

## **Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership**

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### **Meeting Five Outcomes**

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (the Partnership) came together for its fifth meeting in lutruwita / Tasmania. The two-day meeting took place over 31 January and 1 February 2024, and was hosted by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre at piyura kitina (Risdon Cove).

The meeting opened with a Welcome to Country by Tasmanian Aboriginal man Dewayne Everettsmith. Dewayne is descended from the Aboriginal community of Cape Barren Island and the Gunai/Kurnai people of Victoria. Dewayne welcomed members in palawa kani, the language of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people of lutruwita / Tasmania. He shared stories about Aboriginal people's deep and continuing connection to the lands, sky and waters of lutruwita / Tasmania, and their resilience throughout colonisation. He reminded members that Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing position children within a network of kin and Elders who care for them and develop their cultural identity.

The meeting was chaired by Catherine Liddle, CEO, SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) and Kylie Crane, Deputy Secretary, Early Childhood and Youth Group, Commonwealth Department of Education. The meeting was attended by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and representatives from all Australian Governments. A full list of attendees is located below on page 5.

Day 1 of the meeting opened with a joint presentation by the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and Tasmanian Government representatives. The presentation introduced members to the early childhood care and development priorities in lutruwita / Tasmania. The Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre and Tasmanian Government are working in partnership to progress these priorities, in line with the Tasmanian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan 2021-2023.

### **PROGRESS TOWARDS JOINT COUNCIL**

A core function of the Partnership is to make recommendations to the Joint Council on Closing the Gap about improving early childhood care and development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, in line with the [Closing the Gap Socio-Economic Outcomes](#) 2, 3, 4, 12 & 13. The Partnership is directly accountable to Joint Council, and Joint Council is responsible for agreeing the Partnership's policy proposals to improve early childhood education and care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Members discussed the draft recommendations for the mid-2024 meeting of Joint Council, which correspond to Partnership Year 1 Priorities 1, 2, 5 & 6. Members agreed with the intent of the draft recommendations, but wanted to strengthen the wording to be more action orientated, with a clear pathway for members and governments to take forward relevant work following Joint Council's consideration.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members emphasised the urgency of progressing these recommendations to the mid-2024 Joint Council meeting, to avoid delays to actions that will improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Members also discussed areas of development for a second round of recommendations to Joint Council in late 2024.

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The Partnership also worked to finalise drafts of its first annual report and its three-year strategic plan, which will be provided to Joint Council in mid-2024. The annual report will highlight key achievements from the Partnership's first year of operation. The strategic plan presents the Theory of Change and yearly objectives of the Partnership.

### **PARTNERSHIP YEAR 1 PRIORITIES**

At this meeting, members noted the latest developments of the Partnership's six Year 1 priorities and progressed the actions detailed below.<sup>1</sup>

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

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

Members agreed to finalise the report for the research project on ACCO ECEC and integrated early years services funding model options (Priority 1) and the final findings of the systematic evidence review into optimal hours of ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (Priority 2). The Priority 1 Research Report proposes the principles and technical components of a new funding model that would meet the needs and aspirations of ACCOs that deliver culturally responsive ECEC and integrated early years services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Priority 2 Systematic Evidence Review into the Optimal Hours of ECEC for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children identifies the policy barriers which impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's access to culturally responsive, high-quality ECEC. Members agreed to provide advance copies of the two pieces of research to the Productivity Commission to inform its Inquiry into ECEC.

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.

Members reviewed and agreed in-principle to the proposed Terms of Reference to guide the commissioning of an Evidence Guidance Framework. The purpose of the framework is to develop a shared understanding of what evidence means in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services. This priority acknowledges that governments often value Western indicators of success above Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. This results in knowledge gaps and limitations in government understanding of what works in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family sector.

Members agreed that the Framework should be developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members also recommended that cultural intellectual property safeguards are built into the tender approach, contract and project management so that knowledge shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities remains in community hands.

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<sup>1</sup> The Partnership's priorities respond to the needs and asks from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and communities, and 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.

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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.

Members discussed the purpose and approach for Priority 4, and proposed taking a place-based approach to address the practical barriers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families face when accessing the services they need.

Members noted that there is a significant body of evidence about these barriers, and this should accelerate the development of Priority 4. Members recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are over-consulted on the issues they face due to siloed government services. The project will focus on using this existing evidence to understand what changes need to be made to service systems to increase access to services that are well joined up and meet the needs of families.

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

The Commonwealth Department of Social Services (DSS) summarised the outcomes and points that were agreed in the second design workshop for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Commissioner (National Commissioner), which was held in Meanjin / Brisbane in November 2023. This workshop brought together the Partnership, *Safe and Supported: the National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children* governance groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s commissioners, guardians and advocates to identify the strongest policy and legislative options for the National Commissioner role. DSS noted that the National Commissioner is a shared priority of the Partnership and *Safe and Supported* (under Action 7 of the *Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*). DSS committed to maintaining a strong focus on delivering this Priority over the remaining two years of the Action Plan.<sup>2</sup>

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 overview of the work underway in support of Priority 6. DSS committed to accelerate progress to implement the recommendations of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* (SASF) review. The SASF review surveyed the barriers that ACCOs face accessing Commonwealth funding for child and family services and delivering these services, and proposed opportunities for the Commonwealth Government to address these barriers. DSS also indicated it will provide draft Common Principles to the Partnership for consideration, informed by the recommendations of the SASF Review. The purpose of this document is to assist relevant Commonwealth agencies to embed Priority Reform 2 (Growing the community-controlled sector) across funding design and decisions, which impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### **BUILDING A SHARED UNDERSTANDING OF CLOSING THE GAP ARCHITECTURE**

Government members from South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria and Queensland presented maps of the governance structures which have been set up to implement their commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This information-sharing builds a common understanding between

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<sup>2</sup> On 13 February 2024, the Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People will be established.

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government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the decision-making structures and processes within jurisdictions. It also shows how government members are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and ACCOs in their jurisdictions when making decisions about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **PROBITY FRAMEWORK**

A draft Probity Framework (the Framework) has been developed to support and guide the Partnership to make shared-decisions ethically and in line with probity best practice. O'Connor Marsden (OCM) provided independent advice to develop the Framework and noted that the principle of shared decision-making between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives does not create any inherent probity risks or concerns. The Framework outlines how a shared focus on the goal of the Partnership – to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families – supports ethical decision-making and includes details on practical steps the Partnership can take to create a probity rich environment.

Members indicated their support for the Framework. State and territory government members are interested to explore how the framework could support shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their jurisdictions. The final Framework will be provided to the Partnership for consideration and endorsement at a Meeting 6.

### **CONTINUED ENGAGEMENT WITH THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

The Partnership is working closely with the Productivity Commission as it completes its Inquiry into ECEC. Commissioner Martin Stokie, Commissioner Lisa Gropp and Assistant Commissioner Deborah Brennan presented the preliminary recommendations of the Inquiry's draft report. The Commissioners noted that the final report will be handed down in mid-2024, informed by further insights and feedback from the Partnership, the sector, and families.

### **CONTINUING TO WORK BETTER TOGETHER**

The Commonwealth National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) attended its first meeting as partner to the ECCDPP and provided an overview of Closing the Gap (CTG) governance processes and CTG activities underway. Members reiterated the importance of working together, to enable greater collaboration and information sharing. Members acknowledged the significance of the findings of the Productivity Commission's draft Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the need for governments to transform ways of working and move away from business-as-usual operations. NIAA reaffirmed that Joint Council sees the Policy Partnerships as a key mechanism for driving progress against the CTG socio-economic targets and Priority Reforms.

### **NEXT MEETING**

The Partnership will meet again in April 2024 to continue progressing its Year 1 priorities and discuss its Year 2 workplan.

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## Attendees

Name	Representing
<b>Coalition of Peaks representatives</b>	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Donella Mills	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Neville Atkinson (Day 1 only)	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
Lisa Coulson	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Damian Griffis & Talia Avrahamzon (representing Tenille Lamb)	First Peoples Disability Network
<i>Apology from Dan Mitchell</i> (representing Sharron Williams)	Aboriginal Family Support Services
<b>Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives</b>	
Darcy Cavanagh	Independent representative
Paul Gray	Independent representative
Garth Morgan	Independent representative
Joanne Della Bona	Independent representative
<i>Apology from Keara Baker-Storey</i>	Independent representative
<b>Government representatives</b>	
Kylie Crane	Commonwealth Government
Mark Barraket	New South Wales Government
Mathew Lundgren	Victoria Government
Tania Porter	Queensland Government
Caron Irwin	Western Australia Government
Tina Quitadamo (representing Kathryn Jordan)	South Australia Government
Jodee Wilson	Tasmania Government
Nicole Moore (Day 2 only)	Australian Capital Territory Government
Gabrielle Brown	Northern Territory Government
<b>Partners</b>	
Muriel Bamblett	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Letitia Hope (Day 1) and Tarja Saastamoinen (Day 2)	Commonwealth Government
Julie-Ann Guivarra	Commonwealth Government
Claire Beattie	New South Wales Government
Simone Corin	Victoria Government
Helen Missen (representing Kate Connors)	Queensland Government
Lisa Criddle	Western Australia Government
Shirley Smith	South Australian Government
Vidhya Chelliah	Tasmania Government
Chris Simpson	Australian Capital Territory Government
Agnes McGrath	Northern Territory Government