

## Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership

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### Meeting Six Outcomes

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (the Partnership) held its sixth meeting in Meanjin / Brisbane over 30 April and 1 May 2024.

The meeting opened with a Welcome to Country by Aaron Ruska, a proud descendant of the Yuggera people. Aaron reflected on the Yuggera peoples' enduring connection to the Maiwar (Brisbane River), which has sustained Yuggera cultural practices for generations.

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 independent and peak body representatives and representatives from all Australian governments. A full list of attendees is located on page 4.

### Presentation on ECCD policy landscape in Queensland

Representatives from Queensland provided information on the local early childhood care and development (ECCD) operating context. Members noted that the scale of ECCD reform in Queensland is enabled by the strategic leadership of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP), the Queensland First Children and Families Board and the Queensland Families and Children Commission (QFCC). The Queensland representatives jointly recognised that investment in the recruitment and retainment of a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is a priority for the sector as more ACCOs take on case management responsibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (Delegated Authority).

Commissioner Natalie Lewis of QFCC attended the meeting to present on a program of work titled the Principle Focus: A child-rights approach to systemic accountability for the safety and wellbeing of Queensland's First Nations children, which examines how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle is being implemented across the state's child protection system. As part of the program, the QFCC has developed the Principle Focus dashboard to publicly monitor the Queensland Government's progress towards Closing the Gap Target 12, to reduce over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care (OOHC). The dashboard shows there are early signs of improvement regarding rates of entry into and exits from the OOHC system that coincide with increased participation by or evidence of effective partnership with of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in OOHC in communities where Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), including where this is facilitated through delegated authority. The dashboard is publicly available [here](#).

### Progress on ECCDPP Year One Priorities

Members noted the following updates against the Partnership's Year 1 priorities:

- **Priority 1 and Priority 2:** the Partnership has provided the final report on funding model options for ACCO early childhood education and care (ECEC) and integrated early years services (Priority 1) and the final findings of the systematic evidence review into optimal hours of ECEC for Aboriginal and

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Torres Strait Islander children (Priority 2) to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into ECEC for consideration in its final report. The reports will be made available on the Commonwealth Department of Education and SNAICC website.

- **Priority 3:** the Terms of Reference have been finalised for a project to develop an ‘evidence guidance framework’ to build a shared understanding of what evidence means in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led child and family support services. The project is moving into the commissioning stage.
- **Priority 4:** members acknowledged the complexities of progressing 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 agreed to consider how this work can be carried over into the Partnership’s Year 2 priorities.
- **Priority 5:** On 13 February 2024, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a National Commissioner for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People (National Commissioner). Members celebrated this historic achievement and acknowledged the significant contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders had made in advocating for the National Commissioner over many years, particularly the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (Leadership Group). The Partnership played an important role in working through the policy barriers surrounding the National Commissioner in collaboration with Safe and Supported governance and this was an outstanding achievement of Year 1. The Department of Social Services (DSS) also presented the proposed sequence for appointing an interim commissioner, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members reiterated the expectation that DSS partner with the Leadership Group in the establishment and appointment process.
- **Priority 6:** DSS provided an update on work to implement the outcomes and recommendations of the *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families* report. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members noted that the Productivity Commission’s Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement) provides a strong authorising environment for this priority to move more quickly.

### ECCDPP Year 2 Priorities

The annual priorities reflect a consensus view between members on the policy areas the Partnership will address in its workplan to advance progress on Closing the Gap targets **2, 3, 4, 12** and **13** and the cross-cutting area of disability.

The Year 2 priorities were raised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members of the Partnership who caucused in advance of Meeting 6. The proposed priorities build on existing government commitments to the National Agreement, the Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan (Sector Strengthening Plan), the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy, the *Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 (First Action Plan)* and the Partnership’s three-year strategic plan.

Members agreed in-principle to develop specific priorities around the following issues:

- Increasing the proportion of funding to ACCOs delivering child and family services preventing entry into the child protection system.

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- Funding approaches to reflect the real cost of ACCOs delivering child and family services.
- Support and resource communities and the ACCO sector to establish and operate peak bodies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in every jurisdiction.
- Progressing implementation advice on funding model options for ACCO integrated early years services
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access stable housing.

Given time constraints in the meeting, final endorsement and discussion on the full set of Year 2 priorities were held over for out of session consideration. Once finalised, the Year 2 priorities will be published on the Commonwealth Department of Education and SNAICC websites.

### **Clarifying ECCDPP remit and governance**

The co-chairs provided an overview of the policy remit of the Partnership and its governance processes to ensure members and partners operate with the same understanding of the functions of the Partnership and are fully prepared to participate in shared decision-making at quarterly meetings.

This refresher provided a strong framing for discussion of Year 2 priorities because it clarified how government members are expected to progress the priorities in their own jurisdiction between meetings and in genuine partnership with peak bodies and ACCOs. The Agreement to Implement outlines government members are responsible for briefing the relevant portfolio Ministers, as they would be responsible for considering and progressing implementation of any recommendations agreed by Joint Council, and to lead development of implementation advice so that recommendations are appropriately tailored to jurisdictions, once approved. Co-chairs also encouraged government members to break down internal siloes by sharing the work of Partnership with central agencies and other departments responsible for upholding the social determinants of health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

### **Building a shared understanding of jurisdictional Closing the Gap Architecture**

Government members from New South Wales, the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory presented maps of the governance architecture they have built to implement the National Agreement. The governance architecture in the NSW and NT jurisdictions is currently being finalised, to reduce duplication, break down government siloes, and to ensure the voices of Peak bodies and community groups are embedded within policy structures in line with Priority Reform 1 of the National Agreement (Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making). This information-sharing builds a collective understanding between all members of the Closing the Gap decision-making structures and processes within jurisdictions.

### **NIAA's work to track progress against the Priority Reforms**

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), the Australia and New Zealand School of Government (ANZSOG) and the Australian National University (ANU) presented the key findings of ANZSOG's and ANU's project to develop a comprehensive measurement framework that intends to measure and track progress against the Priority Reform indicators. Measurement of the Priority Reforms is a requirement under the National Agreement and this project is being undertaken to deliver this framework.

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This work also addresses a point in the [Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement](#) that there are significant issues in the design and implementation of the Priority Reform indicators which “undermine its ability to support the transformative change required of governments” (pg. 73).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and government parties are providing their feedback on the Priority Reform measurement framework which will be considered by Partnership Working Group. NIAA noted there will be future opportunities for the Partnership to engage with this work, once the final report is completed.

### **Next meeting**

The Partnership will meet again in July 2024 to agree on next steps for progressing its Year 2 priorities.

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## Attendees

Name	Representing
<b>Coalition of Peaks representatives</b>	
Catherine Liddle	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
Apology from <b>Donnella Mills</b>	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
<b>Neville Atkinson</b>	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
<b>Lisa Coulson</b>	Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre
Apology from <b>Damian Griffis</b> (representing <b>Tenille Lamb</b> )	First Peoples Disability Network
<b>Dan Mitchell</b> (representing <b>Sharron Williams</b> )	Aboriginal Family Support Services
<b>Independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives</b>	
Apology from <b>Darcy Cavanagh</b>	Independent representative
<b>Paul Gray</b>	Independent representative
<b>Garth Morgan</b>	Independent representative
<b>Joanne Della Bona</b>	Independent representative
Apology from <b>Keara Baker-Storey</b>	Independent representative
<b>Government representatives</b>	
<b>Kylie Crane</b>	Commonwealth Government
<b>Jessamin Clissold</b> (representing <b>Mark Barraket</b> )	New South Wales Government
<b>Mathew Lundgren</b>	Victoria Government
<b>Tania Porter</b>	Queensland Government
<b>Claire Hurst</b> (representing <b>Caron Irwin</b> )	Western Australia Government
<b>Kim Little</b>	South Australia Government
<b>Vidhya Chelliah</b> (representing <b>Jodee Wilson</b> )	Tasmania Government
<b>Nicole Moore</b>	Australian Capital Territory Government
<b>Gabrielle Brown</b>	Northern Territory Government
<b>Partners</b>	
<b>Muriel Bamblett</b>	SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC)
<b>Tarja Saastamoinen</b>	Commonwealth Government
<b>Julie-Ann Guivarra</b>	Commonwealth Government
<b>Stuart Malcher</b>	New South Wales Government
<b>Sally Graham</b> (representing <b>Nathan Chapman</b> , virtual, Day 2 only)	Victoria Government
<b>Helen Missen</b> (representing <b>Elizabeth Bianchi</b> )	Queensland Government
<b>Lisa Criddle</b> (virtual, Day 2 only)	Western Australia Government
<b>Shirley Smith</b> (virtual)	South Australian Government
<b>Vidhya Chelliah</b> (served as Member for this meeting)	Tasmania Government
<b>Chris Simpson</b>	Australian Capital Territory Government
<b>Agnes McGrath</b>	Northern Territory Government