



Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting 13 Outcomes – 4-5 March 2026

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP, Partnership) held its thirteenth meeting in at Piyura Kitina/Risdon Cove on Palawa Country in Lutruwita/Tasmania.

Niara Mansell offered a Welcome to Country. Niara is a trawlwoolway pakana woman and the manager of pakana kanaplila, a Tasmanian Aboriginal traditional and contemporary dance group. Niara spoke about the history of the Palawa people and their connection to kunanyi / Mount Wellington.

The meeting was co-chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and Kylie Crane PSM, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood, Australian Government Department of Education. Attendees at the meeting included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander independent and peak body representatives and representatives from all Australian governments. A full list of attendees is located on page 4.

During the meeting, members acknowledged the outstanding leadership of Pat Turner AM as she concluded her tenure as Chief Executive Officer of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NAACHO) and Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks. Members also acknowledged Donnella Mills who is a member of the ECCDPP First Nations Caucus and who was announced as the new Lead Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks.

Representatives from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC) and the Tasmanian Government jointly presented on [Nukara: Keeping Our Children and Families Safe and Together](#). Nukara is the TAC's community-led, scalable blueprint for transferring responsibility of Aboriginal child safety from government to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs). Nukara means 'to weave a basket' in palawa kani. The strategy weaves together community knowledge, cultural strength and practical solutions to keep Aboriginal children in care safe, strong and connected with family, community and culture. The representatives reflected on Nukara and the need to work together to transform funding models for ACCOs. The Tasmanian Government shared an example of how it recently transferred mainstream family violence funding into a flexible funding agreement with the TAC to support a more holistic, ACCO-led, multidisciplinary approach. In working together, representatives reflected on the importance of outcomes-based relational commissioning and sharing resources beyond funding – such as information, processes and procedures, and providing workforce support.

Progressing the Partnership's Priorities

The Partnership's priorities are the agreed policy reform areas on which the Partnership will focus its work. The priorities aim to drive concrete action to advance the safety, development and wellbeing of children and to meet Closing the Gap targets 2, 3, 4, 12 and 13 and the cross-cutting area of disability. A full list of [priorities can be found on the SNAICC website](#).

Priority 1A

Increase the proportion of child and family services funding to ACCOs with consideration to the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children involved in child protection systems, across Commonwealth and jurisdictions in line with the recommendations of the [Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families Report](#) and the [Family Matters Report](#)

The Department of Social Services (DSS) provided an update on the Australian Government's work to increase the proportion of funding to ACCO child and family services. Under Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, all Australian Governments have committed to building the ACCO sector through increasing the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services delivered by ACCOs. This is in recognition that ACCOs are best placed to understand what their communities and children need.

DSS shared an update on consultation on the Australian Government's proposed reforms to five Families and Children Activity programs. A consultation report will be released shortly and DSS will continue to engage with the ECCDPP on the reforms.

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

ACCOs play an important role as a mechanism for self-determination by delivering critical services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. However, current funding models are usually designed for mainstream services and are not tailored to the needs of ACCOs and the children and families they support.

The ECCDPP commissioned SNAICC to undertake research on behalf of the ECCDPP to develop sustainable funding model options for ACCOs delivering child and family services. Deloitte Access Economics is working in partnership with SNAICC to deliver the economic modelling component of the research. SNAICC and Deloitte Access Economics provided an update on the project and how feedback from stakeholders, including ACCOs, has been incorporated into the research report.

Members discussed next steps to take the research forward, including providing recommendations to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap (Joint Council). The final report will be delivered to the Department of Education in March 2026.

Priority 2A and 2B

Progressing the response to the findings of two research reports commissioned by the ECCDPP into funding model options for ACCOs delivering integrated early years services and optimal hours of early childhood education and care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In the next stage of progressing these priorities, members noted Education Ministers Meeting have considered the implementation advice co-developed by Education officials and the ECCDPP in response to the findings of the ECCDPP research reports, and that the Steering Committee with Education officials and SNAICC will lead work to agree a shared definition for ACCO integrated early years services. The advice will be shared with the Joint Council on Closing the Gap at their upcoming meeting in May 2026. Members noted that the definition work should progress as quickly as possible.

Other ECCDPP work

Joint Council on Closing the Gap

Members discussed the ECCDPP's update to Joint Council at its meeting in November 2025. Joint Council discussed the ECCDPP's work and agreed that the Partnership will work with [Safe and Supported](#) governance to accelerate action on existing commitments relating to Closing the Gap Outcome 12, which relates to reducing the overrepresentation

of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care. See the [communiqué here](#) for more information. Members discussed the recommendations the ECCDPP will bring to Joint Council in 2026 to progress its work.

Thriving Kids reforms

Representatives from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) provided members with an update on the national model for [Thriving Kids](#) announced in February 2026 and the Australian Government's bilateral discussions with state and territory governments on delivering Thriving Kids in each jurisdiction. Thriving Kids will establish supports for children aged 8 and under with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs, and their families, and is due to commence on 1 October 2026 with the full rollout by 1 January 2028.

The First Nations Caucus noted the potential of Thriving Kids. They emphasised the importance of the reforms being developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and sought detail on how this would occur. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives noted that, to date, they were being engaged in an advisory capacity or after decisions had been made. The First Nations Caucus noted how ACCO early years services have already been delivering integrated supports for children with disability for decades and successful implementation will be dependent on strong engagement with ACCOs.

DHDA and ECCDPP members agreed on the importance of continuing to engage as Thriving Kids progresses, including capturing valuable insights from the partnership regarding its implementation.

Using data to drive the ECCDPP's work

The ECCDPP has previously discussed the importance of having accurate, usable data to guide its work. To build on these discussions, the ECCDPP held a workshop to agree on how to focus its data efforts in 2026. The Co-Chairs of the [Data Policy Partnership](#) provided an update on their work and members discussed opportunities for the two Policy Partnerships to collaborate.

SNAICC and the Australian Government Department of Education also presented on work they are doing to improve their capacity to work effectively with data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and support data sovereignty. Members discussed the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities leading the creation and use of data relating to their people, and the need for usable data at a local level.

Members agreed that the ECCDPP will initially focus on identifying priority data gaps in data relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This will lay the foundation for future data work, including strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led data, and collaborating with the Data Policy Partnership.

Audit of Closing the Gap in Schooling and Early Childhood Development

The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) presented the findings and recommendations of the [Audit of Closing the Gap in Schooling and Early Childhood Development](#). The Audit found that the ECCDPP aligns well with the 'strong partnership' elements of the National Agreement and is a good example of a successful policy partnership. The ANAO also made recommendations to improve the transparency of reporting around Closing the Gap. Australian Government representatives spoke about how they were acting on these recommendations.

ECCDPP Strategic Plan

Members agreed on the next three-year Strategic Plan for the ECCDPP, which will cover 2026-2028. Members also agreed to a 2026 work plan.

Next meeting

The Partnership will meet again in June 2026.

Attendees/Apologies

Name	Representing
Coalition of Peaks representatives	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donnella Mills (online, day 2)	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Anjee-Lee Bamblett (proxy for Neville Atkinson)	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)
Sarah Patrick (proxy for Damian Griffis)	First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
Kylie Degenhardt (apology)	South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (SAACCON)
Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives	
Darcy Cavanagh (apology)	Independent representative
Paul Gray	Independent representative
Garth Morgan (online, part of day 1 only)	Independent representative
Joanne Della Bona	Independent representative
Elizabeth Cox	Independent Representative
Government representatives	
Kylie Crane	Australian Government, Department of Education
Mark Barraket (online)	New South Wales Government
Mathew Lundgren	Victorian Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Glen Canton (proxy for Melanie Samuels)	Western Australia Government
Kim Little	South Australia Government
Peter Whitcombe	Tasmania Government
Nicole Moore	Australian Capital Territory Government
Michelle Ganzer (online, proxy for Karen Broadfoot)	Northern Territory Government
Partners	
Muriel Bamblett (apology)	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
John Leha (online)	AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
Stacey Giles (proxy for Phillip Brooks, day 1 only)	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
Corri McKenzie	Australian Government, Department of Social Services
Deborah Fulton	Australian Government, National Indigenous Australians Agency
Stuart Malcher	New South Wales Government
Simone Corin	Victorian Government
Ron Weatherall	Queensland Government
Raechelle Lee (online)	Western Australia Government
Jackie Bray (online)	South Australian Government
Jodee Wilson (apology)	Tasmanian Government
Chris Simpson (apology)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Meg Hewett (online, proxy for Aderyn Chatterton)	Northern Territory Government