

Working Together to Ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years



Early Childhood Australia
A voice for young children



SNAICC
National Voice for our Children



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EARLY CHILDHOOD AUSTRALIA NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2019
FROM VISION TO ACTION

Our challenge

Compared to all Australian children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are twice as likely to be developmentally vulnerable when they start school



Developmental vulnerability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (one or more domains), AEDC

The rate of vulnerability is decreasing, but is still unacceptably high – and improvements are levelling off.

| Year | % | Change |
|------|------|--------|
| 2018 | 41.3 | -0.8% |
| 2015 | 42.1 | -1.1% |
| 2012 | 43.2 | -4.2% |
| 2009 | 47.4 | |



Participation in early learning

Preschool attendance rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are considerably lower than for non-Indigenous children (*Closing the Gap Report 2019*).

68 per cent
of Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
children attend for
600 hours

78 per cent
of non-Indigenous
children
attend for 600 hours



About this project

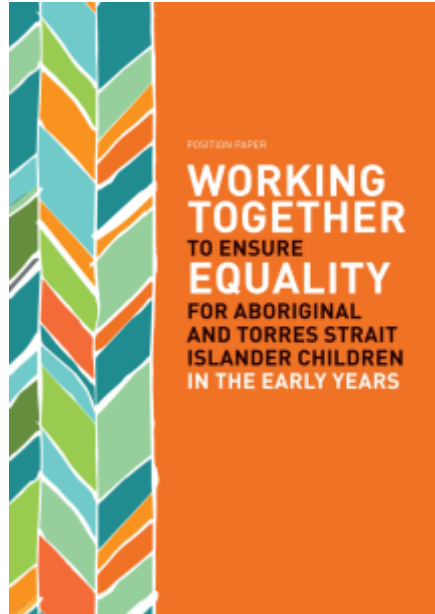
Working Together to Ensure Equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children in the Early Years was released by ECA and SNAICC in February 2019.

The policy work comprises:

- Position paper
- Discussion paper.



Position paper



- A succinct statement of our challenge and our goals
- 20 recommendations for Commonwealth, state and territory governments
- Endorsed by 45 other organisations and individuals.



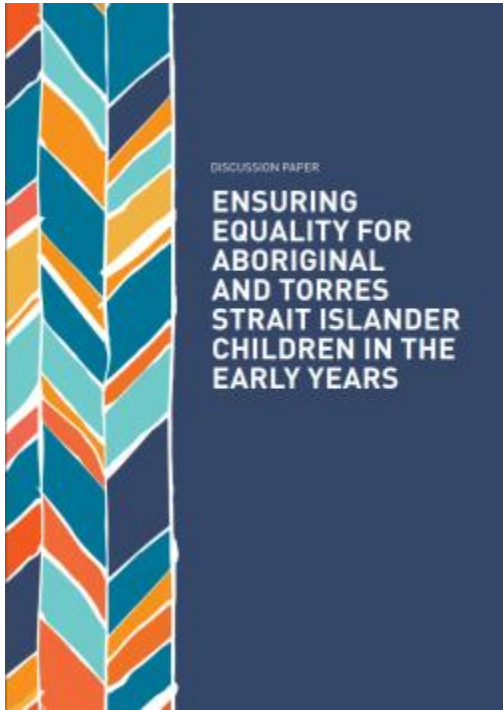
Endorsements

Aboriginal Early Childhood Support and Learning Inc
Australian Community Children's Services
Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS)
Australian Library and Information Association
Australian Literacy Educators' Association (ALEA)
Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth (ARACY)
Brotherhood of St Laurence
Central Australian Aboriginal Congress
Child Australia
Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM)
Coolabaroo Neighbourhood Centre
Early Learning and Care Council of Australia
Early Learning Association Australia
Families Australia
Family Matters – Strong communities. Strong culture. Stronger children
Future Tracks
Goodstart Early Learning
Group of Eight (Go8)
Jumbunna Institute for Indigenous Education and Research, University of Technology Sydney
KU Children's Services
Lady Gowrie Childhood Education Queensland
Murdoch Children's Research Institute
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

Ngangk Yira Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and Social Equity, Murdoch University
Nikinpa Aboriginal Child & Family Centre
Oxfam Australia
Playgroup Australia
Professor Fiona Stanley
Professor Larissa Behrendt
Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP)
Reconciliation Australia
Save the Children
Speech Pathology Australia
Telethon Kids Institute
The Benevolent Society
The Front Project
The Parenthood
UNICEF
UnitingCare Australia
Uniting Communities
Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
Victorian Aboriginal Children & Young People's Alliance
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI)
World Vision Australia
Yorganop



Discussion paper



- An extensive review of data and academic literature on the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in ECEC
- Identifies strategies and principles for action.



Contents and conclusions



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Two key strategies ...

The position paper highlights two key strategies to ensure that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island child is thriving:

- Integrated, family-focused support programs that impact the home learning environment.
- High-quality early education.



... and six principles for action

Essential principles for helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to reach their potential:

- Use a nurturing care framework
- Ensure that services are accessible
- Provide services that are of a high quality
- Ensure that services are culturally safe
- Support integrated early education and family-focused programs, from pregnancy onwards
- Ensure consistent and complete data.



What is our goal?

Integrated services that address more than early education, by supporting families in meaningful ways across a range of areas (e.g. health, parenting support) and building engagement with families over the longer term.



Barriers to participation

- **Individual** barriers: the number of children in a family, employment, income, discrimination and housing
- **Service-level** barriers: service quality and cultural competency
- **Social and neighbourhood** barriers: how transient a community is, living conditions and the level of social and geographical isolation
- **Cultural** barriers: lack of trust in services or difficulty culturally engaging.



SNAICC survey on the new Child Care Package

- SNAICC surveyed members of its early years service network from April – May 2019
- 53 services participated including 24 former BBFs
- Participating services were supporting a total of 1,716 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in every state and territory (except the ACT).



Survey results (part 1)

- 18 of 31 services that provided access data (58%) said that children are accessing fewer hours of child care since the Package commenced
- 14 of these services (45%) said that the Activity Test was a reason for reduced access
- 34% of families in these services were entitled to 24 or 36 subsidised hours per fortnight (below the pre-Package minimum).



Survey results (part 2)

- 68% of services indicated that families have dropped out altogether for reasons including a reduction in subsidised hours, difficulties meeting administrative requirements, and increased out-of-pocket expenses
- Services reported that their biggest challenges under the Package are: 1. Managing family debts, and 2. Increased administrative workload



Community voices

- *“We used to have around 95% attendance with BBF funding. With the new package... we are at 60%. If this continues we will have to look at reducing staff” (Qld)*
- *“10-15 children have gone. They find the new system difficult to navigate” (NSW)*
- *“A lot of our Indigenous families have dropped out as it’s too much of a complicated process for them” (NT)*
- *“The babies’ room is the worst. We used to have 8 babies and now because of the Activity Test we only have 4” (Qld)*
- *“We are losing our identity trying to survive and compete in a mainstream world” (NSW).*



What action should we take?

‘The most effective means to improve outcomes is through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service provision.

‘Where this is not possible, genuine local participation and decision making through culturally safe and competent services is required.’ (Position paper, p.8)



What is the role of the Commonwealth?

- To develop a new national strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children
- To provide needs-based funding
- To ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are able to attend at least three days per week of high-quality early learning in the two years before school.



Our recommendations



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Strategy

1. **COAG to establish new early childhood development targets and strategy through the Closing the Gap refresh.**
2. Use an **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Group** to monitor and report on progress.
3. **Coordinate** policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across departments.
4. Develop a needs-based funding model for ECEC for for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
5. Incorporate for **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies** through a formal partnership with COAG.



Access to services and programs

6. Access to preschool programs as a **legislative entitlement**.
7. **Universal access to early education for all three- and four-year-olds, with at least three days per week for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.**
8. **Investment in quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled integrated early years services.**
9. A funded program to support **culturally-safe practice** in every ECEC service that has high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
10. Report on the impact of the new **Child Care Package** on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
11. **Amend the Child Care Subsidy activity test to provide up to 30 hours subsidised early learning each week to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, regardless of their parents' work or activity.**



Quality service provision

12. Include former **Budget Based Funded services** in the National Quality Framework.
13. **Expand and strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC workforce, and strengthen the cultural competence of all educators.**
14. Provide professional development in **trauma-informed practice** for educators working with at-risk children.
15. Expand the **Inclusion Support Program** to help services in disadvantaged communities meet the National Quality Standard.



Cultural competency

16. Develop a cultural competence framework and resources to support the NQF guiding principle on valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
17. Support **two-way partnerships** between mainstream ECEC services and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, services and communities.



Data and evaluation

18. Ensure that this new strategy is based on **strong data**, monitoring and evaluation.
19. Require, and provide for, **evaluation** of all funded ECEC programs.
20. **Adapt the AEDC to better reflect all children's strengths and better incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge.**

