
Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting One Outcomes

The Partnership came together for its first meeting in Adelaide on 14 November 2022. The meeting opened with a Welcome to Country from Michael Kumatpi Marrutya O'Brien, Senior Kurna Custodian. The meeting was chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO of SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, and Brenton Philp, Deputy Secretary Early Childhood and Youth Group, Commonwealth Department of Education, and attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and representatives from all Australian governments. A full list of attendees is located below.

The meeting was an important milestone to support implementation of the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Closing the Gap), in particular, Priority Reform 1 – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making. The Partnership is a formal partnership mechanism that all governments have committed to under Closing the Gap. It is a shared decision-making forum with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and government representatives across early childhood education and care, maternal and child health, child safety and families.

The partnership will involve representation and engagement from across the early childhood care and development sectors to consider and respond to the issues impacting on children in their early years.

Members considered partnership principles and enablers to create a strong and culturally safe partnership. This includes: building trust through transparent communication; providing clarity on roles and responsibilities; ensuring adequate resourcing to enable equal partnership; providing sufficient lead time and information for members to caucus and engage with stakeholders; and recognising shared decision-making as a step towards supporting self-determination.

Members in the room signed the Agreement to Implement the Partnership, as the formal document that establishes the terms of reference for the Partnership and affirms members' commitment to work together to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. The Agreement will be circulated out of session for members that were unable to participate in person.

The Partnership will focus on the Priority Reforms and Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 12 and 13 of Closing the Gap. Members stated their intention to apply a holistic, systems-thinking approach to early childhood care and development policy issues including but not limited to, early childhood education and care, child protection and a cross cutting focus on disability, as well as intersecting areas such as health, justice, and housing. This includes ensuring a focus on the social determinants of child wellbeing and safety and addressing siloes across

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government to ensure a joined-up, child-centred focus across early childhood sectors and policy areas.

The Partnership committed to building on the work of and considering intersections with relevant strategies, such as the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy*, the *Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan*, *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021 – 2031*, and the *National Plan for Reducing Violence against Women and their Children*, and the *National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse*.

The Partnership discussed its role in reporting to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap and the need to establish supporting governance and effective engagement mechanisms to further its work. This includes consideration of working groups and engagement with national Ministerial forums, local government, place-based partnerships and state-based peaks, with the guiding principle that agreed outcomes should drive working and governance arrangements.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members shared their lived experience, motivations and aspirations for the Partnership. They highlighted systemic and structural reform priorities for the Partnership to consider, in particular, to build the community-controlled sector (Priority Reform 2) and to transform government organisations (Priority Reform 3) to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working and self-determination. This includes improving funding arrangements that are more responsive to the needs of children, families and communities and ways to increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

Government representatives spoke to the key levers and priorities in their jurisdictions, acknowledging the need for stronger partnership approaches and community-led initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, with a focus on strengthening the community-controlled sector and workforce.

The Partnership observed there is a shared focus and significant investment amongst all governments in the early years. The Partnership noted there are significant reforms underway across jurisdictions as well as nationally to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Partnership discussed that mainstream services often fail to effectively engage with and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. While governments' responsibility for children is shared across different portfolios and jurisdictions, responses are often not integrated and children can fall through the gaps. This is evidenced in the outcomes.

Members discussed that key solutions include better coordination of service delivery; transfer of funding from mainstream to community-control; and coordination of government policy and programs to better support holistic, community-led models of support and care for children. The Partnership identified the opportunity to share knowledge and best practice in implementing these solutions.

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The Partnership discussed proposed priorities brought forward by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, with a focus on early opportunities to progress. The proposed priorities build on reform opportunities identified through current national early childhood care and development strategies, plans and frameworks. Key themes across the opportunities include:

- reforming funding models for early years community controlled services, to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- improving government procurement processes to support community led service delivery; and
- enhancing system accountability, coordination and integration across the sectors and government agencies that influence the health and wellbeing of children and families.

The Partnership provided broad support for these priorities and noted the Commonwealth's in-principle support to consider a project to research and develop options on an early childhood education and care funding model for ACCOs. The shared secretariat will further progress the proposal ahead of the next Partnership meeting.

Members agreed to further consider the priorities put forward by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members out-of-session to aid the development of a detailed workplan for agreement at the next meeting of the Partnership.

The Partnership will meet again in early 2023 to continue discussions and progress actions to together drive improvements in Closing the Gap Priority Reforms and early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Attendees

| Name | Representing |
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| Coalition of Peaks representatives | |
| Catherine Liddle | SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) |
| Donella Mills | National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) |
| Tennille Lamb | First Peoples Disability Network |
| Lisa Coulson | Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre |
| Neville Atkinson | Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated |
| Sharron Williams | Aboriginal Family Support Services |
| Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives | |
| Joanne Della Bona | Independent representative |
| Keara Baker-Storey | Independent representative |
| Darcy Cavanagh | Independent representative |
| Paul Gray | Independent representative |
| Government representatives | |
| Brenton Philp | Commonwealth Government |
| Gillian White | New South Wales Government |
| Mathew Lundgren | Victoria Government |
| Tania Porter | Queensland Government |
| Chad Stewart | Western Australia Government |
| Peta Smith | South Australia Government |
| Jodee Wilson | Tasmania Government |
| Nicole Moore | Australian Capital Territory Government |
| Gabrielle Brown | Northern Territory Government |
| Partners | |
| Muriel Bamblett | SNAICC |
| Tarja Saastamoinen | Commonwealth Government |
| Brendan Thomas | New South Wales Government |
| Simone Corin | Victoria Government |
| Sarah Callinan | Queensland Government |
| Andrew Rayner | Western Australia Government |
| Vidhya Chelliah | Tasmania Government |
| Aimee Kable | Australian Capital Territory Government |