

28 and 29 June 2023

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

Meeting Three Outcomes

The Early Childhood Care and Development Partnership (the Partnership) came together for its third meeting on Arrernte Country in Mpartnwe (Alice Springs) on 28 and 29 June 2023.

The meeting opened on Untyeyetwelye (ANZAC Hill) with a Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremony from Aunty Barbara Satour and Kristy Bloomfield, and a performance by traditional Arrernte dancers, Isabella Bloomfield, Jada Bloomfield, Mikaylah Deemal and Amalia Bloomfield. Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children (SNAICC) shared stories of sacred sites surrounding Mpartnwe, including Ayepe-arenye, Ntyarlke and Utnerrengatye (MacDonnell Ranges).

The meeting was co-chaired by Catherine Liddle 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.

YEAR ONE PRIORITIES

At this meeting, the members discussed progress on the Partnership's six priorities as part of its Year 1 workplan.

Part of the Partnership's role is to identify specific reforms to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and progress outcomes under Closing the Gap. The Partnership's priorities respond to the needs and asks from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and communities. Priorities agreed by the Partnership do not represent formal government commitments until they have progressed through Closing the Gap governance and/or are reflected in the policy commitments of individual governments. At Meeting 3 the Partnership received updates and took the following actions to advance progress towards the agreed priorities of the Partnership.

Priority 1: Commission research to develop funding model options for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOS) that deliver Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including integrated early years services

- In June 2023, the Commonwealth Department of Education, on behalf of the Partnership, engaged SNAICC to undertake this research project.
- The project will include collecting and analysing a range of qualitative and quantitative data relevant to ACCO ECEC service provision.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

- Deloitte Access Economics has been sub-contracted to undertake financial and economic modelling.
- A final report will be delivered to the Partnership in December 2023.

Priority 2: Increasing the base entitlement to 30 hours per week of subsidised ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0–5

- As a first action, the Partnership agreed to take this priority forward by contributing to the evidence base for optimal hours of ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- The Partnership agreed that SNAICC will commission a systematic review on behalf of the Partnership. The review will collate and analyse evidence relating to the number of hours and levels of access to ECEC across Australia to support the best education and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Priority 3: Commission research and evidence development on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led models of family support to prevent entry into out-of-home care

- The Partnership received updates from Co-Chairs on the establishment of a working group to progress this priority, which will meet for the first time between Partnership Meetings 3 and 4.

Priority 4: Progress a cross sector project to identify the collaborative efforts required to break down siloes and address social determinants of tertiary systems intervention for children and families.

- The Partnership received updates from Co-Chairs on the establishment of a working group to progress this priority, which will meet for the first time between Partnership Meetings 3 and 4.
- The Partnership agreed that a focus for this working group should include pursuing opportunities to collaborate with similar working groups being progressed in other forums such as *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported).

Priority 5: Establishment of a fully empowered and legislated National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner

- As a first action, the Partnership has agreed to collaborate with the Safe and Supported governance bodies to progress consideration of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Commissioner.
- This priority had been progressed out-of-session via a meeting between the Partnership Co-Chairs, the Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) and representatives of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

- DSS will host a workshop with members of the Partnership, the Safe and Supported Leadership Group and other key government and non-government stakeholders across all jurisdictions.
- The workshop will bring together existing evidence and expertise on this issue and focus on identifying options for taking this priority forward.

Priority 6: Oversee and require regular reports on progress to implement the outcomes and recommendations of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* review

- DSS provided an update on the implementation of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* report, noting that DSS, the Commonwealth Department of Education and SNAICC are designing common principles in response to the report.
- The Partnership discussed the importance of community-controlled commissioning, including ways to ensure government can target its procurement and grant activities to community to better invest in ACCOs, prioritise early intervention and prevention initiatives, and ensure research projects reflect community aspirations.

JURISDICTIONAL IMPLEMENTATION PLANS

Government members from the Commonwealth, Western Australia, Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, and Northern Territory presented their plans to implement the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement and tracked progress against the National Agreement's socio-economic outcomes. The purpose of the presentations was to provide a candid overview of the status of jurisdictional implementation of the National Agreement, share cross-jurisdictional learnings and identify opportunities to strengthen implementation moving forward.

Across jurisdictions, programs that are working well included place-based, holistic initiatives that were tailored to community needs, focused on early intervention and built the capability of ACCOs delivering the services. Jurisdictions also reflected on their experience of building trust and relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations in their state or territory.

The discussion on jurisdictional implementation plans will be continued out-of-session with presentations from Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania, and South Australia.

PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION CLOSING THE GAP REVIEW

The Partnership heard from Commissioner Natalie Seigel-Brown who provided an update on the Productivity Commission's three-year Closing the Gap Review. Members shared their reflections on the strengths and challenges of the Partnership as well as the broader implementation of the National Agreement. There was productive and open discussion around ensuring greater accountability under the National Agreement and the need to move beyond deficit language and framing of Closing the Gap Targets to a focus on empowerment under the Priority Reforms.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

The Partnership discussed the diverse reform agendas and operating contexts of jurisdictions and noted its impact on varied progress, awareness, and commitment to the National Agreement.

The views of the Partnership will be incorporated into the Review, and the Productivity Commission will deliver its final report to Joint Council in December 2023.

WORKING BETTER TOGETHER

The Partnership discussed ways to streamline its work and ensure it is working collaboratively with other Policy Partnerships and governance structures. Members agreed to:

- look into ways to bring together national working groups on similar issues
- formalise a criteria and process for external stakeholders to request Partnership engagement. This will support the Partnership to prioritise engagements that are most impactful in delivering outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and its unique role as a collective shared decision-making body. The Partnership Engagement Criteria will be published online on the Commonwealth Department of Education website
- continue to develop its processes for identifying strategic reform opportunities, and
- leverage opportunities for influence and impact when members sit on more than one policy or governance forum.

COMMUNICATING EXTERNALLY

The Partnership discussed the importance of ensuring policy decisions and issues are communicated effectively with external stakeholders. To support this, members agreed to develop a communications strategy for the Partnership to ensure its work is transparent and its messaging is clear and culturally appropriate. As part of this work, the Partnership will continue to consider changing its name to ensure it reflects the focus of the Partnership to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

NEXT MEETING

The Partnership will meet again in October 2023 to further progress its Year 1 priorities, discuss draft recommendations to Joint Council and begin development of its three-year strategic plan.

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

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)
Neville Atkinson	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
<i>Apology from Tennille Lamb</i>	First Peoples Disability Network
<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
Joanne Della Bona	Independent representative
Keara Baker-Storey	Independent representative
Government representatives	
Kylie Crane	Commonwealth Government
Liam Findlay (representing Gillian White)	New South Wales Government
Mary Roberts (representing Mathew Lundgren)	Victoria Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Chad Stewart (representing Caron Irwin on Day 1) Caron Irwin (Day 2 only)	Western Australia Government
Michael Brougham (representing Natalie Atkinson)	South Australia Government
Vidhya Chelliah (representing Jodee Wilson)	Tasmania Government
Nicole Moore	Australian Capital Territory Government
Gabrielle Brown	Northern Territory Government
Partners	
Muriel Bamblett	SNAICC
Tim Crosier (representing Letitia Hope) Letitia Hope (Day 2 only)	Commonwealth Government
Jayde Ward (representing Brendan Thomas – Day 2 only)	New South Wales Government
Pippa Proctor (representing Simone Corin)	Victoria Government
Kate Connors	Queensland Government
Lisa Criddle	Western Australia Government
Shirley Smith	South Australian Government
Chris Simpson	Australian Capital Territory Government
Agnes McGrath	Northern Territory Government