

15 and 16 March 2023

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting Two Outcomes

The Partnership came together for its second meeting on Wurundjeri Country in Naarm (Melbourne) on 15 and 16 March 2023. The meeting opened with a Welcome to Country from Stacie Piper, a proud Wurundjeri Djadjawurrung and Ngurai Illum-Wurrung woman. In her Welcome, Stacie shared her personal and family experiences of connecting with culture, and highlighted the importance of embedding language, dance, song and ceremony in the early years of a child's life.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children, and Kylie Crane, 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 second Partnership meeting focussed on the strategic role and operations of the Partnership including confirming its first year priorities and work plan for 2023. The Partnership affirmed its role as set out in the Agreement to Implement, including:

- to identify opportunities to work more effectively across governments, the Coalition of Peaks and community organisations to reduce gaps and duplication;
- to conduct and commission research and studies, analyse data and information, and prepare reports; and
- to develop advice and recommendations to Joint Council.

In considering the Partnership's strategic role, parties noted the breadth of national and joint Commonwealth, state and territory reform opportunities across early childhood care and development systems over the next three years. Parties agreed to bring forward key reform opportunities that the Partnership should support or strengthen through its three-year strategic plan, as part of further considerations of where it can best direct its reform focus and efforts within the current policy landscape.

The Partnership considered the early opportunities brought forward by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members in Meeting One and agreed these as high priorities for the Partnership to progress in its first year.

As a first priority, the Partnership agreed to commission a research project in 2023 on funding model options for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) that deliver early childhood education and care (ECEC) and other integrated early years services for children and families. The project aligns with Priority Reform Two and clause 45 of the National Agreement, which sets out objectives to build the

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

community-controlled sector with dedicated, reliable and consistent funding models that are responsive to community needs. Members discussed the scope and considerations for the project. Considerations included modelling for future ACCO sector growth, the intersections with workforce availability and capability, and funding needs for rural and remote contexts.

The project will be commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Education as shared secretariat on behalf of the Partnership. The Partnership will receive regular updates on the progress of the project, with the final report to be completed in 2023. The findings are expected to inform current reform and review processes, including the Productivity Commission inquiry into the ECEC system, as well as informing policy recommendations to Joint Council.

Other key actions agreed across the early opportunities were to:

- advance the Partnership's agreed reform priorities, including through engagement with the Productivity Commission inquiry into the ECEC system, and in support of reform opportunities identified by *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported);
- promote the uptake of activities to increase the involvement of ACCOs in the child and family sector; and
- commission a range of research projects to support ACCOs, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led models of family support, and enhance system coordination and integration across the sector and government agencies.

The Partnership agreed that these early opportunities, along with the activities agreed at Meeting One, form the basis for its workplan and actions for 2023, which will provide the framework for the Partnership's activities for reporting to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap. Working groups will be established to scope and progress these early opportunities as required. The Partnership's workplan will be publicly released prior to the third meeting.

Parties also discussed the Partnership's interactions with other early childhood governance structures and the importance of mechanisms to ensure respective bodies can consider and collaborate on shared reform priorities. In particular, parties noted the intersections between the work of Safe and Supported and the Partnership. It was also recognised that the work of the Partnership should be joined up with other Policy Partnerships implemented under the National Agreement to drive coordinated activities and strengthen areas of shared reform.

Members agreed operating protocols for Partnership meetings to further supplement the Agreement to Implement which was agreed and signed at Meeting One. The protocols embed shared decision-making principles as reflected in the National Agreement and through existing Closing the Gap governance protocols. In recognition of the holistic scope of the Partnership, parties agreed the inclusion of additional representatives as partners to

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

the forum as required, to enable the Partnership to have a joined-up approach across early childhood systems, including education and care, health, and child safety.

To support the Partnership's discussions and decisions, the meeting hosted two guest speakers who shared their expertise in early childhood care and development systems. The Partnership heard from Natalie Lewis, Commissioner, Queensland Family and Child Commission, who provided an overview of the existing framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioners. Natalie spoke about her role and responsibilities as Commissioner in promoting the rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, and in providing advice on how legislation, policies, processes, programs, and practices can be improved. She outlined the current challenges of her duties and the role that legislation plays in enabling Commissioners to operate effectively.

The Partnership also heard from Sarah Gafforini, Director, Office of the CEO at Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), an Aboriginal community-controlled organisation servicing children, young people, families, and community members in Victoria. Sarah provided an overview of VACCA's Nugel Program, which works with children and young people within the child protection system. The program provides VACCA with full decision-making authority under legislation for Aboriginal children in out-of-home care. Nugel provides culturally informed legal and case management services to support children in out-of-home care and advocates for the safe reunification of families. Sarah highlighted how the program has provided an important evidence base on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander care.

Meeting Two also included a performance from the Koorie Youth Will Shake Spears, a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance group, who performed a series of traditional dances and shared a brief history of their cultural connections and heritage.

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

Attendees

Name	Representing
Coalition of Peaks representatives	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donella Mills	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) (<i>Day 1 only</i>)
Tennille Lamb	First Peoples Disability Network
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Neville Atkinson	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (<i>Day 1 only</i>)
<i>Apology from Sharron Williams</i>	Aboriginal Family Support Services
Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives	
Darcy Cavanagh	Independent representative
Paul Gray	Independent representative
Garth Morgan	Independent representative
<i>Apology from Joanne Della Bona</i>	Independent representative
<i>Apology from Keara Baker-Storey</i>	Independent representative
Government representatives	
Kylie Crane	Commonwealth Government
Gillian White	New South Wales Government
Mathew Lundgren	Victoria Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Chad Stewart (representing Caron Irwin)	Western Australia Government
Jackie Bray	South Australia Government
Vidhya Chelliah (representing Jodee Wilson)	Tasmania Government
Sybilla Meeth (representing Nicole Moore)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Gabrielle Brown	Northern Territory Government
Partners	
Muriel Bamblett	SNAICC (<i>Day 1 only</i>)
Letitia Hope	Commonwealth Government (<i>Day 1 only</i>)
Brendan Thomas	New South Wales Government
Mary Roberts (representing Simone Corin)	Victoria Government
Ron Weatherall (representing Kate Connors)	Queensland Government
<i>Apology from Andrew Rayner</i>	Western Australia Government
Tina Quitadamo	South Australian Government
Silvia Lopic (representing Anne Maree Sabellico)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Agnes McGrath	Northern Territory Government