

Discussion paper: Identifying priorities for the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan

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Acknowledgements

SNAICC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

Acronyms

ACCOs	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations
DSS	Department of Social Services
ECCDPP	Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
NGOs	Non-Government Organisations

1. About this discussion paper

The *Safe and Supported National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported) is the national commitment to enhance the safety and wellbeing of children across Australia. The plan is implemented through two Action Plans, one for all children, and another dedicated to addressing priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. With both Action Plans coming to an end this year, the development of the Second Action Plans to run from 2027 to 2031 is now underway. This discussion paper has been prepared by SNAICC to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, the child and family services sector and other key organisations to identify priorities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. Consultations will be facilitated by members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group of Safe and Supported (Leadership Group) and SNAICC in August 2026.

To support consultations, this paper provides an overview of the Safe and Supported policy context, a summary of priorities and progress under the first five years of Safe and Supported, and discussion questions to aid consideration of priorities for enhancing the safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Feedback from these consultations will feed directly into the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. Input will also inform the development of the broader Second Action Plan for all children and, where relevant, support alignment with related action plans under the following key national frameworks:

- *Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026–2036.*
- *National Plan to End Violence against Women and Children 2022–2032.*
- *The National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021–2030.*

2. Why these consultations matter

With the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 coming to an end, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan will run through to 2031, aligning with the deadline for Closing the Gap Target 12 – a 45 percent reduction in the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.¹

Despite some significant achievements under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026, national reporting indicates that progress against Closing the Gap Target 12 (to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45 per cent

¹ Closing the Gap, 2026. For more information see: [Outcome 12 - Closing the Gap](#).

by 2031) is worsening and not on track to be met. The rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care has steadily increased over the past five years nationally, while there has been a downward trend for non-Indigenous children.² As of 30 June 2025, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across Australia were 12 times more likely to be in out-of-home care than non-Indigenous children.³

While progress has been made, implementation of several actions and commitments under the First Action Plan remain uneven or incomplete across jurisdictions. These consultations for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan are an opportunity to set the agenda for the next five years. As the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan develops, it is critical to consider how the Second Action Plan can strengthen implementation of Safe and Supported by embedding shared decision-making, transferring authority where appropriate, and ensuring sustainable resourcing and clear accountability for outcomes to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

3. Policy Context: Safe and Supported

Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031 is a 10-year national policy framework jointly developed and endorsed by the Commonwealth Government, state and territory governments in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group for Safe and Supported, with significant contributions from Families Australia and the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing (National Coalition) Steering Group.

Safe and Supported is widely recognised as a transformative approach in government policy, as the first national framework negotiated under the terms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It embeds shared-decision making through a formal partnership (the Partnership Agreement) between Australian governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Safe and Supported sets out how governments and the non-government sector will work together to help children, young people and families who need support, particularly those who are experiencing disadvantage or are vulnerable to abuse or neglect. It is the main national policy framework which aims to address Target 12 of the National Agreement, which is to reduce the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and young people in out of home care by 45% by 2031.

Safe and Supported is currently being delivered through two Action Plans, that are due to end in 2026:

² Report on Government Services, 2026. [Community Services \(Part F\)](#). Table 16A.2, [Children aged 0–17 years in care, by Indigenous status](#).

³ Report on Government Services, 2026. [Community Services \(Part F\)](#). Table 16A.2, [Children aged 0–17 years in care, by Indigenous status](#).

1. The ***Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*** focus is on achieving safety and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It was developed in partnership with the Leadership Group.
2. The ***Safe and Supported First Action Plan 2023-2026***, commits to making significant and sustained progress in reducing the rate of child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts. This action plan focuses on all children in Australia, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.⁴

This discussion paper aims to support consultations which focus on the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. Input will also inform the development of the broader Second Action Plan for all children.

Table 1 and Table 2 outline the key actions each Safe and Supported Action Plan focuses on. There are some actions which are linked, referenced and/or reinforced between the two Action Plans.

Table 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026

Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4
Delegated Authority Commit to progressive systems transformation that has First Nations self-determination at its centre, through development of jurisdictional plans to enable the exercise of authority in child protection by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Investing in the Community-Controlled Sector Shift towards adequate and coordinated funding of early, targeted and culturally safe supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	Data Sovereignty Build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infrastructure for sovereignty of data and improve the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence base.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Develop a national approach to continue building a sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family sector workforce.
Action 5	Action 6	Action 7	Action 8
Active Efforts Implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts.	Legal Supports Improve availability and quality of legal support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families engaged with child protection systems.	Advocating for Accountability and Oversight Establish and strengthen advocacy through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners.	Social Determinants of Child Safety and Wellbeing Work across portfolios impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

⁴ This includes four Priority Groups: children and families with multiple and complex needs; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable; children and young people and/or parents/carers with disability experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable; and children and young people who have experienced abuse and/or neglect including children in out-of-home care, and young people leaving out of home care and transitioning to adulthood.

Table 2: Safe and Supported First Action Plan 2023-2026

Action 1	Action 2	Action 3	Action 4
Early Supports Address the social determinants of child safety and wellbeing through early and targeted support and improved access to services for vulnerable children and families.	Data and Research Establish a national coordinated data and research approach.	Workforce Agree a national approach or strategy for a sustainable and skilled children and families services workforce.	Listening to Experience Embed the voice of the child and living experience in program and policy design in the context of Safe and Supported implementation.
Action 5	Action 6	Action 7	Action 8
Out-of-Home Care Improve lifetime outcomes for children and young people in and leaving out-of-home care through strategies that support proactive access to universal services.	Carers Improve support for carers.	Disability Ensure effective and timely responses for parents and carers living with disability and children and young people with disability and/or developmental concerns.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle Implement the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts.

4. Policy Context: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan

For the next five years, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan will operate within a broader policy landscape that includes several intersecting national frameworks, including:

- The **National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022-2032**. Work is progressing on the second action plan, with strong intersections across child and family safety, prevention of violence, responses to family, domestic and sexual violence, and system integration across governments.
- **Our Ways, Strong Ways, Our Voices: National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Plan to End Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence 2026-2036**. Work is progressing to deliver a dedicated Action Plan to address family violence and progress Target 13 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Target 13 states that by 2031, the rate of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children is reduced at least by 50%, as progress towards zero.
- **National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse 2021-2030**. Work is progressing to develop a Second Action Plan to keep children and young people safe from sexual abuse and better support victims and survivors.

- The **Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP)**. The ECCDPP is a shared decision-making forum between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and governments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to improve early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

5. Progress to date: Achievements and challenges

Since 2021, there have been a number of important developments under Safe and Supported including:

- **Establishment of a shared governance and decision-making structure:** This has provided the infrastructure for a collaborative approach between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and the Commonwealth, state and territory governments, which has resulted in the development of the two Action Plans, and accompanying Theories of Change, Outcomes Frameworks and Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies.
- The **National Child and Family Investment Strategy** (Investment Strategy) and **Innovation Fund** (under Action 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan).⁵ All governments have endorsed the Investment Strategy which sets the direction for funding priorities for child and family services, shifting investment towards prevention and early support for children and families, and investing in ACCOs to deliver an increased proportion of culturally appropriate child and family services.
- Partnering with DSS on the design and implementation of the **Innovation Grant Fund, with \$10 million being committed** over three years to 10 ACCOs to provide prevention and early intervention supports and prepare for transferring resources and funding to ACCOs
- **\$44 million in funding to ACCO child and family services** through the **Improving Multidisciplinary Responses program**, supporting 15 ACCOs to deliver self-determined, locally driven and culturally grounded approaches to early intervention and other supports.
- **Establishment of the first National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People** (National Commissioner) and strengthening standards for similar roles. After many years of advocacy, the National Commission was established in January 2025, with Sue-Anne Hunter appointed in August 2025 as National Commissioner. In March 2026 legislation was passed providing for strong powers, functions and independence of the Commissioner. The Commonwealth and most states and territories have endorsed minimum requirements settings standards for the powers and functions Commissioners must have.
- **Development of the Waterways Training Package, a national program designed to strengthen culturally responsive and trauma-informed practice across the child and**

⁵ See: [The National Child and Family Investment Strategy](#).

family sector (under Action 3 in the Safe and Supported First Action Plan).⁶ Waterways was funded by DSS to support mainstream services across Australia that work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The training is a two-day, face-to-face workshop and supports services to reflect on their roles and responsibilities, change harmful systems and practices, and uphold the rights, strengths and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

- Strengthening the evidence base and policy architecture for reform through a scoping study for a **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support**, alongside research and scoping work to inform enhanced legal support services and refreshed national out-of-home care standards.

Since implementation commenced, progress has also been made across other areas, including the strengthening of national governance arrangements for Safe and Supported, progressing work on delegated authority and self-determination, and improving data and reporting through the development of Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies.

Alongside these developments, implementation experience and feedback shared through Safe and Supported governance and sector engagement processes point to several recurring challenges that the Second Action Plan could explore further:

- **Investment in ACCOs needs to shift at greater scale and pace:** Recent investments provide important foundations. However, longer-term, more flexible and better coordinated funding is needed to support ACCO-led prevention, early intervention, family support and system transformation.
- **Strengthening investment in early and targeted supports:** There needs to be a strong focus on investment in early intervention, targeted supports for children, young people and families facing disadvantage and/or vulnerability.
- **Accountability arrangements need strengthening:** Implementation has been varied across jurisdictions. The Second Action Plan could strengthen transparency, clarify responsibilities, support independent oversight and establish mechanisms to respond where implementation is delayed.
- **Data systems need to better support community decision-making:** Further work and resourcing is needed to improve data sovereignty infrastructure and the availability of timely, disaggregated and locally useful data to track progress against Target 12 and support decision-making by communities and ACCOs.
- **Delegated authority reforms require stronger planning and implementation:** Engagement with ACCO leadership on delegated authority has been inconsistent across jurisdictions, and legislative and implementation progress varies widely. Where authority has genuinely been transferred and

⁶ See: [Waterways](#).

properly resourced, the evidence is promising and shows increased reunification and connection to family and culture for children.

- **Workforce strain remains high:** Further investment and reform are needed to grow and sustain the ACCO child and family services workforce, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- **The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is not consistently or effectively implemented to the standard of active efforts:** Implementation of the Child Placement Principle varies significantly between jurisdictions, and in many instances has not reached the standard of “active efforts” committed to under the First Action Plan.

6. Priorities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan

The Safe and Supported First Action Plan 2023-2026 and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 have established some strong foundations for reform. The Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group has identified and agreed with governments a set of consistent priorities that need to be taken forward in the Second Action Plans, including:

- ACCO investment and transition of funding.
- Early support and prevention.
- Delegated authority.
- Growing the ACCO workforce.
- Implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group has also agreed with governments that a focus is needed on addressing gaps in resourcing and accountability for implementation.

Our consultations aim to test and expand on these priorities with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. The consultations will help identify which actions should be prioritised, how implementation could be sequenced, and what resourcing, partnerships and accountability arrangements may be needed to support practical delivery over the life of the Second Action Plans. The questions below are designed to support conversations about what is most needed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people stay connected to their families, communities, Country and culture:

1. Building on what has already been identified through the First Action Plan and previous engagement, what issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people most need attention in the Second Action Plans?

Prompts:

- What has changed since the First Action Plans were developed?
- What challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities are becoming more urgent?
- Where are children, families and communities needing the most support?
- What needs to happen faster to support progress toward Closing the Gap Target 12?

2. Based on the experience of the First Action Plans, what should be continued, strengthened or done differently in the Second Action Plans to accelerate change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?

Prompts:

- Which reforms or actions have made, or could make, the biggest difference?
- Where have there been persistent barriers or implementation gaps?
- What should be strengthened, stopped or done differently?
- What needs to improve in shared decision-making, accountability and implementation?

3. Which actions should take highest priority in the Second Action Plans to achieve real change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?

Prompts:

- What actions would have the greatest impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people?
- What is needed to strengthen Aboriginal community-controlled services, workforce and self-determined supports?
- What is needed to support children to remain safely connected to family, community, culture and Country?
- What data, evidence and accountability arrangements are needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty and decision-making?
- What would success look like over the next five years, and how should it be measured?

7. How to engage and next steps

This discussion paper is intended to support the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, the child and family services sector and other key organisations to identify priorities for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan. Consultations will be facilitated by members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group of Safe and Supported and SNAICC in August 2026. Following consultations, all feedback collated will be considered in the drafting of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Second Action Plan, which will be developed through shared decision-making between governments and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group. Input will also inform the development of the broader Second Action Plan for all children.

The Second Action Plans for Safe and Supported are intended to be finalised and endorsed by October 2026 and will commence implementation in early 2027. For any questions regarding consultation processes for the Safe and Supported Second Action Plans and how to participate, please contact:

safeandsupported@snaicc.org.au