



Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting 15 Outcomes – 8-9 September 2026

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP, Partnership) held its fifteenth meeting in Meanjin/Brisbane on the lands of the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples. The meeting was co-chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC), who joined online, and Kylie Crane PSM, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood, Australian Government Department of Education (DE).

Attendees included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander independent and peak body representatives and representatives from all Australian governments (refer page 4). Members acknowledged the contributions of Garth Morgan (Independent representative) and Ron Weatherall (Queensland Government) as departing members.

Aunty Kathryn Fisher offered a Welcome to Country, sharing her connection to Country as an Aboriginal Elder who was born and grew up on Cherbourg Aboriginal Reserve, and reflecting on colonisation and child removal in Queensland.

Queensland case study

Representatives from the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and the Queensland Government presented on delegated authority, which enables the delegation of statutory child protection decision-making powers to the CEO of an Aboriginal entity. Delegated authority has yielded reunification outcomes and led to sustained reunifications where children do not return to care. Members reflected that this could suggest opportunities to strengthen family support and early intervention efforts to prevent unnecessary removals. Members also noted that self-determination, genuine partnership, and implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) are critical to the success of delegated authority.

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. A full list of priorities is on [the SNAICC website](#).

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

Members discussed a synthesis of evidence on workforce challenges in the child protection and child and family services sector prepared by the Australian Government Department of Social Services (DSS). Developed following DSS' decision to pause the previously agreed workforce scoping study to avoid duplication of previous work, the synthesis reviewed existing literature on workforce challenges. The study had been identified as an agreed joint priority of the Partnership and Safe and Supported, including under Action 4A of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan. The synthesis outlined broad alignment in workforce challenges and reform directions across the child protection, non-government organisation and ACCO sectors.



The First Nations Caucus raised concerns about the limited extent to which ACCO workforce perspectives were reflected in the evidence base, the recommendation not to proceed with the study and the shortage of shared decision-making in reaching this conclusion.

The synthesis will be discussed at a Safe and Supported Senior Oversight Committee workshop on workforce challenges on 18 September 2026, with feedback from the Partnership informing discussions. DSS will share workshop outcomes with the Partnership to support consideration of options to progress a project on workforce priorities, as agreed at Joint Council in 2025.

Priority 4D: Work with [Our Ways Strong Together](#) and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group of Safe and Supported to progress priorities and actions of [Our Ways – Strong Ways – Our Voices](#) that align with the remit of the Partnership.

Members noted and discussed a presentation from Our Ways Strong Together, the newly established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak body for addressing family, domestic and sexual violence. The presentation highlighted family and domestic violence as an early childhood issue, affecting children's development, health and long-term outcomes, with the early childhood and education system playing a critical role in prevention and early intervention. It also reflected on the importance of strong working relationships with government in supporting shared priorities and reform efforts. First Nations members reflected on their involvement in the establishment of the peak body, and the potential to create rapid change when leaning into the National Agreement and the Priority Reforms.

Other ECCDPP work

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

Members noted an update on preparations for a Partnership and Safe and Supported report-back to Joint Council on Closing the Gap in November 2026 on progress toward Target 12, including shared priority actions to:

- increase funding to ACCO child and family services through implementation planning for the National Child and Family Investment Strategy, including consideration of the *Doing Things Differently* report
- invest in early support and prevention services
- progress on delegated authority
- strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.

The First Nations Caucus emphasised that reporting should prioritise measuring progress using data. Members also agreed to include matters of intersectionality (for example, where out-of-home care intersects with issues such as workforce and housing) in their briefings to Indigenous Affairs Ministers, prior to the meeting of Joint Council, to support consideration of the broad factors that influence outcomes for children and families.

First Nations Education Policy

The Australian Government Department of Education (DE) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Corporation (NATSIEC) facilitated a workshop on the co-drafted [First Nations Education Policy](#) (FNEP, Policy), with SNAICC sharing their experience in the Policy's development to date as one of five First Nations Partners. Discussions focussed on implementation, including the ECCDPP's role, and key considerations for the early childhood education and care (ECEC) sector. Members discussed the Partnership's value in bringing a whole-of-child approach to policy discussions and supporting the sharing of evidence and good practice.

SNAICC and the First Nations Caucus acknowledged the significance of including ECEC for the first time in a national education policy but noted concerns about the current draft. They emphasised the need to include ECEC as a distinct education system, recognise the central role of ACCO-led integrated early years services, explicitly include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people living with disability, and build on existing shared decision-making mechanisms to support implementation.



Feedback from the workshop will inform ongoing refinement of the Policy and further implementation planning, ahead of Education Ministers considering the revised Policy in the first half of 2027.

REFOCUS case study

Members noted and discussed a presentation from REFOCUS, a community organisation providing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across Southeast Queensland. The presentation highlighted the organisation's success in eliminating the over-representation of children in out-of-home care in their region in 2025. REFOCUS's approach to reunification and out-of-home care centres around authenticity, trust, and holistic support. The presentation also reflected on challenges the organisation has faced and identified key strengths, including establishing a strong delegated authority infrastructure to support decision-making about children.

Review approach to tracking ECCDPP priorities

Members provided feedback on a proposed new approach to tracking progress on the ECCDPP Priorities, developed in response to the independent evaluation of the Partnership and First Nations Caucus calls for more consistent and transparent reporting. It also aims to better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on progress. Members agreed to trial the approach within a six-month timeframe, subject to incorporation of feedback, including consideration of a public reporting version.

Development of a potential Early Education and Care Commission (EEC Commission)

The EEC Commission Working Group Co-chairs updated members on the development of a potential EEC Commission. This included the functions agreed by Education Ministers as in- and out-of-scope for consideration, and the thinking underway to embed shared decision-making and Priority Reforms in designing a Commission.

SNAICC and the First Nations Caucus expressed their support for an EEC Commission to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and provide accountability for and coordination of system reform. They advised that an EEC Commission should embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and shared decision-making, and work alongside existing National Agreement partnership structures. Members reflected that the limited opportunity for broader First Nations peak representation and input does not reflect the principles of shared decision-making.

Co-Chairs acknowledged these concerns and committed to further engagement with SNAICC and First Nations Caucus members out-of-session to inform advice to Education Ministers. Members were also invited to provide written feedback for inclusion in this advice.

ECCDPP evaluation response/next steps

Members discussed a sequenced implementation approach for the recommendations from the independent evaluation of the Partnership and agreed for the Co-secretariat to start implementation. Members noted that implementation should be iterative, with the relevance of recommendations reviewed throughout delivery.

Next meeting

The Partnership will meet again in December 2026.

Attendees

Name	Representing
Coalition of Peaks representatives	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donnella Mills	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Neville Atkinson	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI)
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC)
Tennille Lamb	First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
Shona Reid	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	Independent Representative
Government representatives	
Kylie Crane	Australian Government, Department of Education
Dr Nicole Moore	Australian Capital Territory Government
Mark Barraket (Day 2) Trisha Ladogna (Day 1 proxy for Mark Barraket)	New South Wales Government
Rachelle McMillan	Northern Territory Government
Tania Porter (Day 2) Rachael Beswick (Day 1 proxy for Tania Porter)	Queensland Government
Bec Curtain (proxy for Kim Little)	South Australia Government
Clare Wiseman (proxy for Peter Whitcombe)	Tasmania Government
Mathew Lundgren	Victorian Government
Melanie Samuels	Western Australia 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 (Day 1) James Steen (Day 2 proxy for Corri McKenzie)	Australian Government, Department of Social Services
Ali Jenkins (proxy for Josh Smith)	Australian Government, National Indigenous Australians Agency
Telesha Newman (apology)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Stuart Malcher	New South Wales Government
Audrey Billias Meg Hewett (intermittent proxy for Audrey Billias)	Northern Territory Government
Letitia Creevy (proxy for QLD Partner, TBC)	Queensland Government
Deahna Haltis (proxy for Jackie Bray)	South Australian Government
Dr Jenine Godwin-Thompson (proxy for Simone Corin)	Victorian Government
Raechelle Lee	Western Australia Government