



Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting 14 Outcomes – 24-25 June 2026

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP, Partnership) held its fourteenth meeting online. 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 5.

Progressing the Partnership's priorities

The Partnership's priorities are the agreed policy reform areas where the Partnership focuses its work. The priorities aim to drive 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. The relevant priorities are summarised below. A full list of [priorities can be found on the SNAICC website](#).

Priority 1B: Develop models for adequate and coordinated funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) that deliver child and family services

The ECCDPP commissioned research by SNAICC to develop sustainable funding model options for ACCOs delivering child and family services, to provide an evidence base to guide reform and future investment. The *Doing things differently – Funding ACCOs to keep families together* Final Report was provided to the ECCDPP in May 2026 and formally circulated to Joint Council on Closing the Gap in June 2026. It will be available online mid-year.

Members discussed how governments are considering the report to inform implementation planning for the [National Child and Family Investment Strategy](#), as part of work to ensure ACCOs have the resources they need to support families. Through the Investment Strategy, most governments have committed to shift toward coordinated, adequate investment in early, targeted and culturally safe supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Members discussed commissioning for the [Children and Families Support Program](#). The program is a significant source of funding for organisations delivering supports to strengthen families and keep children safe at home. The Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS) provided an update on work underway over the next 5 years to transition more funding to ACCOs under the program, so more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can access culturally safe support services. First Nations members noted that transitioning funding to ACCOs cannot be achieved through a simple transfer of existing programs and funding arrangements. They noted that recent funding rollovers represented a missed opportunity that should be explicitly considered in future transition work. The First Nations members also expressed concerns regarding the pace of transition, the absence of a clearly defined pathway to enabling large-scale, systemic funding reform, and the lack of opportunities for ACCOs to participate in tender processes prior to funding being continued with existing mainstream providers.



Priority 1C: Monitor and engage with reform agendas that are central to responding to the needs and priorities of the ACCO early years and child and family services workforce

In 2025, the ECCDPP agreed to commission a workforce scoping study, in partnership with [Safe and Supported](#), to provide a better understanding of how to support and grow a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services workforce. DSS noted that they had paused this work in its previously agreed form and are reviewing existing work already underway in support of this priority to avoid duplication. Following this review, DSS will share the results of the synthesis with the Safe and Supported governance for discussion and decision about implementation actions to progress and any additional research to be commissioned where there are gaps. DSS will bring back the outcomes of this discussion to the ECCDPP in September 2026.

Priorities 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

Members noted progress by the ECCDPP and education officials to develop a shared national approach to defining ACCO integrated early years services, with agreement from Education Ministers targeted for mid-year. The proposed definition is intended to support greater consistency with funding decisions as they relate to ACCO integrated early years services and promote a more holistic and coordinated approach to funding new or existing services that meet the definition. Members acknowledged the work as an important step in progressing this priority. First Nations members highlighted the importance of timely commitment to implement a new funding model to ensure ACCO services are adequately resourced to deliver wrap-around supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Government members affirmed there is no current commitment from governments to implement a dedicated funding model for ACCO integrated early years services, including the model presented in the ECCDPP [research](#). Members noted the work being led by the Australian Government to explore funding reform opportunities within existing authority for ACCO integrated early years services bilaterally with jurisdictions, and the Australian Government's commitment to work with the Coalition of Peaks and other First Nations partners on any reform opportunities identified.

Priority 4B: Oversee and support joined-up responses to reviews and inquiries relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with disability in partnership with community, relevant peaks and the sector

Since the last meeting, the ECCDPP commissioned the University of Melbourne to deliver a project to develop a culturally safe assessment tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families with disability in contact with child protection systems. The project aims to improve data availability and ensure children have access to appropriate disability supports. In undertaking this project, the University of Melbourne will work with First Nations peaks, community leaders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disability advocates across jurisdictions. They will also work with the Ipsos Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Unit to support engagement with local communities.

Priority 4C: Identify, promote, and research options to expand existing successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led therapeutic models of care to support the perinatal health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies and parents and prevent infant removals by child protection authorities

Members considered an update on research commissioned by SNAICC to progress this priority. The research aims to better understand the data available on pre-birth notifications and infant child removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from child protection services. The research will provide an evidence-base to support more babies to stay safely at home.



Priority 5A: Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Evidence Guidance Framework to build a shared understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services, communities and governments on what is understood as ‘evidence’ in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led child and family support services

On behalf of the ECCDPP, SNAICC has commissioned Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak to deliver an Evidence Guidance Framework, in partnership with the Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research. The Framework aims to build a shared understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services, communities and governments on how evidence is generated, understood and applied.

Members provided feedback on the Framework and its associated toolkit and discussed how they will consider the application of the Framework once it is finalised. Following members’ endorsement out-of-session, the Framework will be published on the SNAICC website for communities and governments to use in their work.

Other ECCDPP work

Joint Council on Closing the Gap / Closing the Gap Target 12

Members discussed the ECCDPP’s update to Joint Council at its meeting in May 2026, where ECCDPP tabled its third set of recommendations.

Members considered the upcoming November 2026 meeting of Joint Council, including preparing for a report back to Joint Council on progress against Target 12 of the National Agreement. Target 12 aims to reduce the rate of over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031. In recognising the interconnectedness of Target 12 and the overarching funding frameworks which support ACCOs, part of this update will include how governments are considering the *Doing Things Differently – funding ACCOs to keep families together* report in their work (see Priority 1B above).

Thriving Kids reforms

Representatives from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (DHDA) presented and engaged in discussion with members on the [Thriving Kids](#) reforms. The workshop focused on the Thriving Kids national model, workforce activities, proposed governance arrangements which support joint dialogue between First Nations Leadership and jurisdictions, and opportunities for ECCDPP influence and engagement. The Western Australian Government Department of Communities presented on Thriving Kids implementation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in Western Australia.

Thriving Kids will establish supports for children aged 0-8 with developmental delay and/or autism with low to moderate support needs, and their families. Thriving Kids is due to commence, in a phased approach, from 1 October 2026 with the full rollout by 1 January 2028.

Members discussed the benefits of centring child and family services and early childhood services in the delivery of Thriving Kids, given their close relationships with children and families, including how these services should be considered in the context of the Commonwealth-led sector strengthening work. First Nations members noted the reform’s potential and highlighted the importance of Thriving Kids being developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Members reiterated that the National Agreement on Closing the Gap must be a key anchor in the reform process, with shared decision-making embedded throughout.

DHDA will continue to engage with the ECCDPP as Thriving Kids progresses.



New Preschool Funding Agreement

The Australian Government Department of Education commenced engagement with ECCDPP members to inform negotiations for a new Preschool Funding Agreement (Agreement). The new Agreement will replace the current Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA), which is scheduled to cease on 30 June 2028.

The Department emphasised Education Ministers' expectations that negotiations be conducted in genuine partnership with key partners. This included through the formal Education Ministers governance with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC), and also with SNAICC and the ECCDPP. Negotiations will be guided by quality and equity objectives, in addition to current PRA parameters of the Commonwealth funding states and territories to deliver 600 hours a year of preschool programs in the year before full-time school.

Members provided initial feedback on key considerations and the scope of reform for the new Agreement. First Nations members noted the importance of governments working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and of using this opportunity to drive progress on Closing the Gap Priority Reforms. Members were invited to provide further feedback to the Department of Education, with engagement to continue as negotiations progress.

Next steps for ECCDPP's data work

Members discussed the next steps for the ECCDPP's data work, following workshops held at Meeting 13 on the use of data to drive work in the Partnership and strengthen its evidence base. Members provided feedback and considerations on a proposed project aiming to improve reporting on ACCO service coverage and funding flows to ACCOs delivering early childhood education and care and child and family services. The project addresses two key data gaps in early childhood care and development discussed at Meeting 13. These include the lack of national reporting on where ACCOs are located and whether services provided are meeting need levels in communities, and the lack of formally scheduled ACCO funding reporting. Members agreed to take forward further planning for this project, which will be discussed at Meeting 15.

Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3 – progress and lessons learnt

Members discussed how Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3 (transforming government organisations) has been implemented by governments. Members had an open discussion about how governments have approached Priority Reform 3, what has worked, and what barriers have prevented transformation. This conversation will continue at Meeting 15.

ECCDPP Evaluation

Members held a workshop to discuss implementing the evaluation of the ECCDPP's work from 2022 to 2025. The evaluation provides an important opportunity to continue to improve the ECCDPP's ways of working and strengthen its impact for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Members identified initial recommendations to progress first in response. The Partnership will continue its discussions around the sequencing and implementation of the recommendations in future meetings. The ECCDPP annual reports will include further information on how the evaluation recommendations are being implemented.

National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People

Members received an update from the National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People, Ms Sue-Anne Hunter, as part of the ECCDPP's work to collaborate with other bodies working to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The National Commissioner provided an update on their work, noting the intention to work closely with partners to strengthen joint work. Members discussed the important role of the National Commission in upholding the rights of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and discussed opportunities for the ECCDPP to work with the Commission.

Next meeting

The Partnership will meet again in September 2026.

Attendees/Apologies

Name	Representing
Coalition of Peaks representatives	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donnella Mills (apology)	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Neville Atkinson (Day 1) Anjee-Lee Bamblett (Day 2, proxy for Neville Atkinson)	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)
Sarah Patrick (Day 1, proxy for Damian Griffis)	First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
Shane Catterall (apology)	Aboriginal Family Support Services (AFSS) on behalf of South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (SAACCON)
Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives	
Darcy Cavanagh	Independent representative
Paul Gray	Independent representative
Garth Morgan	Independent representative
Joanne Della Bona	Independent representative
Elizabeth Cox (apology)	Independent Representative
Government representatives	
Kylie Crane	Australian Government, Department of Education
Mark Barraket	New South Wales Government
Mathew Lundgren	Victorian Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Margaret Collard (proxy for Melanie Samuels)	Western Australia Government
Kim Little (Day 2) Jackie Bray (Day 1, proxy for Kim Little)	South Australia Government
Peter Whitcombe (morning of Day 1) Clare Wiseman (afternoon of Day 1, and all of Day 2, proxy for Peter Whitcombe)	Tasmania Government
Kate Columbine (proxy for Nicole Moore)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Rachelle McMillan (Day 1) Michelle McColm (Day 2, proxy for Rachelle McMillan)	Northern Territory Government
Partners	
Muriel Bamblett	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
John Leha	AbSec – NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
Helena Wright (proxy for Phillip Brooks)	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
Corri McKenzie	Australian Government, Department of Social Services



Priya Powell (proxy for Josh Smith)	Australian Government, National Indigenous Australians Agency
Stuart Malcher	New South Wales Government
Simone Corin	Victorian Government
Letitia Creevy	Queensland Government
Tom Antoniazzi (proxy for Raechelle Lee)	Western Australia Government
Jackie Bray	South Australian Government
Jodee Wilson (apology)	Tasmanian Government
Telesha Newman	Australian Capital Territory Government
Meg Hewett (proxy for Aderyn Chatterton)	Northern Territory Government