



Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Strategic Plan 2026–2028

Artist attribution

Guiding Stars description

This vibrant artwork, titled “Guiding Stars,” symbolizes the unity and shared decision-making embodied by the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP or the Partnership).

The central motif of interconnected patterns and shapes represents the coming together of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, families, and government representatives, all working harmoniously to ensure the well-being and cultural richness of the youngest children. The bright, swirling elements signify the Guiding Stars, an ancestral reminder of the wisdom and strength that guide the community in making decisions for a brighter future. Surrounding footprints depict the journey of collaboration and continuous support from the community, creating a nurturing environment where every child can thrive and remain connected to their heritage. This piece is a celebration of the ECCDPP’s commitment to fostering early childhood development and closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Artist bio

Tovani Cox is a proud Bunuba, Gija and Karajarri woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. Born in Broome, Tovani is passionate about art and design and often her inspiration is from her long standing commitment to self-determination and rights of first nations people and communities. She was predominantly raised in Noongar country in Perth, and since early 2017 has been living in Melbourne on Wurundjeri country, and travels home to the Kimberley as often as she can to connect with kin and country. Tovani has qualifications in Digital Graphic Design from RMIT University, and wants to pursue further skills and training using art as therapy and healing.

Artist attribution

Tovani Cox is a proud Bunuba, Gija and Karajarri woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia.

Design attribution

The ECCDPP logo and creative elements designed by Coolamon Creative.



Acknowledgement

The ECCDPP acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country across the continent and islands and their continuing connections to land, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Elders past and present and emerging. We acknowledge and respect their continued connection to Country, care for community and practice of culture for generations uncounted.

We also acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, parents, families and kinship carers who are the custodians of caring practices that have kept children safe and thriving for more than 65,000 years.

Strategic plan summary

Background

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP, the Partnership) was established under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) in 2022 to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The Partnership brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders with all Australian governments to develop shared recommendations on matters that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Having everyone at the same table shifts more power to communities and supports more collaborative, effective solutions. The ECCDPP meets four times a year to progress this work.

The first three years (2022–2025)

In its first three years, the Partnership focused on establishing strong foundations and driving early progress.

As shared decision-making represents a new and different way of working, it took time for the ECCDPP to build the relationships, processes and trust to function well. This included creating space for challenging conversations and government members demonstrating a willingness to shift traditional approaches to working and making decisions with communities.

The Partnership initially agreed on six priorities to guide its work. These were then expanded, and the ECCDPP is now guided by 16 priorities. Collectively, these priorities capture important changes that are needed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

One of the strengths of the ECCDPP is the way it works with other forums to influence policy development, and to ensure the voices of

communities are helping to drive progress for children. In the first three years, the Partnership's work contributed to reforms that will have significant impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This included the establishment of the National Commission for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, as well as the replacement of the Child Care Subsidy Activity Test with the 3 Day Guarantee – under which families caring for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child are eligible for 100 hours of subsidised early childhood education and care per fortnight for each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child.

The next three years - 2026–2028 strategic plan

Now in its second term of operation, the Partnership is a well-established shared decision-making forum with strong relationships and ways of working. Over the next three years, it will continue to strengthen these foundations with an unwavering focus on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This will see the ECCDPP:

- expand the evidence base to progress agreed Partnership priorities, including those relating to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) funding, the child and family services workforce, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with disability
- strengthen collaboration with other policy partnerships and governance bodies, including Safe and Supported, to drive action and advance progress against Target 12 (reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care)
- leverage opportunities to shape and inform cross-cutting reforms that impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- identify opportunities to refine Partnership operations in response to reviews, including the independent evaluation of the ECCDPP's first term.

Part of being a strong shared decision-making forum means acknowledging challenges and working collaboratively to address them. For example, one challenge that has been repeated raised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the ECCDPP is that governments' decision-making processes can slow the Partnership's work and progress.

Guided by the independent evaluation of the ECCDPP, the Partnership is navigating through known challenges, and this forms a key part of this Strategic Plan. However, it is important to recognise that resolving all identified challenges will necessitate broader changes by government, which sit outside the control and remit of the ECCDPP members.

The 2026–2028 Strategic Plan builds on what the Partnership has achieved to date and provides a path forward to address challenges and strengthen its impact.

In 2026, the Partnership will focus on continuing to push forward existing work from the first three years, while setting up the structures for long-term success.

By 2027, the Partnership will be more mature and influential, and will be embedded across the early childhood policy landscape as a forum for decision-making about early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In 2028, the Partnership will take stock of its work to date and make any changes needed to ensure it can keep delivering for children into the future.

The Partnership will also have a workplan each year. The workplan provides more detail on the actions the Partnership will take to deliver the ECCDPP priorities, guided by the Strategic Plan. Together, these documents support the Partnership to continue delivering a new way of working and support stronger, more positive change to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Vision and remit*

The Partnership works towards:

- ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (0–5 years) are born healthy and remain strong, nurtured by strong families and thrive in their early years; and
- ensuring children's safety and care in family and addressing the impacts of child protection systems on children's health, wellbeing and development.

This vision is underpinned by the Closing the Gap Outcomes 2, 3, 4, 12 & 13 which are within the remit of the Partnership:

- Outcome 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and strong.
- Outcome 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.
- Outcome 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children thrive in their early years.
- Outcome 12: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are not over-represented in the child protection system.
- Outcome 13: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and households are safe.

*As outlined in the [Agreement to Implement the ECCDPP](#) (as at Feb 2026)

Purpose

The Partnership's primary function is to make recommendations to all governments, through Joint Council, to improve the early childhood outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.* Through this, the Partnership drives improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in line with the National Agreement, by establishing a joined-up approach between all governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

*As outlined in the [Agreement to Implement the ECCDPP](#) (as at Feb 2026)

Theory of Change

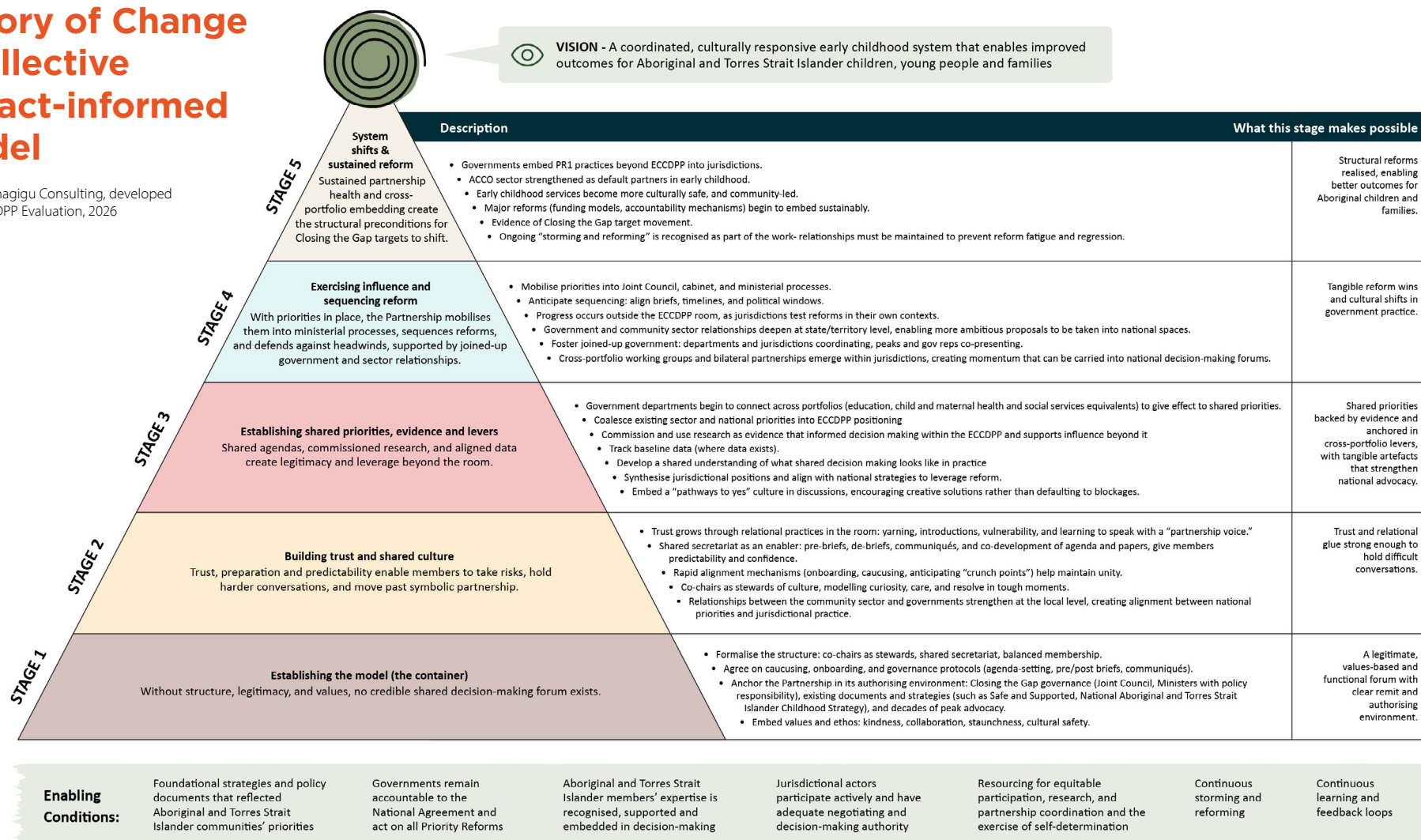
Informed by the evaluation of the first term of the ECCDPP, the Partnership has expanded on its Theory of Change and outlined a collective impact-informed model for how it will achieve outcomes.

The Theory of Change acknowledges that a shared decision-making partnership like the ECCDPP evolves and matures over time, gaining influence as relationships and structures strengthen. It recognises that these partnerships do not follow a simple, linear path from activity to outcome.

The Theory of Change also emphasises that meaningful reform requires a stable partnership ("container"), supported by shared priorities, coordinated action, and aligned authorising pathways. In addition, it reflects members' consistent focus on trust, caucusing, stewardship, and negotiated pathways to agreement.

Theory of Change – collective impact-informed model

Source: Yamagigu Consulting, developed for the ECCDPP Evaluation, 2026



Overarching partnership objectives*

The Partnership's objectives are to:

- establish a joined-up approach between all governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representatives to address early childhood care and development outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- give a focus to the Priority Reforms in the National Agreement, and how they can be harnessed to make the changes needed to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy, supported to thrive with strong families and proud in culture
- identify specific reforms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to achieve their potential in the early years, to be set up for long-term success
- identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments, reduce gaps and duplication and improve outcomes under Closing the Gap
- identify opportunities to work more effectively across the Coalition of Peaks and community organisations, reduce gaps and duplication and improve outcomes under Closing the Gap
- support efforts to implement the National Agreement including meeting targets for the Priority Reform areas and socio-economic outcomes
- drive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led outcomes on Closing the Gap, and support community-led development initiatives
- enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, communities and organisations to negotiate and implement agreements with governments to implement all Priority Reforms and policy specific and place-based strategies to support Closing the Gap.

*As outlined in the [Agreement to Implement the ECCDPP](#) (as at Feb 2026)

Operating landscape

ECCDPP – snapshot (as at February 2026)

- Established in August 2022 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- One of six policy partnerships alongside the:
 - Justice Policy Partnership
 - Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership
 - Housing Policy Partnership
 - Languages Policy Partnership
 - Data Policy Partnership
- Initial 3-year term ended in 2025, followed by an extension until mid-2028
- Guided by the Agreement to Implement the ECCDPP – a document outlining the Partnership’s purpose, objectives, scope, and roles and responsibilities of parties
- 13 meetings held across the country
- 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members and partners
- 19 government members and partners from the Commonwealth and each state and territory
- Working towards delivering 16 priorities under 6 key themes, an expansion from 6 priorities in the first year of operation
- Two sets of recommendations submitted to Joint Council (July 2024 and November 2025).

Strengths

- Has built strong processes and relationships to provide foundations for shared decision-making
- Strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led evidence base for supporting children through commissioned research
- Demonstrable contributions to important reforms (e.g. 3 Day Guarantee, National Commissioner)
- Caucusing arrangements embedded into the Partnership’s design allowing shared decision-making to function more effectively
- Able to use influence across multiple areas of policy, even where shared decision-making roles may be less formalised
- Strong alignment with the ‘strong partnership’ elements as set out under clause 32 of the National Agreement.

Challenges

- The Partnership's broad, cross-cutting policy remit can present challenges for sequencing and delivery of actions
- Limited capacity and resourcing at the Co-secretariat level can result in delays in progressing all agreed priorities
- Securing sufficient buy-in and engagement from relevant portfolios and governments to enable meaningful progress on agreed priorities
- Operating in an environment where progress on Priority Reform Three (Transforming Government Organisations) has been slow
- Extent to which governments can give up power varies, and places limitations on the extent to which the ECCDPP can truly function as a shared decision-making forum
- Government decision-making timelines often do not meet community expectations for urgent action
- Varied governance arrangements and departmental processes across jurisdictions can be difficult to navigate and delay progress

- Impact requires decisions outside the ECCDPP and Joint Council, including funding and policy decisions made through Budget and Cabinet processes
- Decisions and potential for impact affected by electoral cycles and long-term funding uncertainty
- Currently, there are limited mechanisms in place to clearly track the Partnership's decisions and actions taken in response to them to ensure accountability for progress. The Partnership also lacks access to data in formats that would help track the impacts of its decisions and actions.

Opportunities

- Strengthened ability to influence policy decisions and more effective delivery of ECCDPP functions as the Partnership continues to mature and as work is progressed
- Embedding partnership priorities across governments so that reform and implementation action is not reliant on the limited resources or influence of the Co-secretariat

- Leveraging and influencing existing reforms related to the Partnership's remit
- Working with Safe and Supported to amplify impact of reforms to progress Target 12 in line with Joint Council's focus on this target
- Targeted collaboration with other policy partnerships on joint initiatives that have potential for achieving meaningful, impactful outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- Completion of enabling activities to support progression of deferred priorities (e.g. Priority 4D – progress priorities and actions of Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices that align with the Partnership's remit; and Priority 6A – work with the Justice Policy Partnership and Safe and Supported governance to identify opportunities to increase the capacity of specialist ACCO legal services)
- Leverage and incorporate any changes made to strengthen the broader Closing the Gap governance to ensure Partnership recommendations have the intended impact.

Year Four / 2026 – Planning for enduring success

Goal

Build on the achievements of the Partnership's first term to ensure enduring success and sustained influence. As part of this:

- focus on progressing existing work to the necessary decision points to deliver outcomes for children and families (within the Partnership's remit and influence)
- make improvements to the Partnership's operations in response to the ECCDPP evaluation
- future-proof the Partnership and ensure it can create the necessary impact in the long-term.

Objectives and Actions

Objectives and actions in support of the 2026 goal are outlined below.

Note – reference to priorities within actions below reflect agreed Partnership priorities – including (as at March 2026) those with substantially progressed research and advice (e.g. Priorities 2A and 2B – ECEC funding model and access), those recently finalised or nearing finalisation (e.g. Priorities 1B – child and family services ACCO funding and 5A – evidence guidance framework), and those yet to commence or recently commenced (e.g. Priorities 1C – workforce and 4B – disability).

- **Objective:** Relevant governance forums (e.g. the Education Ministers Meeting) are supported to make decisions regarding relevant Joint Council-endorsed recommendations.
- **Action:** Provide input and advice and use the Partnership's influence to support relevant governance forums to make decisions regarding ECCDPP priorities where research and advice is significantly progressed (including having been endorsed by Joint Council).

■ **Objective:** Further build the evidence base and leverage broader reform opportunities available to progress ECCDPP priorities through relevant governance groups – including to Joint Council – building on the previous sets of recommendations put forward by the Partnership.

- **Action:** Finalise existing research commissioned to take forward ECCDPP priorities and progress agreed next steps to support relevant governance groups to make decisions.
- **Action:** Continue to advance the commissioning of research in support of priorities agreed to by the Partnership – including those which require collaboration with Safe and Supported and other Policy Partnerships.
- **Action:** Maintain visibility of SNAICC-commissioned research to support relevant ECCDPP priorities and consider next steps to progress these priorities in response to the research.

■ **Objective:** Promote a renewed and compelling narrative that elevates the Partnership as a central mechanism for genuine partnership and shared decision-making – anchored by its role in supporting Closing the Gap Priority Reform One (Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making).

- **Action:** Where appropriate, reinforce the Partnership's role and purpose – and its link to driving Closing the Gap outcomes – through consistent messaging across all levels of government and non-government engagement.
- **Action:** Explore opportunities – including through collaborating with the Data Policy Partnership – that enable the Partnership's actions and their impact on early childhood outcomes be better tracked, measured, and communicated to various audiences.

■ **Objective:** Ensure Partnership operations are progressively refined as it matures, guided by insights from the independent evaluation of its first term, and other reviews (e.g. the ANAO's Closing the Gap in Schooling and Early Childhood Development audit).

- **Action:** Progress first-term evaluation findings and recommendations through the Partnership and other appropriate governance channels for endorsement.
- **Action:** Ensure opportunities for the Partnership to discuss and reflect on areas for improvement arising from other reviews as appropriate.
- **Action:** Leveraging existing co-secretariat processes, document and track improvements to the Partnership's operations arising from adopted recommendations.
- **Action:** Share lessons relevant to the broader Closing the Gap landscape as opportunities arise.

Year Five / 2027 – Embedding impact as the norm

Goal

The Partnership's identity and functions have matured to a point that its work and influence are embedded in early childhood care and development systems, as well as the broader Closing the Gap governance architecture. As a result, the Partnership also secures its reputation as a positive and influential partner in genuine, shared decision-making.

Objectives and Actions

Objectives and actions in support of the 2027 goal are outlined below.

Note – reference to priorities within actions below continue to align with agreed Partnership priorities and may include those progressed under the 2026 actions, as well as those previously deferred or deprioritised due to capacity constraints or other dependencies.

- **Objective:** Maintain continued oversight of the early childhood reform landscape and identify opportunities where the Partnership can either use a reform opportunity as a 'hook' to advance its priorities and / or be a vehicle for influence by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are embedded in policy development and implementation.
 - **Action:** Through more consistent and strategic engagement, enhance relationships with other policy partnerships, line agencies, central agencies, and other decision-making forums to proactively identify and pursue opportunities to leverage the Partnership's expertise and progress its priorities.
 - **Action:** Leverage the Partnership as a foundation to broaden engagement and deepen relationships with ACCOs and First Nations stakeholders, ensuring their voices are reflected in the identification and pursuit of reform opportunities.
- **Objective:** Building on previous recommendations, Joint Council considers a further set of meaningful and impactful policy-focussed recommendations in support of agreed Partnership priorities.
 - **Action:** Leverage the Partnership's maturing evidence base and growing influence to submit policy recommendations that more fulsomely deliver on the Partnership's priorities.
 - **Action:** Policy thinking and recommendations are informed by place-based feedback and learnings from other shared decision-making bodies and policy partnerships, where appropriate.
 - **Action:** Recommendations put forward to Joint Council are supported by clear identification of how the recommendation improves early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the parties responsible for delivering relevant actions.

- **Action:** Through regular engagement, continue to strengthen relationships with, and influence among, central agencies and other authoritative bodies to foster authorising environments that enable more ambitious, longer-term policy early childhood policy reform.

■ **Objective:** The Partnership can demonstrate and communicate improvement to its operations as a result of adopting recommendations from the Partnership's independent first-term evaluation.

- **Action:** Drawing on existing Partnership processes and feedback from Partnership members, monitor and document how the ECCDPP's operations have changed, and any flow-on impacts, following the implementation of evaluation recommendations.
- **Action:** Commission an independent evaluation of the second term of the Partnership.

■ **Objective:** The impact of the Partnership's priorities and activities, including their progress towards achieving relevant Closing the Gap priority reforms/targets, can be better illustrated and communicated with supporting data.

- **Action:** Maintain engagement with the Data Policy Partnership and leverage available opportunities that would enable the Partnership to strengthen its ability to track and measure progress of its activities, and the impact these have on improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.



Year Six / 2028 – Nurturing progress

Goal

The Partnership benefits from robust governance and operational arrangements, and a broader enabling environment, that help nurture its longevity, ongoing progress and ability to deliver tangible impacts into the future.

Objectives and Actions

Objectives and actions in support of the 2028 goal are outlined below.

- **Objective:** Agencies and decision-makers proactively engage the Partnership as the relevant forum for decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, enabling it to provide early input into the design of relevant reforms.
- **Action:** Assess opportunities to build on prior years' actions to solidify the Partnership's position as a respected, influential, and critical decision-making forum within the early childhood policy landscape.

- **Objective:** The Partnership can clearly articulate its strengths and barriers, and pinpoint areas for future improvement following two terms of operation.
- **Action:** Undertake an independent, second-term evaluation of the Partnership.
- **Action:** Complementing the second-term evaluation, take stock and reflect on the Partnership's operations, achievements and progress to date in achieving the Partnership's agreed priorities to shape the strategic focus and direction of any subsequent term.

- **Objective:** Actions implemented by the Partnership continue to drive tangible early childhood outcomes beyond 2028.
- **Action:** Secure a long-term extension to the term of the Partnership.
- **Action:** Continue to contribute towards and strengthen the evidence base to guide future early childhood policy reforms.
- **Action:** Continue to monitor progress of the Partnership's actions in delivering observable results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

