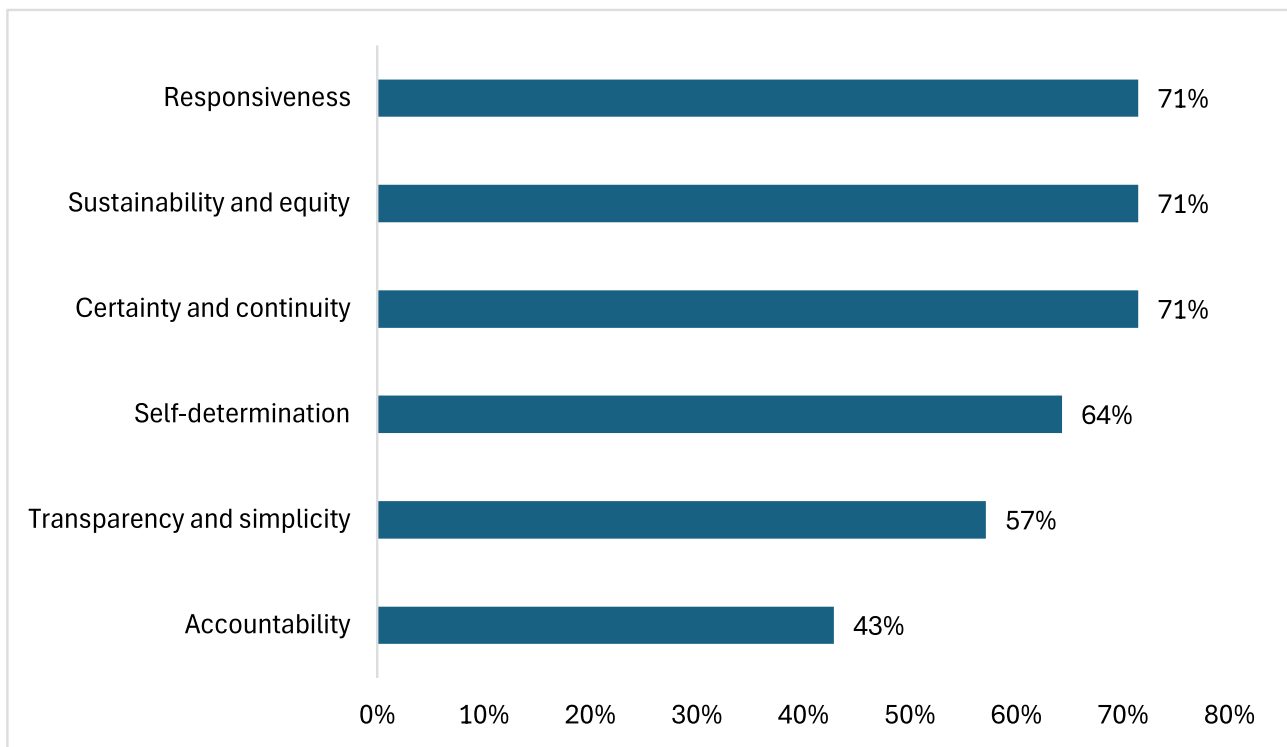
Drawing on the stakeholder engagement, literature review and data analysis, six principles have been selected to guide the design and assessment of funding models. These principles are defined in Table 5.

Table 5: Summary of funding model design principles

Funding principles	Description
Self-determination (Community control)	Funding enables services to exercise genuine decision-making authority, with the flexibility to design and deliver supports that reflect local needs and community priorities.
Responsiveness	Funding reflects the diversity of the communities served by the services, responding to varying levels of need and recognising higher delivery costs in specific contexts to achieving a given outcome.
Transparency and simplicity	Funding is allocated through clear, consolidated and consistent processes. Administrative requirements are minimised so services can focus on delivering positive outcomes for children and families.
Certainty and continuity	Funding is stable and predictable, enabling services to plan and invest in workforce, infrastructure and other capabilities that deliver long-term services for community.
Sustainability and equity	Funding meets the full and true costs of culturally strong and high-quality service delivery. Government commits to funding arrangements that are stable, equitable and financially sustainable.
Accountability	Services are accountable for delivering culturally safe, strengths-based outcomes aligned with community expectations. Reporting approaches are proportionate, meaningful, and designed in partnership with services.

These principles also align with the views of ACCOs who were surveyed and interviewed, as well as other reviews. More than half of all ACCO respondents highlighted four principles as most critical: (i) responsiveness (ii) self-determination, (iii) sustainability and equity, and (iv) certainty and continuity of funding (Chart 9).

Chart 9: Principles that should inform funding model from interviews and surveys

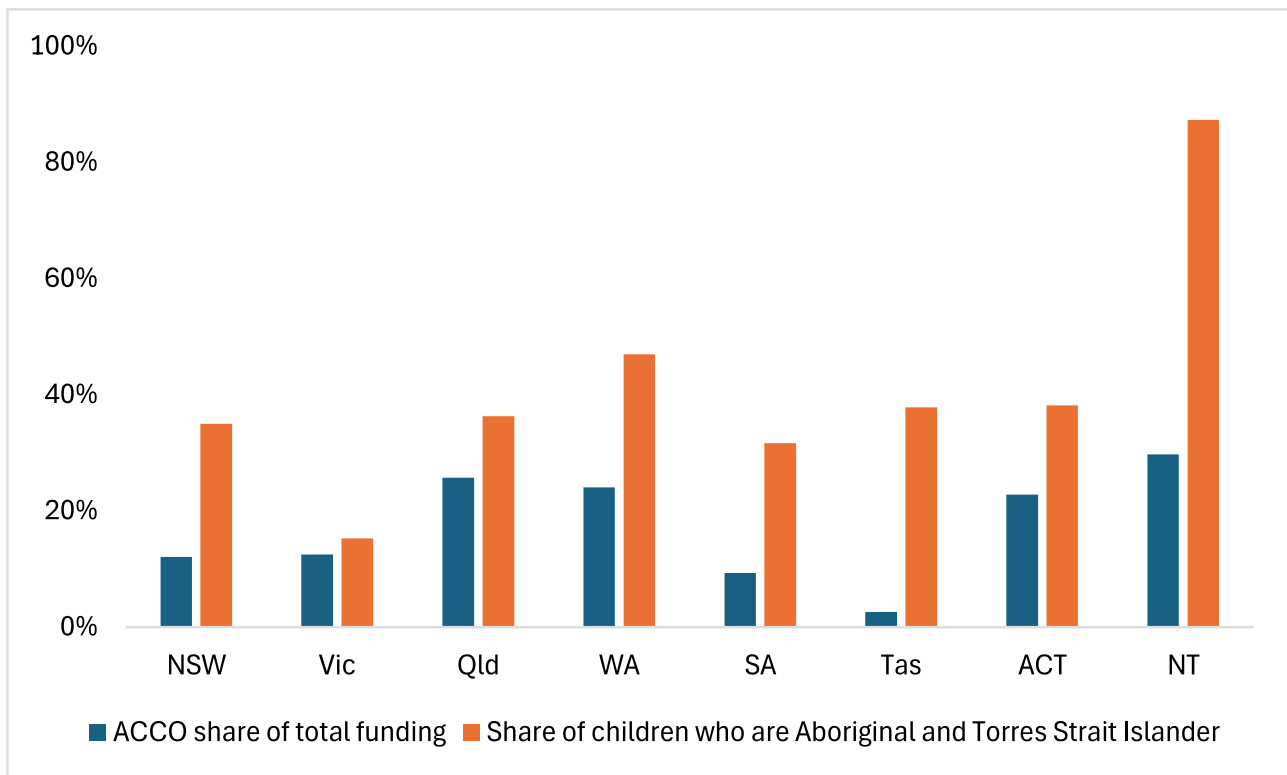


Source: survey responses (n=8) and interviews (n=6).

Effective funding (and other levers) will support sustainable and coordinated growth of the sector – which is key in ensuring the delivery of high quality, culturally safe child and family supports.³ This is important as, across all jurisdictions, ACCOs continue to be under-represented in service delivery relative to community need. While they are the most effective in providing supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, ACCOs typically receive 15% of funding for FSS and IFSS. In contrast, 41% of children receiving these services are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Chart 10).

³ 88% of survey respondents noted the importance of growing the sector.

Chart 10: Share of total funding received by ACCOs compared against share of children accessing FSS and IFSS services who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, 2023–24



Source: Deloitte analysis of service data provided by states and territories to SNAICC and published in the Family Matters report (SNAICC, 2025c). Data obtained from Table 7 - Expenditure on FSSs, IFSSs and child protection services through ACCOs, by jurisdiction (2023–24). Protective intervention services data is excluded.

Options development

In considering potential funding approaches for ACCOs delivering early intervention and preventative child and family services, six broad funding model types have been considered:

- **Block-based funding:** services are directly funded with lump sum payments, and funding is generally not tied to specific activities.
- **Activity-based funding:** funding is directly tied to the level and types of activities that services deliver.
- **Outcomes-based funding:** funding depends on achieving pre-agreed outcomes rather than being tied to inputs or outputs.
- **Needs-based funding:** funding allocations are determined by a formula reflecting various drivers of need (e.g., population size, geography, disadvantage).
- **Programmatic funding:** funding is allocated to support the delivery of a specific program with defined objectives, target groups and reporting requirements.
- **Hybrid funding models:** funding that combines elements from the above funding models.

Options appraisal

A qualitative assessment has been undertaken to consider how each funding model option aligns to the guiding principles (Table 6). The assessment highlights that each option involves inherent trade-offs, for example:

- Block-based funding performs relatively strongly on self-determination, certainty and continuity as it provides predictable and flexible funding. However, it may be less responsive to variations in need or costs across communities, and lead to less equitable outcomes across diverse service contexts.

- Needs-based funding performs relatively strongly on responsiveness, sustainability and equity as it allocates funding systematically according to different drivers of need. However, on its own, this model could potentially introduce volatility in funding from year to year.

Given these trade-offs, a hybrid model has been assessed as the most balanced approach across the principles, particularly given the importance of (i) responsiveness (ii) self-determination, (iii) sustainability and equity, and (iv) certainty and continuity to ACCOs. The preferred architecture incorporates the following elements:

- A fixed block component that establishes a funding floor for every ACCO, supporting certainty, continuity and the ability to maintain core workforce and service capacity regardless of fluctuations in demand.
- A needs-based component that adjusts the funding level to respond the following key drivers of need: (i) community size, (ii) location, and (iii) community complexity and need.

The funding levels will be parameterised to reflect the true costs of high quality, culturally safe delivery to ensure a sustainable and equitable funding model. The funding is intended to support achievement of community outcomes rather than prescribe activity-based outputs, enabling ACCOs to tailor services to local needs and priorities. High quality and culturally safe delivery is explained in the next section.

Table 6: Qualitative assessment on relative strengths of options against funding model principles

Funding model type	Responsiveness	Transparency and simplicity	Self-determination	Certainty and continuity	Sustainability and equity	Accountability
Importance of principles to ACCO service delivery*	HIGH		HIGH	HIGH	HIGH	
Block-based funding	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM-HIGH	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Activity-based funding	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
Outcome-based funding	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH
Needs-based funding	HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	MEDIUM	HIGH	MEDIUM
Programmatic funding	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM	LOW	MEDIUM	MEDIUM
Hybrid approach	MEDIUM-HIGH	MEDIUM	MEDIUM-HIGH	MEDIUM-HIGH	MEDIUM-HIGH	MEDIUM

* Source: Based on survey and interviews.

Implementation considerations

Parameterising the funding model

This section outlines an approach for parameterising the hybrid funding formula reflecting the best available evidence. Parameters should be refined and quality assured in application, reflecting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement and leadership in understanding community and family needs. Engagement would assist in addressing high uncertainty in costs associated with size-based and complexity-based loadings while also enabling the critical principle of self-determination such that funding is matched to community-led understandings of need and required responses.

To establish indicative cost estimates, the modelling adopts a set of assumptions on staffing levels and workforce profiles. These are used solely as inputs for quantification and are not intended to prescribe how services should structure or deploy their workforce.

There are likely to be multiple ways for services to achieve a given outcome, and the parameterisation simply provides a consistent basis for estimating the resources required to deliver high-quality, culturally strong support. The intent is for funding to be provided as a dollar amount, with ACCOs retaining the control and flexibility to design and deliver services in a way that best meets the needs of their communities.

The funding model is designed to capture the indirect costs of delivering services, noting there are resource costs which exceed the amount that ACCOs are typically funded for. This aspect aligns with a core recommendation of the 'Pay What It Takes' report to re-evaluate the assumption that low overheads indicate efficiency, and instead determine the total investment required to effectively support ACCOs (Taylor & Collins, 2024).

Funding floor

The funding floor provides a fixed level of funding provided to all ACCOs regardless of service characteristics, which is an estimated **\$1.4 million per ACCO**. This is estimated based on the following assumptions outlined in Table 7.

Table 7: Assumptions underpinning funding floor estimate

Component	Value	Estimation approach / source
Staffing The minimum level of staffing required to meet operational needs, and minimum requirements for safety, supervision and cultural capability.	6 FTE staff	Inputs received from ACCO submissions. The minimum staffing structure would support a range of roles, including: • 1 manager • 1 admin / operational staff • 4 service delivery staff (2 junior, 2 senior)
Average labour costs Accounting for the labour costs required to support the right mix of skills.	\$122K per FTE staff	Average of \$101K (equivalent to SACS level 5.1), which supports competitive wages that attract and retain high skilled, local workers. ⁴ An additional 20.5% for oncosts is added. ⁵ The SCHADS Award is currently being reviewed, and any changes should be reflected in the average labour cost assumption.
Non-labour costs Accounting for full financial costs, including non-labour costs (e.g., facilities, transportation).	66% of labour costs, \$480,000	ACNC data, ABS Input-Output tables, IbisWorld. Equivalent to 60% of total costs being associated with labour costs. This is broadly consistent with data reported by Social Ventures Australia, whereby non-labour costs typically average 1/3 of total costs incurred by charities.
Resource costs Capturing true costs of delivery through the contributions of volunteers and unpaid overtime labour.	10% of labour costs, \$73,000	ACNC data and ABS analysis on current levels of overtime and use of volunteers in the sector.
Deferred costs Capturing true costs of delivery through activities that may be deferred by ACCOs due to insufficient funding.	10% of labour costs, \$73,000	Assumption-driven. Intended to support flexibility for services, and allows services to invest in the activities required for high quality, culturally safe service delivery, including through professional development and workforce capability building.

⁴ This average cost broadly supports a varied staffing profile in a range of levels including: (i) SAC 8.3 for management, (ii) SAC 5.2 for two senior service delivery staff, (iii) SAC 3.4 for two junior service delivery staff and an administrative staff.

⁵ Oncosts captured include: super, workers' compensation, long service leave and leave loading.

Needs-based funding

Four dimensions of needs-based funding have been determined to respond to differences in need and operating costs across ACCOs. Each of these components are outlined in Table 8 below.

- **Size-based loading:** accounts for the additional costs associated with supporting a larger number of families. This loading should reflect the underlying demand for early intervention and prevention services within a community, including both current and anticipated future demand rather than historic service patterns alone. In particular, it should consider (i) existing service delivery, (ii) waitlists, (iii) areas where child and family services are currently under-provided, and (iv) projected demographic changes. As there is no single existing measure, this loading will need to be constructed using a combination of program data, population data, and regional indicators such as engagement with the child protection system.
- **Region-based loading:** accounts for the higher costs associated with service delivery in regional and remote communities. These costs include reduced caseloads for staff to accommodate travel time, as well as higher transport, infrastructure and material costs.
- **Complexity-related loading:** for the higher costs associated with delivering more intensive and sustained interventions in communities experiencing greater levels of disadvantage and complexity.
- **Brokerage loading:** provides funding for practical and material supports that assist families (for example, transport, essential items or short-term assistance) as it is considered a prerequisite to effective engagement with child and family services. Funding levels would be higher in communities where families face greater socioeconomic disadvantage.

Table 8: Needs-based funding components

Component	Value	Estimation approach / source
Size-based loading For services with more than 100 families requiring support, a scaling factor is applied to account for additional resource requirements.	An additional \$9,400 (approx.) per additional family, or \$240,000 per 25 additional families.	In low-complexity settings, the best available evidence suggests that one additional FTE staff member is required for every 25 additional families served. • For high-intensity services, each staff member can support around 8 families per year. For low-intensity services, each staff member can support around 28 families per year.⁶ • For IRSEO 5 communities, the model assumes an 80:20 service delivery profile, with 80% low-intensity services and 20% high-intensity services.

Component	Value	Estimation approach / source
Region-based loading A loading to accommodate for higher costs of delivery associated with regional and remote communities.	Loading based on ARIA: ⁷ Metropolitan: 0% Regional: 30% Remote and very remote: 60% ⁸	Estimated based on average differences in recommended caseloads for regional versus metropolitan areas, drawing on IFSS program evaluation findings. Region-based loading is applied to funding floor <i>plus</i> size-based loading.
Complexity-related loading A loading for ACCOs operating in more disadvantaged communities, where more intensive interventions may be required. ⁹	Loadings based on IRSEO ¹⁰ quintiles: Quintile 1: 65% ¹¹ Quintile 2: 39% Quintile 3: 22% Quintile 4: 9% Quintile 5: 0%	Based on the best available evidence, more intensive supports require 3.5x more <i>staff time</i> to deliver compared to less intensive supports on a per unit basis. ¹² The model assumes the delivery mix between low-intensity and high-intensity services changes with IRSEO. For IRSEO 1, 80% high-intensity services and 20% low-intensity services is assumed.
Brokerage loading A loading for ACCOs to contribute towards supporting families to access practical and material assistance to meet family goals.	Brokerage loading per family of between \$500 to \$2,500 per family (based on IRSEO).	Benchmarking from other sectors indicate brokerage averages between \$1,000 (e.g. Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing Sexual assault support brokerage) and \$3,400 per family (e.g. Victorian Family Violence Flexible Support packages).

⁶ Further details on the evidence provided under *Theme 3: Responsive to cost drivers*; Low intensity services are 1:28. However, for low complexity settings (IRSEO = 5), we assume 20% delivery of high intensity services (1:8 staffing), and 80% delivery of low intensity services. These average out to 1:25.

⁷ Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia.

⁸ Where a service operates across a state / multiple locations, a weighted average ARIA based on the catchment will be estimated.

⁹ The complexity loading only applies to services above a minimum size, where the funding floor alone would not be sufficient to support more intensive service delivery for a given number of families. For Quintile 1 services, the loading applies where services support more than 50 families. For Quintile 4 services, it applies where services support more than 85 families.

¹⁰ Indigenous Relative Socioeconomic Outcomes (IRSEO) index.

¹¹ Quintile 1 representing the most disadvantaged regions. Where a service operates across a state / multiple locations, a weighted average IRSEO based on the catchment will be estimated.

¹² Based on evidence from (i) funding rate differences between FSS and IFSS services from Family Matters and Report on Government Services and (ii) Department of Families, Fairness and Housing data on staffing requirements for different FSS and IFSS interventions.

Example applications of the parameterised funding model

The funding formula described above is applied at the service level to estimate annual recurrent funding. As a result, annual funding amounts are expected to vary significantly across services, depending on their size, delivery context and the needs of the communities they support. Three examples are provided in Table 9 to illustrate how funding may differ across ACCOs with different characteristics. For example:

- **Service 1** is a medium-sized ACCO operating in a metropolitan setting with a relatively low level of disadvantage (IRSEO quintile 5). In addition to the funding floor of \$1.4 million, the service would receive an additional \$0.5 million in size-based funding, reflecting that more than 100 families in the community require its services. Total annual funding is estimated at \$1.9 million, equivalent to around \$13,000 per family.
- **Service 2** is a small ACCO operating in a remote community with families who have relatively high needs (IRSEO quintile 1). In this scenario, the service receives the \$1.4 million funding floor and a regional loading of \$0.8 million. No additional complexity adjustment is applied on top of the floor, as the staffing funded through the base funding is sufficient to deliver intensive supports to the families requiring services (around 30 families). Total annual funding is estimated at \$2.2 million, equivalent to approximately \$75,000 per family.
- **Service 3** is an ACCO delivering services across multiple communities within a small State or Territory. For these services, the funding model applies the average level of need and remoteness across the service area. In addition to the \$1.4 million funding floor, the service receives a further \$5.5 million through size, complexity and regional loadings. Total annual funding is estimated at \$6.9 million, equivalent to around \$17,000 per family.

Funding mechanism

The funding source is a core decision for implementing the funding model, with the choice shaping the degree of flexibility ACCOs have, the governance arrangements, and the administrative burden of funding. Three common funding sources are as follows:

- **Joint funding:** Two or more government agencies (or levels of government) agree to co-fund the same service or initiative, but each agency retains control of its own funding stream, including decisions on allocation, reporting and conditions. Programs often run in parallel rather than being fully integrated.
- **Bundled funding:** Funding for multiple related programs or service streams is packaged together and provided to a single provider or region as one consolidated funding envelope. Although the source of funding lines may remain separate at the government level, bundling gives providers greater flexibility to integrate activities and tailor responses.
- **Pooled funding:** Multiple agencies (or governments) combine their funding into a single shared pool administered under a common governance structure, typically through a single commissioning, contracting or stewardship arrangement. This could include dedicated Aboriginal commissioning bodies where appropriate and may support greater transparency and accountability by enabling clearer tracking of Aboriginal-specific expenditure and outcomes.

Table 9: Example applications of the parameterised funding model

	Service 1: Medium-sized provider with lower needs	Service 2: Small-sized provider with high needs	Service 3: State-level provider in small jurisdiction
Delivery context			
Location	Metro	Remote	Statewide (regional on average)
Families requiring support	150	30	400
IRSEO quintile	5	1	3
Funding components (\$ millions)			
Floor	1.4	1.4	1.4
Size adjusted	0.5	0.0	2.8
Region adjusted	0.0	0.8	1.3
Complexity adjusted	0.0	0.0	0.9
Brokerage	0.1	0.1	0.6
Total annual funding (recurrent, \$ millions)*	1.9	2.2	6.9
Total funding per child	\$13,000	\$75,000	\$17,000

*Total annual funding may not equal to the sum of individual funding components due to rounding.

Long-term vision

Based on the needs of ACCOs, **pooled funding is the most appropriate approach** as it:

- **Supports the delivery of long-term, integrated services.** Pooled budgets have been found to positively impact the implementation of integrated services across program areas where there are established governance arrangements and shared decision-making and accountability (The Sax Institute, 2025). This aligns with the *holistic wellbeing and support needs* focus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families identified in the Literature Review.

- **Enables self-determination and flexibility.** This funding approach provides general purpose funding to services – within a defined domain like child and family services – allowing ACCOs to respond to local priorities, rather than being constrained by specific program rules.
- **Reduces administrative burden.** Consolidating funding streams across departments have been found to reduce transaction and reporting costs for First Nations organisations and government departments (Moran, Porter, & Curth-Bibb, 2014).

However, successful implementation of pooled funding arrangements requires:

- Establishing strong relational infrastructure, including a history of collaboration and shared policy goals across participating departments and ACCOs.
- Clarifying governance arrangements, including the respective roles of government and ACCOs. In line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap this would require shared decision-making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in system stewardship and design, and local ACCO leadership in service design and delivery.
- Management of high transactional complexity, as pooled funding often requires negotiation on governance, legal agreements, and operational arrangements.
- Agreeing on negotiated community-based accountability mechanisms upfront, including outcome measures, data collection, and evaluation practices. Without these, pooled funds risk becoming a “black box” that lack transparency or accountability (Boer et al, 2025).
- Embedding culturally informed economic evaluation in decision-making, including cost-benefit analysis that appropriately recognises and values First Nations cultural, social and community outcomes (Cumming & Faulkner, 2024).

More broadly, funding is only one enabler of effective practice change. For example, the Aboriginal community monitoring and reporting framework in New South Wales (AbSec, 2021) and the national Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening

Plan (Closing the Gap, 2022) highlight the importance of enabling legislation, supportive policies and processes, and appropriate data and infrastructure.

Transition considerations

Transitioning to the proposed pooled funding model will take time, as appropriate governance and delivery mechanisms need to be established. However, this should not delay reform. In the immediate term, actions should focus on strengthening funding certainty and resourcing for ACCOs. Transitional reforms should then progressively reduce administrative burden and support greater self-determination.

In the immediate term, strengthen funding certainty and resourcing:

- **Increase the total available funding:** Increase the overall budget envelope to progressively fund ACCOs in line with the proposed funding model. Annual funding for ACCOs is expected to increase from at least \$270 million¹³ to between \$600 million and \$1.2 billion over time.¹⁴
- **Implement funding model changes within existing programs:** Scale up funding for ACCOs through existing child and family service programs in line with the proposed funding model. Additional measures to improve certainty could include longer contract lengths and appropriate indexation arrangements.
- **Validate and refine the proposed funding model:** Refine the model iteratively during early implementation through ongoing engagement with ACCOs and communities. This should be supported by continued evidence gathering, including consideration of relevant sector developments such as findings from the SCHADS Award review.

¹³ The \$270 million includes State Government expenditure, based on Family Matters data, and excludes State Government IFSS funding for WA and Tasmania. Australian Government funding to ACCOs is assumed to be at least \$20 million per annum. This comprises of (i) Approximately \$10 million from FaC programs, based on an estimated 5% allocation to ACCOs from a total of \$215 million per annum for Children and Parenting Supports, Communities for Children Facilitating Partner, and Family Mental Health Support Services; and (ii) an additional \$10 million for Australian Government IFSS programs.

¹⁴ \$600 million is indicative based on the proposed funding model. It assumes that ACCOs will deliver to 34,000 families. \$1,200 million is indicative and assumes ACCOs deliver services to 69,000 families.

- **Invest in short-term backbone supports for ACCOs:** Provide additional resources to support ACCOs with program navigation, funding applications, reporting requirements and compliance processes during the transition period.

In the transitional phase, reduce administrative burden and strengthen self-determination:

- **Consolidate existing funding streams:** Jurisdictions should progressively consolidate child and family service funding streams so that ACCOs engage with fewer individual programs. This may involve key agencies (for example, child and family service departments) rationalising overlapping programs and funding arrangements.
- **Streamline program and reporting frameworks:** Simplify reporting requirements across consolidated programs and update program guidelines. This should enable ACCOs to tailor service delivery to local priorities while maintaining appropriate accountability and community oversight.
- **Support ACCOs to scale delivery:** Provide targeted investment to build organisational capability and support service expansion in communities where demand exceeds current service capacity. This includes strengthening workforce capability and supporting the delivery of culturally appropriate services.

Other implementation considerations

Other supporting implementation settings for funding models that enable ACCOs to deliver stable, high-quality services include:

- **Funding lengths:** longer contract periods – such as five-year contracts – provide ACCOs with the certainty needed for effective planning, workforce retention and investment in service capability. This stability is particularly important for delivering culturally strong, relationship-based supports. Since 2024,

the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme has introduced four-year rolling funding agreements, with funding levels to be reviewed every two years for individual ACCOs.

- **Establishment funding:** for new or significantly expanded services, an additional six months of funding (relative to the ongoing recurrent level) should be built into the contract to support service establishment. This recognises the upfront effort required for recruitment, establishing systems, community engagement and cultural governance. Capital works or major expansion needs would still require separate funding processes. For example, the ACCO Establishment and Expansion Fund in the ACT provides funding to support new and existing ACCOs to build organisational capacity and capability to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Funding adjustments over time:** to reflect changes in delivery costs over time, recurrent funding should be indexed. Given the cost drivers underpinning the funding formula, the wage component of costs should be linked to escalation rates in the SCHADS Award, while the non-wage component of costs should be indexed to the Consumer Price Index. As an example, the ACT community sector indexation rate is determined through a formula which comprises 20% Consumer Price Index and 80% either Wage Price Index or annual increase in wages under the SCHADS award. The ACT Government reviews its community sector indexation rate annually and pays indexation every six months (Cortis, Blaxland & Adamson, 2021). In addition, periodic reviews (for example, every three years) on costs, need and service delivery patterns should be undertaken to recalibrate the funding model, and ensure it aligns to contemporary cost drivers.

Supporting recommendations

Based on the research, options, and analysis aligned to the recommended model outlined in the report, SNAICC has determined the following supporting recommendations for progressive implementation of the model:

Recommendation 1

New funding approaches across all governments prioritise self-determination as the foundation of successful reform. This requires that funding reforms reorient existing systems and structures from positioning ACCOs and communities as recipients of government funding to recognising their role as self-governing leaders in service design and delivery.

Work towards Recommendation 1 should focus on:

- a) Reframing the relationship between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations towards one where government agencies partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives as systems stewards while ACCOs are leaders of community governance and the design and delivery of support services.
- b) Working in genuine partnership with ACCOs to design and deliver funding programs that are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, respond to the unique needs of each community, and are agreed to through shared decision-making.

Recommendation 2

The Australian Government commits to leading a national, systemic and sustainable approach to funding child and family support in the ACCO sector. This will involve partnering with state and territory governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including community-controlled organisations and peak bodies) to develop an agreed pathway towards a coordinated funding model that prioritises early and tailored supports and ACCO-led services.

Work towards Recommendation 2 should focus on:

- a) Strengthening the role of the Australian Government in systems stewardship and exploring opportunities for incentivising state and territory investment in early and tailored supports.
- b) Planning for an end-state where a new funding model for ACCO child and family support services is delivered through a pooled funding arrangement, supported by a national policy framework and partnership agreement.
- c) Planning for how different funding models and streams across government portfolios and jurisdictions can be consolidated or coordinated, with a focus on holistic service delivery.
- d) Increasing the total pool of funding nationally to address gaps identified in this report in the funding required to respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support needs.

Recommendation 3

Governments commit to implementation of the funding model in jurisdictional reform as an immediate and urgent priority to increase and strengthen ACCO child and family service delivery. Government agencies create new and amend existing funding programs to embed the principles and architecture of the new funding model and align with commitments under the National Child and Family Investment Strategy.

Work towards Recommendation 3 should focus on:

- a) Identifying and pursuing opportunities for reform – including new funding programs and programs being reviewed/recommissioned – at the jurisdictional level and prioritising alignment with the funding model and the Investment Strategy in these activities.
- b) Prioritising funding for early and tailored supports and ACCO-led services, including identifying, allocating and quarantining funds for these purposes.
- c) Increasing the total pool of funding in each jurisdiction to address gaps identified in this report in the funding required to respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support needs.

Recommendation 4

In implementing the Families and Children Activity Reforms, the Australian Government reflects core principles and components of the model in grant guidelines and the design and implementation of grant processes and assessments.

Work towards Recommendation 4 should focus on:

- a) Embedding the funding principles in the design and implementation of the new FaC Activity program.

- b) Partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in the design of grant processes and requirements, and in the assessment of funding applications, noting that Government retains responsibility for funding decisions.
- c) Planning for the ongoing review and scaling of ACCO child and family service delivery through the FaC Activity funding in alignment with the findings and recommendations of this report.
- d) Explicitly funding provisions and priorities that recognise the cultural strength and authority of ACCOs and provide commensurate investment to support growth and leadership.

Recommendation 5

Governments strengthen budget decision-making processes, particularly within central agencies such as Treasury and Finance Departments, to ensure advice informing relevant budget decisions takes full account of the value of prevention investment in ACCOs, to support the identification and allocation of adequate funding for ACCO child and family services.

Work towards Recommendation 5 should focus on:

- a) Consolidating the evidence base on the avoided costs of tertiary interventions when governments invest in ACCO early and tailored supports and utilising that evidence base in relevant new policy proposals.
- b) Developing and applying consistent frameworks for the calculation of avoided costs of prevention investment and consideration of those costs in relevant budget decision-making processes by governments and their central agencies.

Recommendation 6

In implementing the new funding model (and aligned reforms), all governments explicitly and systematically prioritise the sustainability of ACCO services and the growth of the community-controlled sector, including addressing inequities resulting from historical underinvestment in ACCOs.

Work towards Recommendation 6 should focus on:

- a) Providing sufficient and consistent 'core' funding to ACCOs that is explicitly intended for resourcing operations, governance, and organisational development.
- b) Prioritising ongoing funding arrangements and extending fixed-term funding contracts to five years where possible, providing more certainty for ACCOs to support longer term planning.
- c) Investment in immediate and long-term workforce development, including supporting ACCOs with increased funding to invest in training and development opportunities for local staff.
- d) Investment in backbone supports to assist ACCOs with program navigation, funding applications, reporting requirements and compliance processes in the transition to new funding models.

Recommendation 7

All governments continuously review and scale the new funding model to ensure that funding is responsive to changing contexts and sector growth. Scaling should prioritise meeting child and family need, ongoing investment in the ACCO workforce and provisioning for flexibility.

Work towards Recommendation 7 should focus on:

- a) Reviewing funding allocations to ensure they are adequate to meet need and responding to areas of highest need – using data-driven approaches that are validated with ACCOs and communities to ensure responsiveness and avoid formulaic decision-making.
- b) Investing in continuous workforce training and development, including resourcing ACCOs to provide appropriate supports such as cultural supervision, study leave, and pathways for further certifications and qualifications for their staff.
- c) Ensuring that ACCOs are resourced to offer competitive salaries that keep pace with inflation and wage growth in the public and private sectors.

Appendices

Appendix A: References

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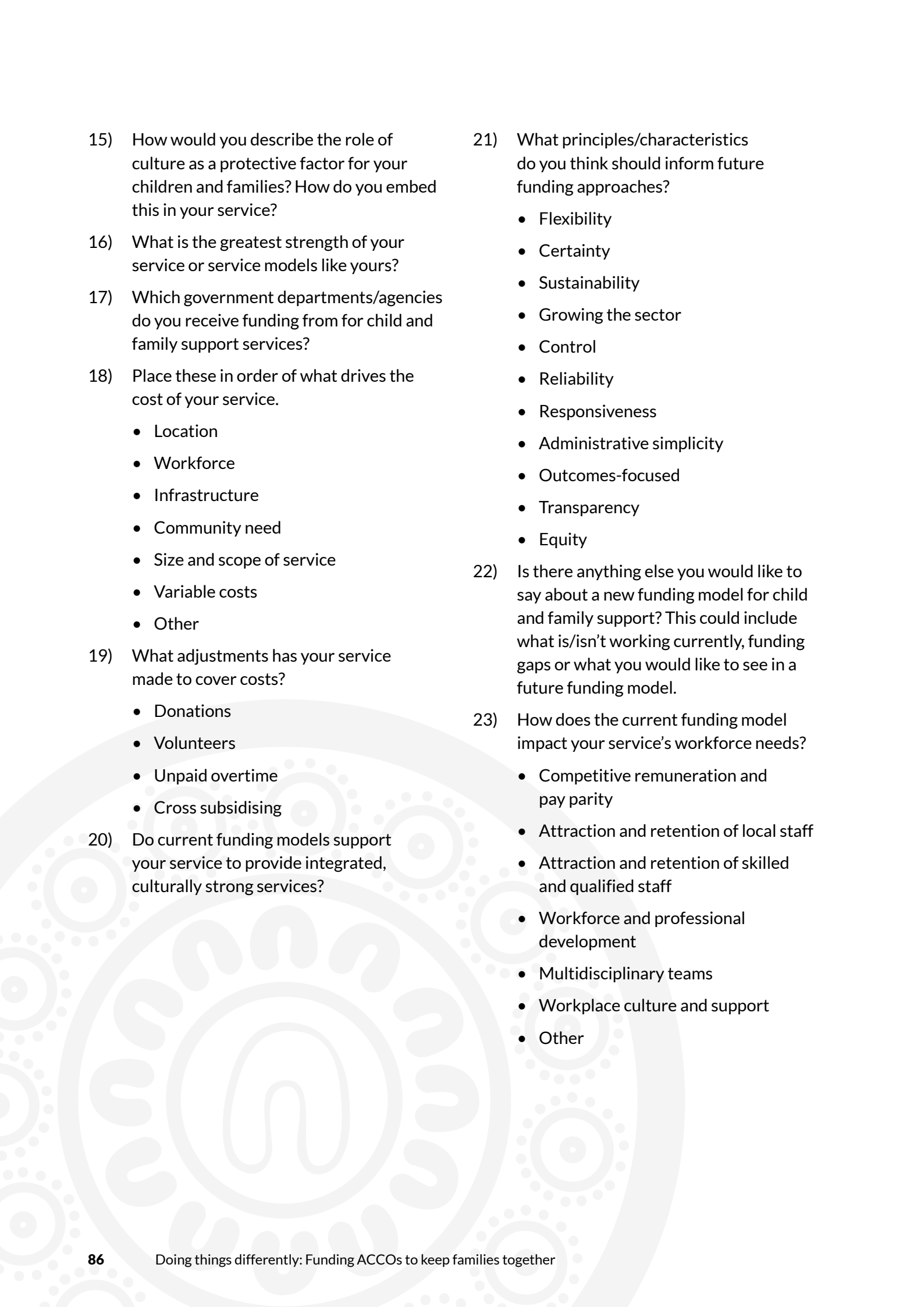
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Appendix B: Consultation Guides

Survey Guide

- 1) Name
- 2) Email
- 3) Do you consent to SNAICC storing and using, for the purposes of research and advocacy, the information and data you provide here, including for use in the project's final report? (All information will be deidentified and privacy protected)
- 4) Would you be open to SNAICC contacting you confidentially to discuss financial information related to your service?
- 5) Is your service an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation?
- 6) What is your service's postcode?
- 7) What is your service's catchment area? This may be a defined catchment or an estimated area, and provided as a list of postcodes, Local Government Area, or other region that your service covers.
- 8) How many a) individuals and b) families do you estimate your service has supported/will support this year?
- 9) Which of the following services does your organisation provide or would like to provide?
 - Family support
 - Intensive family support
 - Child and family wellbeing support
 - Case management support
 - Family mediation
 - Parenting programs
 - Peer support groups
 - Referral and support with accessing other services
 - Community events
 - Cultural events
- 10) Please provide an estimated breakdown of the proportion of your organisation's resources directed towards each service type:
 - Family support services (including parenting programs, peer support group, wellbeing support etc.)
 - Intensive family support services (including case management, family mediation services etc.)
 - Other activities (including housing support, maternal and infant health care etc.)
- 11) Please provide an estimated breakdown of the number of individuals and families participating in each service type in a given year:
 - Family support services (including parenting programs, peer support group, wellbeing support etc.)
 - Intensive family support services (including case management, family mediation services etc.)
 - Other activities (including housing support, maternal and infant health care etc.)
- 12) Tell us about your service and how it responds to the needs and characteristics of the community.
- 13) Are there additional needs in your community that aren't being met by existing services and that could be provided by your organisation with the appropriate resources and supports?
- 14) What do you consider to be the principles and features of an integrated community-controlled child and family support service? (e.g., cultural strength, trust, local support, community engagement, trauma-informed).

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- 15) How would you describe the role of culture as a protective factor for your children and families? How do you embed this in your service?
- 16) What is the greatest strength of your service or service models like yours?
- 17) Which government departments/agencies do you receive funding from for child and family support services?
- 18) Place these in order of what drives the cost of your service.
- Location
 - Workforce
 - Infrastructure
 - Community need
 - Size and scope of service
 - Variable costs
 - Other
- 19) What adjustments has your service made to cover costs?
- Donations
 - Volunteers
 - Unpaid overtime
 - Cross subsidising
- 20) Do current funding models support your service to provide integrated, culturally strong services?
- 21) What principles/characteristics do you think should inform future funding approaches?
- Flexibility
 - Certainty
 - Sustainability
 - Growing the sector
 - Control
 - Reliability
 - Responsiveness
 - Administrative simplicity
 - Outcomes-focused
 - Transparency
 - Equity
- 22) Is there anything else you would like to say about a new funding model for child and family support? This could include what is/isn't working currently, funding gaps or what you would like to see in a future funding model.
- 23) How does the current funding model impact your service's workforce needs?
- Competitive remuneration and pay parity
 - Attraction and retention of local staff
 - Attraction and retention of skilled and qualified staff
 - Workforce and professional development
 - Multidisciplinary teams
 - Workplace culture and support
 - Other

- 24) How are your service's workforce needs different from non-Indigenous services?
- Multidisciplinary teams
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
 - Local staff
 - Cultural competency and safety skills of staff
 - Cultural competency and safety for staff
 - Local community knowledge and connection
 - Staff housing and transport
 - Other
- 25) What is the workforce composition you are currently funded for as roles and FTE? E.g. Centre managers – 3 FTE, Support workers – 6 FTE etc.
- 26) Which of the following best describes your infrastructure arrangements (i.e., the building/s you deliver services from)?
- Single site, owned
 - Single site, leased
 - Multiple sites, owned
 - Multiple sites, leased
 - Multiple sites, combination owned and leased
- 27) Does the current funding model meet your service's capital infrastructure needs? Please provide details on how it does/does not meet these needs, including maintenance and new infrastructure needs.
- 28) Is there anything else you would like to say about capital infrastructure and current funding?
- 29) Is there anything else you would like to say about your service and/or future funding approaches?

- 30) If you'd like to go in the draw to win one of three \$200 vouchers, please enter your email below. Winners will be chosen at random.

Sector Forum Questions

- 1) What does your community need when it comes to child and family support? What does your service need to meet those support needs for your community?
- 2) What drives the true costs of ACCO service delivery? How do current funding approaches cover or fall short of covering these costs?
- 3) How do current funding models impact your services' capacity to provide integrated, culturally strong services?
- 4) How are ACCO service's workforce needs different from non-Indigenous services? How does funding need to change to recognise and respond to these needs?
- 5) What characteristics does a future funding model need to be effective for your service and the sector?

Questions for Interviews with ACCO Representatives

- 1) What does your community need when it comes to child and family support? What does your service need to meet those support needs for your community?
- 2) How do current funding models impact your services' capacity to provide integrated, culturally strong services?
- 3) What drives the true costs of ACCO service delivery? How do current funding approaches cover or fall short of covering these costs?
- 4) How are ACCO service's workforce needs different from non-Indigenous services? How does funding need to change to recognise and respond to these needs?
- 5) What is the greatest strength of your service or service models like yours?

- 6) What do you consider to be the principles and features of an integrated community-controlled child and family support service?
- 7) What principles/characteristics do you think should inform future funding approaches?
- 9) Is the Department able to comment qualitatively on the extent to which funding for the average ACCO does/does not differ to funding for the average service in a given program?
- 10) Is there any additional data on the number of children/families accessing each program?

Questions for Interviews with Public Servants

- 1) What proportion of child and family service funding in your jurisdiction is focused on early supports? Are there any initiatives currently in place to increase this allocation?
- 2) What proportion of child and family support funding in your jurisdiction is directed towards ACCOs? Are there any initiatives currently in place to transition funding to ACCOs?
- 3) How many funding sources would you estimate an ACCO in your jurisdiction would be accessing to deliver holistic child and family support?
- 4) How do funding cycles, procurement approaches, and political landscapes influence how funding and services are delivered in your jurisdiction?
- 5) What do you see as the biggest challenges to implementing flexible and sustainable funding for ACCOs?
- 6) Are there any significant opportunities in your jurisdiction to reform funding approaches and implement dedicated models for community-controlled services?
- 7) Are there any successful examples of ACCO funding approaches that are working in your jurisdiction?
- 8) What are the factors that drive the Department's decisions in how much funding each service in a program receives? For example, is funding determined based on service size, geography, need etc.

Appendix C: Funding Sources

A non-exhaustive list of child and family support funding sources being directed to ACCOs, as provided by government agencies.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
Australian Government Department of Social Services	Families and Children Activity The FaC Activity invests over \$300 million per year in children, youth and parenting programs supporting more than 270,000 Australians annually. FaC children, youth and parenting programs provide important prevention and early intervention supports to help improve children’s wellbeing and development, family functioning and children’s mental health. In 2023–24, DSS conducted a review of three FaC Activity children, youth and parenting programs. DSS consulted on a proposed reform model in 2025 to inform the future structure of five FaC programs.
	Communities for Children Facilitating Partner Facilitating Partners take an early intervention approach that supports families to improve the way they relate to each other; improve parenting skills; and ensure the health and wellbeing of children. They provide short-term, immediate assistance for children and young people, with the support of their families or carers. In each of the program’s 52 communities, a Facilitating Partner subcontracts other organisations in the community called Community Partners to provide services targeted to their community. Services include parenting support, group peer support, case management, home visiting services and other supports to promote child wellbeing.
	Family Mental Health Support Services The Family Mental Health Support Services delivery model describes three levels of support. Providers deliver 1. Intensive, early intervention support to children and young people, with the support of their families and carers. 2. Short-term, immediate assistance for children and young people, with the support of their families or carers. 3. Community outreach, mental health education and community development activities.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Children and Family Intensive Support Children and Family Intensive Support services provide early intervention and prevention support to children or young people aged 0–18 years and their families in selected communities in the Northern Territory and Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia. Children and Family Intensive Support services must be child-centred, strengths-based, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate. Children and Family Intensive Support service workers identify individual family goals and support referrals to specialised services as needed. The key outcome is to keep children with their family, in their community and connected to culture, and to keep them out of the child protection system.
	Specialised Family Violence Services The Specialised Family Violence Services program delivers specialised family services that support children, families, and individuals and couples who are experiencing, or at risk of experiencing, family and domestic violence. The program aims to support families, improve children’s wellbeing, increase participation of vulnerable people in community life, and enhance family and community functioning.
	First Nations Playgroup Pilot Improved early childhood development outcomes for First Nations children, with a focus on children up to six years of age (but open to other children and family members), that regularly participate in playgroup activities.
	Mainstream Children and Parenting Support Children and Parenting Support services help improve the wellbeing and development of children aged 0–12 years (but may include children up to 18 years as necessary). This is done by building the capacity of parents, carers and children through activities such as: • community playgroups • supported playgroups • parenting courses • home visiting • peer support groups • school readiness programs • web-based services or resources in identified areas of need

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Child and Parenting Support Income Management This program aims to support families, strengthen relationships, improve the wellbeing of children and young people and increase participation of people in community life to enhance family and community functioning. The program funds early intervention and prevention services and resources aimed at improving children's development and wellbeing and supporting the capacity of those in a parenting role.
ACT Community Services Directorate	Sustaining Families This service package provides a contemporary, evidence-informed, integrated service model for children aged 0–17 years at risk of entry to care and in care, using practice elements known to be effective in Intensive Family Support, Preservation and Restoration. It aims to provide a combination of support pathways from early assistance to support children and families with emerging needs and vulnerabilities through targeted and specialist support to provide more intensive supports for families with complex needs so children can remain safely in the family home or be returned safely. Interventions per family are typically 12–24 months in duration.
	Functional Family Therapy Youth Justice This service delivers intervention with young people aged 11 to 17 years and their families where the young person has engaged in or is at risk of engaging in offending behaviour. The service aims to strengthen family support and community connection to decrease the young person's involvement in offending behaviour and support them to remain engaged in schooling or employment and to remain living at home.
	After Care Assistance The After Care Service Package provides a combination of support pathways for young people and adults aged between 18–25 who have had an experience of out-of-home care and/or who are disconnected from family. This service comprises an opt-in model of brokerage packages of varying intensities (low, medium and high) to work alongside adults aged 18–21 years to build their capacity and confidence for independence and support their transition to adulthood. The service also involves the delivery of an advocacy, advice and referral service for young adults aged 18–25 years that supports the connection to appropriate universal and secondary community-based support systems.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
New South Wales Department of Communities and Justice	Specialist Aftercare Program This service incorporates intensive and remote outreach Aftercare support as well as Aboriginal Cultural consultations for leaving care, mentoring, and group supports for young people aged 18 to 24 who leave statutory care with moderate to high needs.
	Leaving and Aftercare A targeted subsection of the Aftercare program that includes young people aged 18–25 who have left out-of-home care and are young parents. The program incorporates supports for the infant children of these parents.
	Post Adoption Resource Centre The Post Adoption Resource Centre provides information, counselling, intermediary services, therapeutic groups and support to people affected by adoption in NSW. Support is offered to people who have been adopted, parents, siblings, partners and others who have been separated from family by adoption. The Post Adoption Resource Centre also works with health and counselling professionals to promote understanding of the adoption experience and offers a library of resources relating to adoption.
	The Permanency Support Program The Permanency Support Program supports safety, wellbeing and positive life outcomes for children and young people in the child protection and out-of-home care systems in NSW. Programs are distinct across different funded services.
	Aboriginal Child & Family Centres The Aboriginal Child and Family Centres program in NSW delivers culturally safe, holistic, and integrated services that empower Aboriginal children aged 0–8 years and their families. Operated by ACCOs, these centres unite early childhood education and care, health and allied health services, family and parenting support, and adult education under one roof. They also host playgroups, cultural programs, and community gathering spaces, ensuring families receive meaningful support in a welcoming, culturally grounded environment. The program is designed to strengthen families, elevate children’s early learning and health outcomes, and create deep connections between communities and the services they need, with culture at the core.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Community and Family Support The Community and Family Support program will commence in January 2026 and brings together two early intervention programs: 1. Targeted Early Intervention; and 2. Family Connect and Support. Community and Family Support provides voluntary, culturally safe, and flexible early support services to children, young people, families, and communities across NSW. It targets support early in life and early in need, recognising that family circumstances can shift due to social and economic pressures. Community and Family Support aims to reduce vulnerability and risk factors—such as child abuse, neglect, and family violence—while strengthening protective factors and promoting healthy development. By fostering strong relationships and social connections, the program enhances individual and community wellbeing and safety, especially during critical developmental periods.
	Statewide Family Link Service Provides family finding for Aboriginal children and young people in care, improving their connection to family and culture, and potentially placement with family or kin.
	Strong Families Our Way Strong Families Our Way is an Aboriginal-led initiative designed to embed culturally safe, community-led mechanisms into NSW's child protection system. It establishes and evaluates Aboriginal community-controlled mechanisms to strengthen Aboriginal decision-making, uphold cultural authority, and shift the focus toward early intervention, prevention, and cultural restoration. The mechanisms ensure compliance with the Aboriginal Case Management Policy and promote meaningful family and community participation in decisions affecting Aboriginal children. The initiative aims to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal children in the child protection system.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Aboriginal Legal Service Child and Family Advocacy and Support The Aboriginal Child and Family Advocacy Support program, led by the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) Limited, provides legal and non-legal advocacy and support to families at risk of having their children removed through holistic early assistance. This initiative aims to increase the number of Aboriginal children, young people and families accessing early intervention and support, and reduce the number of Aboriginal children removed into out-of-home care.
	Family Preservation The Department of Communities and Justice has been working with the sector on the Family Preservation redesign since mid-2022 to build a joint understanding with contracted providers of the challenges and opportunities of the current system and programs these providers deliver. The redesign aims to make Family Preservation services more responsive to family needs, and more effective at supporting families to achieve outcomes. The Department has worked with the sector and other partners on the redesign as part of recommissioning, and in readiness for new contracts in April 2026. The redesign introduces two new frameworks—Families Together and Aboriginal Family Preservation—giving providers more flexibility to deliver tailored support.
	Aboriginal Family Preservation First of its kind, Aboriginal Family Preservation will provide the opportunity for ACCOs to design and deliver Family Preservation services that are community-led, self-determined, and culturally safe for Aboriginal children and families. Aboriginal families will be able to access Aboriginal Family Preservation through both community and departmental referral pathways, and ACCOs have flexibility to work with families with the intensity and duration that is needed to keep children safe, families together and support healing.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect ® Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect® is a home-based intensive therapeutic program that targets families where there has been substantiated physical abuse and/or neglect of a child aged 0–17 years. It is a treatment for serious, high risk and complex cases, addressing the multiple factors known to be related to physical abuse and/or neglect across the key settings or systems within which the family is embedded. The program works with everyone in the home, and treatment is provided to the family for a period of six to nine months. Treatment applies 24 hours a day, seven days a week, depending on family need. The timeframe is a guide and may be different given each family’s circumstances and needs, but the model strives to remain within these timeframes. Multisystemic Therapy for Child Abuse and Neglect® is not an open-ended service and can continue for a family beyond the contracted service period and does not require a re-referral.
	Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare® Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare® is a home-based intensive treatment model for families with physical abuse and/or neglect of a child/young person aged between 0 and 17 years. It provides a family therapy-focused model for families with all levels of risk, who would benefit from a whole of family therapy approach. Concerns that may be addressed through the model include child abuse and/or neglect, substance misuse, mental illness, school difficulties (including truancy), some instances of domestic family violence, and/or history of out-of-home care. The family receives family-based services, with sessions occurring in the home and/or community settings. The program is provided for a period of six to nine months. The timeframe may be different given each family’s circumstances and needs, but the model strives to remain within these timeframes. Booster sessions are also available to families after completing the program, however, Functional Family Therapy – Child Welfare® is not an open-ended service.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Nabu Nabu family preservation and restoration program is delivered by Waminda in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven region. Nabu is a community-led early intervention, preservation, restoration and intensive family support service that works with Aboriginal families (including families and their Aboriginal children/young people) and children and young people (0–18 years) where risk of significant harm has been substantiated and child/children is/are at imminent risk of entry to out-of-home care. The Nabu Program aims to strengthen and preserve Aboriginal families by preventing the need for Aboriginal children or young people to be placed away from their family and enabling children and young people who were placed in care, to safely return home. Families can continue to engage with the service as needed for a period of up to 18 months. Flexibility is a core component of the service and from time to time the length of engagement for an individual family may be reviewed. The Program is designed to recognise that people may need support at different life transition points across the life cycle.
Northern Territory Department of Children and Families	Child and Family Centres Child and Family Centres are place-based initiatives designed to respond to the complex needs of children aged 0–9 and families experiencing vulnerability close to home. They aim to improve outcomes related to: • Children’s health, development, safety and wellbeing. • Families’ resilience, problem solving, parenting capability and confidence. • Communities as places where children and families live and have opportunities to thrive. Family Support Services Shares design principles with Commonwealth funded Children and Family Intensive Support Pathway program. The program is child centred, family focused, fosters participation and decision-making and acknowledges that children and their safety must be at the centre of decision-making. Services must be place based. The service is focused on immediate and time sensitive child safety concerns, as well as other vulnerabilities experienced by families, reflecting statutory responsibility for child safety. Providers create a tailored plan, linking families to appropriate support services.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Other Family Supports These supports include grants to two toy libraries, the Parentline support service, and two younger parent programs in the Northern Territory.
Queensland Department of Families, Seniors, Disability Services and Child Safety	Counselling and Intervention Services Counselling and Intervention Services are provided to children and young people under 18 years who are subject to statutory intervention and require support as a therapeutic response arising from a personal experience of physical, emotional or sexual abuse/harm and neglect.
	Sexual Abuse Counselling Sexual Abuse Counselling assists children and young people aged five to 18 years who are subject to child protection statutory intervention and have been sexually abused or are engaging in sexualised or early sexual offending behaviour.
	Intensive Family Support Intensive Family Support services respond to vulnerable families with children and young people (unborn to 18 years) who are at risk of involvement in the statutory child protection system. Intensive Family Support is a consent-based program providing case management for clients who agree to engage with the service. All individuals who identified as being family members of the referred child and consent to engage are eligible for a service. Case managers work collaboratively with families to identify and prioritise their presenting needs and provide intensive support interventions with specialist services.
	Family and Child Connect Family and Child Connect services are an entry point for information and support advice for vulnerable families. The role of Family and Child Connect is to assess the needs of a family and help that family link to local services that best meet their needs. Families, community members and professionals seeking assistance can all contact the service to discuss their concerns about a family and what supports are available. The service may be able to help in a single session, or by taking more time getting to know the family's situation then connecting them to the right services that can help. Family and Child Connect are available to help a family over the phone, or they can visit the family in their home or at a place that the family thinks is a safe place to talk.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Targeted Family Support The target group for Targeted Family Support services is children, young people (unborn to 18 years) and their families who find themselves in vulnerable situations but are not currently subject to statutory child protection intervention. These services are targeted to a particular cohort or deliver a specific type of intervention. Services funded under this program may work with family members, those who are parenting, whole families and community groups in relation to families and children and young people (unborn to 18 years) who find themselves in vulnerable situations.
	Secondary Family Support Secondary Family Support services are required to reduce harm or risk of harm to children and young people, prevent crises or problems within families from arising or escalating and stabilise or maintain family wellbeing. These services aim to: improve the wellbeing and safety of children, young people and their families; build the capacity of families to care for and protect their children; provide linkages to local universal support services and community groups that enable families to access the resources they need to build their capacity, solve problems and make positive choices/changes; and prevent entry or re-entry into the statutory child protection system. Families are supported by a lead case manager.
South Australia Department for Child Protection, Department of Human Services, and Office for Early Childhood Development	Child Health and Development Checks The Office for Early Childhood Development has formed partnerships with an ACCO and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation to deliver culturally safe child health and development checks for Aboriginal children aged up to and including five years, ensuring stronger support pathways for families. The service includes an Aboriginal Child and Family Linker to support families in accessing secondary and tertiary health care services and other programs, and educational and developmental material, tools and resources for families.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Family Group Conferencing Family Group Conferencing is a facilitated process where extended family work together to make decisions that protect a child or young person who is at risk of harm and possible removal from their family. The Family Group Conference model used in South Australia is based on the New Zealand model, which is widely acknowledged as best practice. The model has a focus on enabling Aboriginal family and community members to identify strategies to keep children and young people safe with family and kin.
	Early Intervention/Reunification This service provides in-home and out-of-home support to strengthen family relationships, ensuring children and young people can return safely to the care of their families.
	Intensive Family Services The Intensive Family Services provide a very high level of case management, therapeutic intervention, and practical support to assist families to improve family functioning where there are high level safety concerns. High Intensity Services provide an average of four hours of support to each family per week for an average service length of six to nine months. Services are evidence informed and work within culturally safe and trauma responsive frameworks. Priority groups include infants at risk, Aboriginal families, young parents, and adolescents with complex trauma. The program is delivered by the Department of Human Services.
	Family Support Services A low intensity family support service designed to provide earlier help and support to families with children from pre-birth to adolescence experiencing low to medium-level risk and need. The program is delivered by the Department of Human Services.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
Tasmania Department for Education, Children and Young People	Aboriginal Liaison Officers This program funds 3 FTE Aboriginal Liaison Officer positions within the within the Strong Families Safe Kids Advice and Referral Line to contribute to: • Promoting the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and their families • Facilitating, promoting, preserving and restoring stability for families • Building child, family and community capacity and resilience • Reducing the involvement of children and families with the statutory child and family services system • Intervening earlier to protect children, improve child wellbeing and improve family functioning • Delivering trauma-based intervention options based on a trauma-informed framework • Offering flexible service delivery to meet the needs of the children and families and fluctuating service demands • Providing culturally sensitive service responses for children and families.
	Family Support Services Family Support Services provide culturally safe practices when working with families and develop individualised support plans to delivery case management that is underpinned by cultural safety. Services are intended to strengthen and preserve the safety and stability of families. Family Support Services implement intervention methodology and supporting tools that enable a measure of service achievement against the support plans and enable revision of the plan across the service period. Services incorporate outreach case management support, extended hours, brokerage funds, and working collaboratively with families and other services to determine any significant factors affecting safety and wellbeing during the delivery of the service.
	Intensive Family Support Services Intensive Family Support Services seek to prevent children entering the statutory out-of-home system by supporting families with multiple and complex needs to increase the safety and wellbeing of children in the family home and enable them to remain safely in the family home.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Working Together Working Together provides access to free, quality early learning for eligible three-year-old children, tailored holistic support for children and their families and early childhood education and care service partners, aimed at addressing barriers to access or participation; and supports children's transition into kindergarten in the following year. To facilitate access and participation for children and families, Working Together operates a grants scheme that has two primary components, Participation Support and Holistic Support.
Western Australia Department of Communities	WA Family Support Networks The Family Support Network program is a key component of the Department's Building Safe and Strong Families Earlier Intervention and Family Support Strategy. The Family Support Network is delivered in partnership with an ACCO and aims to provide culturally appropriate services which prioritise the needs of Aboriginal families. The Family Support Network works with families to identify and improve their cultural needs and are designed to include their natural support networks and wider community links that encourage and assist families to thrive in their community. Intensive Family Support Service The Intensive Family Support Service program is a state-wide intensive support service that works with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families who are often experiencing disadvantage, complex challenges, and trauma, including intergenerational trauma. The service provides intensive in-home practical support and development of parenting and living skills to improve family wellbeing and safety. Referrals include: • Where child safety concerns exist, working to keep children safely at home. • Where children are in care, working to safely reunify children home. Services are delivered by an ACCO, or in partnership with an ACCO, and the supports provide practical parenting education and skill development for parents and/or pre-birth families, focusing on daily living skills, child mental health, education, safety, and protective skills. These services operate across 14 locations state-wide.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Wungening Moort – Aboriginal In-Home Support Service The Aboriginal In-Home Support Service program is designed to assist Aboriginal families where children are at imminent risk of entering care and support them to be reunified with children currently in care. A consortium called Wungening Moort currently delivers the Aboriginal In-home Support Service. The aim of this service is to keep children and young people safely at home with family, connected with country, culture and community. The service offers culturally secure, responsive and practical support.
	The Regional Family Support Hub (formerly known as the Regional Service Model) The Regional Family Support Hub is an integrated service model derived from existing Earlier Intervention and Family Support Agencies and adapted for the unique needs of local communities in regional locations. Key principles of the model include expanded service supports, family-led goals and outcomes, ACCO delivered where possible, with focus on strong partnerships and flexible service delivery. The Regional Family Support Hub is comprised of three service streams with increasing levels of support dependent on the needs of the family: 1. The Support Network (formerly known as the Early Diversionary Support Network) 2. Community Intensive Case Management (formerly known as Community Intensive In-home Support) 3. Regional Intensive Support (formerly known as Statutory Intensive In-home Support).
	Target 120 Target 120 is a family-focused intervention aimed at reducing juvenile reoffending and criminal activity among at-risk young people in Western Australia. Target 120 works with local organisations, predominantly ACCOs, government agencies and the community, to support young people and their families who are at risk of becoming repeat offenders by connecting them with tailored services and supports, including culturally appropriate services and an in-home component to help develop parenting skills and promote healthy child development.

Jurisdiction	Funding Program
	Aboriginal Community Connectors Program The Aboriginal Community Connectors Program delivers essential community services by providing transport to a safe place, diversion from unsafe situations, referrals to complementary services, and mediation. People accessing these services include at-risk youth and adults and youth, experiencing challenges in Alcohol and Other Drugs, violence, and mental or physical health issues. Service users may also have mobility challenges due to age, disability, or lack of viable transport options. The program is community-led and delivered by local Aboriginal organisations employing people in the community.
	Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services Child Sexual Abuse Therapeutic Services and Indigenous Healing Services provide a range of healing, support, counselling and therapeutic responses. This includes services for children, young people and their families affected by child sexual abuse, and adults who have experienced historical child sexual abuse and children at risk of, or displaying, harmful sexual behaviours. The Indigenous Healing Services take an Aboriginal perspective on health and wellbeing, encompassing physical, social, emotional, cultural and spiritual wellbeing to provide a holistic service response for vulnerable Aboriginal children and families.
	Home Stretch WA Home Stretch WA provides young people leaving out-of-home care with the option to continue to receive support up until the age of 21. The Home Stretch WA model was co-designed with young people with lived experience of transitioning from care, with a particular focus on the needs of young Aboriginal people and their families. The Department of Communities has partnered with community service organisations and ACCOs (Home Stretch WA service providers) to deliver the Home Stretch WA program across the State. Key elements of the WA model include an 'Investment Me Fund', 'Staying on Agreement' and 'Subsidy and Housing Allowance'.

Source: Returned data requests.



Doing things differently: Funding ACCOs to keep families together

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