



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

**SNAICC Submission to the Department of Education,
Employment and Workplace Training (DEEWR)**

**Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in
Regional, Remote and Indigenous Communities
Review of the Budget Based Funding Program**

21 September 2012

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care
Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy, Victoria 3068
Phone: (03) 9489 8099
Fax: (03) 9489 8044

Web: www.snaicc.org.au

Acknowledgments

SNAICC gratefully acknowledges the time of the following people and organisations in the preparation of this submission:

- Eva Cox, Jumbunna Indigenous House of Learning, University of Technology Sydney
- Louise Cave, Birrelee Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS)
- Margaret Sims, University of New England
- Graham Burrridge, Yarrabah PCYC
- Geraldine Atkinson, Rose Bamblett, Kim Powell and Vaso Elefsiniotis, Victorian Aboriginal Education Institute Association Inc (VAEAI)
- Lisa Coulson, Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (TACCA)
- Lisa Thorpe, Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre
- Judith Tempest, Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU) NSW/ACT
- Elva Johnson and Viki Mitchell, Berrimba MACS
- Barbara Romeril and Cara Gleeson, Community Child Care
- Stacey Brown, Yappera Children's Services
- Karen Minter, Yawarra Child Care Centre
- Alison Doyle, Wunala Creche, Mabunji Aboriginal Resource Association
- Hazel, Maningrida Creche
- Rhonda Gleeson, Brewarrina Mobile Children's Service, MacKillop Rural Community Services
- Joy Williams, Uniting Care Victoria and Tasmania
- Robyn Paterson, National Association of Mobile Services (NAMS)
- Frances Snedden, Children's Services Management Support Queensland
- Kylie Brannelly, Queensland Children's Activities Network
- Shirley Wilson, Allira MACS
- Jan Wright and Deb Mann, Ngroo
- Jackie Topau and Elvie Sandow, Gundoo Day Care Centre and MACS
- Reuben Ardler, Gudjahgahmiamia MACS
- Garry Matthews, Abcare Australia
- Kerry Crawford, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA)
- Roslynne Webb, Noogaleek Children Centre (MACS) and Winnanggay Preschool
- Agnes Fox, Thursday Island Child Care Centre
- Annie Stone, Nurapai Kazil Child Care Centre
- Andrea Menon, Congress Australian Aboriginal Congress Child Care

Introduction

SNAICC welcomes the opportunity to participate in the discussion on the future of the Budget Based Funded (**BBF**) program for early childhood education and care (**ECEC**) services. BBF services have provided a fundamental support to children, families and communities for decades. Being owned and run by communities has meant that their understanding of and relationships with communities has enabled effective and responsive programs that build on community and cultural strengths, and attain great outcomes for children and families. Despite significant challenges in funding, infrastructure and workforce development support, these services continue to be a bedrock for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around Australia. This review provides an opportunity to redress some of the challenges that BBF services face and better enable them to provide quality, culturally safe environments in which children will flourish.

SNAICC strongly believes that any reform of the BBF program must respond to and seek to address the persistently low educational, health and wellbeing outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Critical to this is recognising the concerns recently identified by the United Nations (**UN**) Committee on the Rights of the Child regarding “The serious and widespread discrimination faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including in terms of provision of and accessibility to basic services”.¹ There is extensive and well established evidence that investment in early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is “fundamental to attempt to reverse the historic and continuing health, social, economic and political disadvantages they face”.² Drawing from this, SNAICC considers it imperative that the Australian government consider this an opportunity to respond to the UN Committee’s recommendations to increase availability and access to early childhood education for Australia’s children by considering providing free or affordable early childhood services.³

This submission responds to and is informed by the questions contained within the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (**DEEWR**) discussion paper *Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in Regional, Remote and Indigenous Communities*. This submission does not answer these questions in a direct, linear fashion, but instead it seeks to respond to the issues raised within the discussion paper through the following structure:

- Section A: Executive Summary
- Section B: Background context
- Section C: Consideration of the principles fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services;
- Section D: Consideration and practical examples of the constraints and relevant issues with the current BBF model;
- Section E: Consideration and practical examples of the constraints and relevant issues with the Child Care Benefit (CCB) model; and
- Section F: A discussion and ideas for a revised future BBF model.

Section A. Executive Summary

- This review is a prime opportunity to review the current challenges faced by the BBF model and to begin the process of building a future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care (**'ECEC'**) services that is based on an equitable, sustainable and effective model. Imperative to this review process is that it is given sufficient time, and involves the active participation and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, ECEC services and sector experts.
- BBF services operate in urban, regional and rural areas to provide holistic education and care opportunities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. They are extremely diverse services with diverse operational and funding needs.
- The historical BBF funding model provides a strong foundation for effective service delivery but contains many challenges that limit its current effectiveness and scope for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services. Funding constraints lie at the core of these challenges.
- Identification of core governing principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC BBF services should guide consideration of an effective funding program.
- In particular, early childhood services need to reflect and respect the complexities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and community strengths and needs. While they should be resourced to retain and extend the cultural and social strengths, they also need to counter the damages of past indignities and meet pressing additional needs. Therefore any funding program must be assessed by whether they can meet the complex needs of our communities.
- While there are limitations in the current BBF model, simply shifting services to the other current alternative available, a Child Care Benefit (**'CCB'**) model, is clearly not the answer. Many services and sector experts have reinforced to SNAICC serious reasons why the model would be incompatible for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services. These range from the philosophy and objectives of the model, to substantial technical and administrative challenges with its requirements. A shift to CCB may have grave implications then, particularly in light of the current pressures and limitations of the system.
- The current Federal Government policy agenda recognises the importance of early childhood for positive outcomes for children and in reversing cycles of disadvantage. It is also investing significantly in achieving equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Any changes to the current non-mainstream ECEC model must ensure that they advance rather than undermine this agenda. In particular to move towards these outcomes, early childhood education and care services must be accessible, particularly to those most excluded, of high quality, responsive to community needs and culturally appropriate.
- A flexible method to determine eligibility for the BBF program would assist in ensuring consistency and equity. This could be based on a demonstration of need for support by ECEC services through each three year funding proposal, therefore allowing consideration of any change in service needs over time. Fair means of review would be essential to this approach.
- SNAICC urges that the current national consultations be followed by more in depth work with experienced practitioners in BBF services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood experts to really understand the complexities of service needs, and the tools or models required to value the strengths of communities and

obtain strong outcomes for children, and to interrogate how diverse community needs translate into an effective national funding program.

Section B. Background context

Strong evidence indicates that the early years from 0-8 are critical in a child's development, and that "investment in early education, particularly for disadvantaged children, is more effective than intervention at later ages."⁴ A number of international studies indicate that high quality early childhood programs that focus on children as active program participants and focus on improving parenting skills provide greater returns on investment than those focusing on family economic circumstances.⁵ Outcomes from such programs include "improved health status, cognitive skills, achievement motivation, and school readiness in the short term as well as school achievement, educational attainment, and reductions in remedial services and criminal behavior in the longer term."⁶

The current Government policy agenda reflects a shift in priority towards investment in the early years, specifically through the *Investing in the Early Years: A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*, 2009 ('**Early Years Strategy**'), and the new reform agenda for early childhood education and care outlined in the National Quality Framework ('**NQF**'). Furthermore, early childhood is one of the seven interrelated 'Building Blocks' developed to support the 2008 COAG agreed reforms to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage, and the 2008 Council of Australian Governments ('**COAG**') National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development, 2008 sets out the path forward for this.

Early childhood development within this overarching policy context is framed as encompassing:

- all aspects of children's development (cognitive, learning, physical, social, emotional and cultural);
- supporting "all children, and providing additional help for those children most in need to reduce social inequalities",⁷ and
- focusing on "respect for diversity and difference as a strength, and helping children develop a positive sense of self and culture."⁸

To meet these aims, programmatic responses therefore need to encompass and support holistic, culturally competent care and development services that focus on addressing societal inequities and increasing access for the most disadvantaged.

Section C. Principles fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services

This section introduces the key principles that underpin Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services. The seven elements are drawn from a wealth of evidence, historical and recent, that outlines what works in delivering early childhood services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These elements need to be considered within and operationalised by the future funding model.

1. Innovative governance and self-determination

A wealth of evidence from national and international literature demonstrates that service governance models that foster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and

ownership lead to improved service delivery outcomes⁹ that directly benefit children and families.¹⁰ Recent SNAICC research highlights the relevance of self-determination for improved and better integrated service delivery, citing compelling international evidence that “the best outcomes in community well-being and development for Indigenous peoples are achieved where those peoples have control over their own lives and are empowered to respond to and address the problems facing their own communities.”¹¹ Further evidence indicates that when Indigenous communities “make their own decisions about what development approaches to take, they consistently out-perform external decision makers on matters as diverse as governmental form, natural resource management, economic development, health care, and social service provision.”¹² The principle of active participation of and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is recognised within the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (**NIRA**) as fundamental in designing programs to effectively overcome disadvantage; “Through improved engagement, Indigenous people are being made central to the design and delivery of services and programs. The aim is to build responsibility and capacity at the personal and community level and lay the basis for lasting change.”¹³

This principle is confirmed by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which states that the right to education requires that educational programs are developed in collaboration with Indigenous communities so as to best address their specific needs, and that Indigenous communities have a right to establish “their own educational institutions and facilities, provided that such institutions meet minimum standards established by the competent authority in consultation with these peoples.”¹⁴ Article 14 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)*, to which Australia is a signatory, reaffirms that through their own educational institutions Indigenous people have the right to provide education “in their own languages (and) in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.”¹⁵ This is particularly important in early childhood with strong cultural identity forming the bedrock for later development.¹⁶

As the recent Australian National Audit Office review of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery capacity recognised, there is a critical need for greater investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled services as a priority not just for effective service delivery, but as a policy objective in itself, “in so far as it promotes local governance, leadership and economic participation, building social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”¹⁷ The recent NSW Ombudsman report on addressing Aboriginal disadvantage also provides key learnings in this area – highlighting a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and ownership as a major contributor to the failure of government policies to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage.¹⁸

Service example

A number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services identified in recent SNAICC consultations that community governance mechanisms are vital supports to ensure that the service is truly managed by, reflective of and responsive to the community. For example, Yappera MACS in Victoria felt that having a committee made up of parents, grandparents or other family members who are both actively involved and invested in the service *and* in the local community enables the service to better respond to community needs. Committee members often have strong historical connections with the centre – with a number of Board members involved with Yappera for up to 20 years. Board members are therefore invaluable partners in ensuring that Yappera remains connected to its history and long-term objectives, and retains a strong connection with the community.

2. Strengths based, quality service provision

A strengths based approach to ECEC service provision builds on existing family and community strengths and expertise to develop children's and families' capacity, confidence and pride. It utilises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and languages, recognizing – as stated in the House of Representatives recent report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional language development - the multitude of evidence that “early childhood Aboriginal language and cultural programs lead to increased self-esteem, improved academic performance, improved school attendance, reduced drop-out rates and better proficiency in reading skills in both the Indigenous language and English.”¹⁹

It requires active community participation, “encouraging and facilitating communities ‘doing it for themselves’ rather than ‘being done to’.”²⁰ The National Early Childhood Development Strategy describes this as “engaging and empowering parents and communities in early childhood development and services”, highlighting this as an essential component of a responsive early childhood service.²¹ A strengths based approach is particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, for whom past policies, structures and histories have eroded self-esteem and social cohesion. In overcoming this, therefore, a critical element of an empowering, strengths based approach is recognising each family and community's unique context and qualities. As Sims describes, “It is essential to remember that each family/community/culture has different strengths, not all of which are recognised as strengths in a white, middle-class world.”²²

Service example

Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services see their role as being proactively engaged in the development of their local community. The Director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Children's Centre described to SNAICC how partnerships with families strengthens partnerships with the community, explaining that, “I don't think we've ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community.” She feels that their community development approach has myriad benefits for children, helping to build a stronger community and parents who can support their development, and helping to strengthen children's identity and connection. She describes that “MACS centres aren't just services to the community, they're part of the community.”²³

Essential to a strengths based approach is recognising and valuing quality within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services – which may look different to quality in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services. The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF), a key element of the National Quality Standard, is a positive shift in the sector towards a strengths based approach that provides flexibility to provide a strong standard of quality that can then be applied to reflect the differences of local community contexts. Drawing on recent SNAICC consultations with 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF services, it is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services are effectively implementing the EYLF, and, critically, that the Framework provides flexibility for services to demonstrate their own unique, context-specific approaches to quality service provision.²⁴

3. Values and incorporates identity and culture

A wealth of literature highlights the importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of early childhood service models that “acknowledge and affirm Indigenous culture and build positive cultural identity.”²⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have identified that a critical factor in their engagement with a child care service is the ability of the service “to recognise and incorporate cultural practice into the way the child and family is dealt with.”²⁶ The NIRA affirms this, setting out that “Connection to culture is critical for

emotional, physical and spiritual well being. Culture pervades the lives of Indigenous people and is a key factor in their wellbeing – culture must be recognised in actions intended to overcome Indigenous disadvantage....Efforts to Close the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage must recognise and build on the strength of Indigenous cultures and identities.”²⁷

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services incorporate culture on an everyday, incidental basis by focusing on developing children’s identity, sense of belonging and pride within their community, family and culture.²⁸ Whilst many mainstream early childhood services do aim to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, there are important distinctions. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services, for example, naturally embrace culture as central to every aspect of service delivery: it is not something external, but inherent in what they are. This creates a sense of cultural safety for families.²⁹

Service example

Reflecting culture on a deep level involves using it to engage children in learning experiences. Birrelee MACS in Tamworth has worked collaboratively with Macquarie University to do this - designing numeracy and literacy resources that reflect the children’s culture. The Director describes how this engages children in topics they may not be interested in, “So the numeracy may not engage the child but that sense of connection and identity (within the resource) engages the child.” She emphasises “our learning experiences have to be culturally centred, and I think that’s why our kids struggle at school, because it becomes a secondary thing or an optional extra. Whereas here it’s our daily experience.”³⁰

4. Holistic and responsive to community needs

Holistic and responsive services seek to cater for a child’s comprehensive developmental needs, including language development, speech and hearing support, etc. These need to be part of an integrated approach and not considered as add-ons to a program. Holistic early childhood services also need to provide a range of services beyond child care and development programs,³¹ including health, family support and capacity building, nutrition and early intervention. These additional programs have been identified by families and services alike as critical to increasing families’ access and engagement with an early childhood service.³² The provision of such additional programs in an integrated approach is also critical to meeting broader family needs³³ and overcoming disadvantage in early childhood. This requires “a holistic approach that addresses children and families in the context of their communities and cultures, taking into account children’s physical and mental health, emotional wellbeing and development.”³⁴

Such an integrated approach is defined in the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, which states that “Services for children and their families are linked in different ways, depending on local needs and circumstances, to promote a holistic response to each child and family situation. This includes integration, whether physical or virtual, that encourages interdisciplinary approaches to meeting the needs of children and their families...”³⁵ The National Partnership further defines that “Early childhood experts advocate integrated delivery of services, including antenatal services, child and maternal health services, parenting and family support services, and early learning and child care, as the best delivery platform to ensure families actually receive the support they need.”³⁶ This approach is recognised by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child as being a positive shift towards “a coordinated, holistic, multisectoral approach to early childhood”, recognising that the traditional divide between education and care services has not always been in children’s best interests.³⁷ SNAICC research on integrated service delivery has identified that

genuine and respectful partnerships are key to the provision of holistic, integrated services.³⁸ Effective integration requires collaboration at various distinct levels, including “regional and local service development (and) management and coordination.”³⁹

A recent UN review of Australia’s child rights record recommended that the Australian government “further improve the quality and coverage of its early childhood care and education...with a view to ensuring that it is provided in a holistic manner than includes overall child development and strengthening parental capacity.”⁴⁰ Many BBF services, such as the MACS, offer a strong model of this type of service provision.

A final critical feature of holistic services is that they target their programs and approach to the specific needs and context of their local community. This involves the capacity to spontaneously adapt to short-term needs and/or changing community dynamics – such as an increase in children visiting with their families for cultural business. It also involves a capacity to reflect longer-term community priorities and requirements, for example responding to an identified need for literacy support. This is reinforced by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, which sets out that governments need to ensure that ECEC standards are “tailored to the circumstances of particular groups and individuals...(States) are encouraged to construct high-quality, developmentally appropriate and culturally relevant programmes and to achieve this by working with local communities rather by imposing a standardised approach to early childhood care and education.”⁴¹

Service examples

Recent SNAICC consultations identified that a number of services provide nutritional programs as part of their service. These provide a useful example of how an early childhood service can provide additional programs.

Congress Child Care Service in Alice Springs has identified a particular need for children who are failing to thrive. Working in collaboration with their parent body’s health clinic they provide specialised care and a nutrition program for these children. As the Director explains, this is about looking at “what sort of things we can do to improve these children’s weight while they’re in care here”.⁴²

Tamworth-based Birrelee MACS works with a dietician to conduct regular cooking activities with the children and share recipe examples with families that can be cooked on limited budgets. Through this approach they have noticed tangible positive differences in children’s eating habits.⁴³

5. Community not centre focused

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services are about meeting the needs of *all* children in the community.⁴⁴ Services focus not on just the children attending the centre but seek to reach all children who may be in need. This is achieved, for example, through outreach, mobile services, and provision of care to children visiting the community. This “community approach to child care is consistent with a ‘traditional’ Indigenous approach.”⁴⁵ This principle is supported within the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, which states that a key element of a responsive ECEC services is “active service outreach into the community”.⁴⁶

Such an approach addresses the well-documented challenge of the lower rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s participation in early childhood care.⁴⁷ The barriers to their participation are not simply the low availability of services in a given area, as one report notes “Increasing the number, scope and capacity of services did not necessarily

mean Indigenous families accessed and engaged with these services.”⁴⁸ Barriers centre around unmet cultural or support needs of families; remoteness or lack of transport; negative associations with institutions and government services; and lack of cultural competent staff.⁴⁹

A key service delivery principle within the NIRA is that services “should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.”⁵⁰ Whereas mainstream child care services are established to support families working or studying, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services prioritise access and engagement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children not accessing, or not likely to access, mainstream services. They target their services to improve access for the most disadvantaged members of a community, and through their unique features they overcome many of the identified barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience in accessing early childhood services.⁵¹ One example of this is the community management committees discussed above, which help families to feel that the service is part of and owned by their community.⁵²

These concerns are supported by earlier evidence from the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child that Indigenous children “are among those children who require positive measures in order to eliminate conditions that cause discrimination and to ensure their enjoyment of the rights of the Convention on equal level with other children.”⁵³ This lies behind States’ responsibility to ensure that Indigenous children can enjoy their right to education through allocated and targeted resources specifically aimed at increasing Indigenous’ children’s access to education.⁵⁴ Review of the BBF program provides an ideal opportunity to instigate positive measures to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families’ access to and engagement with ECEC services. This is consistent with NIRA service delivery principle of priority that: “Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.”⁵⁵

Service examples

Broome-based service Jalygurr Guwan operates a mobile outreach service to provide education, care, health and parenting services for approximately 10 families a week who would not normally access a child care service.

Outreach services are a key form of targeted support identified within the National Early Childhood Development Strategy as effective in reaching high need and/or at risk children and families.⁵⁶

Service example

During recent SNAICC research many services identified that the trust families have in them as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation means that the most vulnerable families in the community will access the service. The Director of one regional service cites the example of a vulnerable family who came to the centre for help because they “were told that this was a safe place to go”, and attributes this to the community’s trust in them as a local service with local staff.⁵⁷

6. Supports ongoing learning, information-sharing in and across sectors, and innovation

Ongoing learning within an early childhood centre means that educators and staff “become co-learners with children, families and communities, and value the continuity and richness

of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.”⁵⁸ This involves educators working within a cycle of reflective practice in which “current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated.”⁵⁹ It means learning from practice, engaging with other services and having the flexibility to innovate based on local needs, strengths and opportunities. Therefore, ongoing learning is also about staff staying closely in touch with local needs and accordingly adjusting services to meet those needs, as discussed under Principle 4 above.

7. Sustainability

Lastly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services must be built upon and supported by sustainable foundations, which encompasses several elements.

Local workforce development

Numerous studies have articulated the benefit of having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to improve families’ access and engagement with a service.⁶⁰ Sustainable, long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, requires service designs that enable capacity building for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations.⁶¹ Training and workforce development for local community members are central to this, in ensuring a skilled, qualified, long-term and culturally appropriate workforce who understand the local culture and community. Services need to be able to take on untrained local workers, who they can then support to gain their qualifications. This involves an understanding that the staff may not stay on at the service, but that the service will play an important role in enabling their career development. This then contributes to the pool of skilled workers within the community. Supporting this, the NIRA sets out that a key element of service sustainability is ensuring that attention is paid to “building the capacity of both Indigenous people and of services to meet the needs of Indigenous people, particularly: (i) developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations.”⁶²

Adequate long term funding

Planning for sustainable, long-term funding is crucial to ensure ongoing, viable service delivery, community ownership and to facilitate and foster community planning in the long-term.⁶³ SNAICC has identified that a key principle in integrated services for families and children is that “Funding bodies make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery (and that) Government is up-front and transparent about future funding arrangements.”⁶⁴ In a 2012 paper the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare identified that long-term and stable funding and the delivery of long-term programs, are key factors in improving accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to ECEC services.⁶⁵ Short-term funding is linked to ‘initiative fatigue’, where families lose motivation to continually engage in new, short-term programs.⁶⁶ Shorter timeframes also hinder the building of relationships between program providers and families, and do not allow sufficient time to work through complex issues – such as health concerns.⁶⁷ The paper also identifies that a further key element is that a service is economically accessible for families.⁶⁸ For a more detailed discussion of the implications of this see Section D, Part 1.

Adequacy of funding is also clearly a fundamental aspect of quality ECEC service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A number of key reports have noted the lack of increase in funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to date,⁶⁹ and the need for additional funding in the short-term to ‘close the gap’. In particular, appropriate

funding would address service's urgent and ongoing infrastructure and workforce development needs, and would recognize the necessity of overcoming additional needs Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities face due to factors such as colonization, intergenerational trauma and depletion of parenting skills caused by the Stolen Generations, and entrenched poverty.

Operational structures and systems that are determined by services and respond to service context

The National Early Childhood Development Strategy identifies that to better respond to and engage with children and families requires flexibility within funding and administrative arrangements.⁷⁰ SNAICC research also identifies that flexibility within government funding frameworks is a key principle in ensuring a strengths based approach to integrated service delivery, and to enable targeted and innovative community-based service design that responds to local needs and priorities.⁷¹ This requires "Flexible frameworks and service contracts to enable local service design that reflects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations."⁷² Such systems are also vital in ensuring service empowerment and self-determination.

This means sufficient flexibility to enable a service to develop the content of its own program, including the most essential services, and to define how those services are provided. Budgetary and reporting requirements must also appropriately respond to a service's context and type. In particular, the relevancy of reporting requirements will vary between a small, mobile children's service providing a fortnightly playgroup, and a large, centre-based long day care centre.

Operational structures and systems must also be sufficiently flexible to cater for the very diverse types of service models currently required to meet the needs of communities around Australia. This includes, playgroups, mobiles, long day care centres, crèches, and Out-of-School-House care. There is also a need to be able to reshape models as the community needs change over time. Research indicates that "Perceiving child care as a continuum of options (along which communities can move in either direction) enables communities to build on current strengths and work together towards planning for their future."⁷³ This allows services to establish and foster relationships with children and families, and to introduce families to early childhood services. For example, in many communities informal playgroups have created accessible entrance points to early childhood care for new families. Such 'soft' entry points are a key way to enable access to services for hard-to-reach families, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.⁷⁴ Once established within a community, and where community demand dictates, the playgroups can then transition to more formal child care services. This gradual process of transition enables services to ensure that they are built on strong, foundational relationships with community, and that they respond and are tailored to community needs.

As one report states, "Service development, community needs and appropriate infrastructure must be bound together and synchronised. This requires ongoing assessment and consultation with communities. This ensures adequate facilities and a sense of ownership over the usage of buildings, for example, and can be critical in the development and sustainability of the service."⁷⁵

Introduction to Sections D and E

The issues and concerns outline in Section D and E have been relayed to SNAICC through discussions with: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF and CCB early childhood services from across Australia; Indigenous Support Units ('IPSUs'); SNAICC National Executive members working in the early childhood sector; representatives from peak bodies and other relevant early childhood organisations; and sector experts. The structure of each element is as follows:

- A short explanation of the issue or concern;
- Where relevant, an evidence-based substantiation of the concerns raised by reference to relevant sector reports and literature;
- Brief individual service examples that highlight the practical effects of a particular issue; and
- Potential possible alternatives that have been proposed from the sector or from the literature.

Section D. Consideration and practical examples of the constraints and relevant issues with the current BBF model

1. Longer funding cycles

Issue

The current method of one-year funding cycles presents various issues. In particular it:

- Limits services' ability to conduct long-term, strategic planning,⁷⁶ and to save money for larger or one-off projects such as vehicle replacement, building maintenance or general depreciation;
- Creates a significant administrative workload for both services and contract administrators;⁷⁷
- Can create a perception of service instability amongst staff, which can effect their commitment to the service;
- Can create challenges when employing new staff – such as trainees, or supporting staff to further their qualifications – when it is not known whether the service will be able to employ that person the following year; and
- Creates pressure to spend funds within the year to ensure budget levels are not decreased, as unspent funds cannot be carried over to the following year.

Evidence

A key COAG *Closing the Gap* service delivery principle is sustainability, with programs and services to be "directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets".⁷⁸ Key to this is ensuring that attention is given to "ensuring adequate and appropriate resources, particularly...considering workforce supply and future planning." Based on these concerns, the Australian National Audit Office has stated that there would be merit in DEEWR exploring the benefits of multi-year funding arrangements, which it states the Department has in theory agreed with.⁷⁹ Multiple year contracts would afford service providers greater flexibility in how they use their funding, which ANAO states would "allow them to cater for local changes in demand and circumstance..."⁸⁰

Possible alternative

A number of services and sector reports have indicated that a solution to this challenge is extended - for example three to four-year - funding cycles that would enable services to conduct longer-term, sustainable future planning to better meet the needs of their communities and families.⁸¹ This would contribute to addressing the sustainability issues identified in Section C, Part 7.

See Example 3.1 for an example of the restrictions of the one-year funding model.

2. Need for additional services

Issues

Many services are struggling under current budget restrictions to deliver more than just child care, and have been forced to make budget reductions – for example cutting transport, staff, nutrition or other programs to continue operating.

Evidence

The lack of budgetary provision for additional services was identified as a particular issue for Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) as far back as 2000, when SNAICC identified that the funding model was still essentially a model for the provision of long day care, and that whilst this was, and continues to be, an important component of MACS it is not the only thing they do: "MACS...are expected by their communities to do many things but are funded to do one thing."⁸² This issue is not limited just to MACS, but extends to all BBF services, with one report identifying that,

A number of service providers talked about the types of services they want to offer, services they perceive as vitally important to the future of their communities, but they are unable to do so because the desired program is not part of their child care funding, they do not have the expertise to apply for alternative sources of funding, or they have had success with alternative funding but this is not available on an ongoing basis. A number of service deliverers talked in despair of quality programs they had been running but are now closed, or are closing, because non-renewable funding had run out and they could not find alternative sources.⁸³

There are several common features amongst services who do deliver additional programs. One of these is having a proactive Director, often non-contact, who is able to utilise professional networks to create and sustain partnerships with other organisations who have the capacity to co-deliver these programs. However, not all services have the capacity or are able to source such a Director. A further feature is having an umbrella or parent body who provides additional programs to the community. However, where services do not have these, "Limited capacity for administration of government funds can prevent some organisations that are well-placed in an Indigenous community from providing necessary services."⁸⁴ This is defined as a provider level barrier in enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to access ECEC services.

This issue is not about providing specialist services, but about providing services that are essential to ensuring access, engagement in a service, and a holistic response to children's learning and developmental needs. This aligns with and is verified by the Government's agenda to promote and support quality, integrated services that seek to 'close the gap' in early childhood outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services have identified to SNAICC that the essential services they need to provide to cater for their communities' needs include;

- Culturally centered and affordable early childhood care and development programs;
- Transport to and from the centre;
- Food and/or nutrition programs;
- Health programs; and
- Parenting and/or family support programs.

A key paper informing the 2007 National Indigenous Child Care Services Plan identified that the future funding model “should respond to and provide for all the core elements of any service (transport, health, nutrition, early learning, culture and family support) and appropriate service infrastructure and administration.”⁸⁵

To look at two of these elements in more depth, the provision of transport has been recognised as a major contributing factor to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in ECEC services – both by families and service providers.⁸⁶ This issue affects both rural and urban areas, with a government respondent in one study identifying that “The bus is the umbilical cord to the service, if it breaks down it’s really low”. As one parent states from the same study describes “Without the bus service I would have to travel 45 minutes every morning from the community to take my five year old to the nearest preschool. The cost of this trip in petrol alone is too much.”⁸⁷ Nutrition programs are another essential element: ensuring that children have the required energy to concentrate on learning and development; helping to teach children and families about healthy eating; and supporting children who may not be receiving their full nutritional requirements at home. These are just two out of a number of programs that evidence indicates supports improved access to and outcomes from early childhood development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

As discussed earlier in this paper, the provision of these additional services is vital to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to early childhood services, as identified by the OECD, “It is widely acknowledged that particular communities and families will experience difficulties in gaining access to ECEC unless specialist programs are provided. These include rural and remote communities, (and) Indigenous communities”.⁸⁸ These additional programs are also fundamental in addressing the well-documented disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander face in a number of wellbeing outcomes.

Example 2.1

Congress MACs, operating in Alice Springs, cater for a population with high community needs. However due to budgetary constraints they currently have a waiting list of nine months. The Director explains that most families do not understand that there is a waiting list – and critically - that for families who need immediate support a waiting list is “far too long to keep a child safe.” The Service Manager describes a situation they see frequently – young mothers who are trying to come out of difficult circumstances around housing, family violence and alcohol abuse issues seeking support from the centre so that they can break the cycle of disadvantage and commence study. She states that they regularly have to turn these families away – noting how “At least 3 days every week, we have a call or someone come to the Centre on this basis that we mostly need to turn away....If we cant take them, then the whole purpose of the Centre is lost.”

The MACS also naturally responds to other kinds of additional needs in the relationships that staff (majority Aboriginal) build with children. 82 per cent of children currently attending Congress are in an out-of-home care arrangement. The Director informs that for these children, “the Centre is actually the most consistent thing in their life”. She describes a cycle

of children transitioning from home to foster care, to respite care when foster families go on holidays, back to their family for reunification and then often to a different foster family. The staff at Congress know and understand these children – as the Director describes, “we know their history, we appreciate their feelings, we understand their behavioural and emotional issues that can emerge, and we know what works to bring out their strengths and to support them.”

To ensure children are receiving the support they need as they move into school, Congress sees a need for additional programs such as parenting sessions, and a transition to school program where primary schools would work in collaboration with the centre. This would enable schools to have a deeper understanding of each child’s unique emotional needs and the environment they have come from. However, the funding is not available to facilitate this most essential component. Thereby when schools do not have an understanding of the history of each child it often then just reinforce and exacerbate emotional and behavioural issues of these children.

Example 2.2

Staff at Brewarrina Mobile Children’s Service in remote New South Wales strongly feel that the provision of additional support services – such as parenting, nutritional and health programs - are critical to both encouraging and sustaining families’ participation, and to providing effective and high quality early childhood care that addresses the complexity of children’s needs. Despite this, their current budget does not enable them to provide the additional programs they feel necessary to most effectively work with their families.

Example 2.3

Yappera MACS in Thornbury, Victoria, have found that significant limitations with the current BBF funding model have forced them to close their out of school hours care (OSHC) service, and limit the additional essential services they need to run to meet the needs of their community. They estimate that a further annual allocation of \$370,000 is required to provide essential programs such as OSHC, maternal and child health, a playgroup and parenting program, and to raise staff ratios to meet obligatory national standards.

Example 2.4

Allira MACS, a Dubbo-based service, has found that the insufficiency of their budget has forced them to increase their fees and take on more working families in order to subsidize the cost of the low-income families. As a result this limits space for the low-income families to use the services.

3. Infrastructure

Issues

Due to low budgets, and the issues discussed above in regards to annual funding cycles, infrastructure maintenance and renovation remains a large challenge that is not addressed within the current funding model. Services have explained that there is little or no provision within the BBF model to upgrade their facilities or set aside money for depreciation, despite many services indicating that they operate out of older buildings in need of repairs and maintenance.⁸⁹

Evidence

A 2009 Australian Government report indicated that 20 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services classified their premises as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor’, with a further 23 percent reporting that they were only ‘adequate’.⁹⁰ Whilst the BBF Quality Measure does

include an allowance for upgrading infrastructure, this does not constitute a long-term solution that will empower and resource services to sustainably manage their infrastructure requirements.

Example 3.1

Yappera MACS operates out of an 18-year-old building in much need of renovation and repairs. However due to the limitations of the funding, they have not been able to make the necessary infrastructure improvements to their building and site. They have identified that a longer funding agreement would enable greater forward planning in order to make long-term improvements to their service.

4. Cost of staff wages

Issue

The rising cost of staff wages means that the majority of service budgets are going towards wages and associated costs – leaving little for external programs, purchasing resources and other costs. Furthermore, new state and national regulations to lower educator-to-child ratios have meant that many services have had to employ new staff without receiving additional funding – which often involves cutting other programs or services. Increased budgetary pressure and inflexible budget models do not support services to retain senior, skilled staff, or to hire new highly qualified staff.

Evidence

Research has identified that once staff become qualified, services are often unable to afford the increased wage level, and as a consequence cannot retain these higher qualified staff.⁹¹ This is exacerbated by budget levels being based on set percentages of staff at various qualification levels, so that when staff gain further qualifications the increase in their wages is not catered for within current budgets.

Example 4.1

Allira MACS has a high majority of highly qualified staff who therefore sit within a higher salary bracket, resulting in the service spending a majority of their budget on staff wages. To compensate for this the service has had to cut back on staff, and are now debating whether to cut their nutrition program to save costs.

Example 4.2

Yappera MACS identifies a significant disconnect between the requirements of new national regulations and the lack of an associated increase in budget. The recent regulations have required that the service increase staff and staff wages at a cost of up to \$100,000, but their current budget has no allowance for this. As a result of these cost increases, they have had to shut down their OSHC program in order to meet these costs within their current budget. They have also had to cut back on their provision of transport for children, which compromises accessibility and service delivery for many families.

5. Reporting requirements

Issue and evidence

Several issues with the BBF reporting requirements have been identified by services and within the literature. These include:

a) Onerous reporting requirements

The reporting requirements under the BBF program are reported to be arduous and time-consuming. Generally service providers submit between five to eight reports annually, including a certified or audited acquittal. A recent 2010 Australian National Audit Office report found that 72 per cent of service reports were submitted late, and of these over 56 per cent were a month late. This meant that 67 per cent of DEEWR payments were approved after the date specified in the funding agreement.⁹² The report identified that the reporting requirements were particularly challenging for services with more limited administrative capacity.

b) Repetitive reports

The various reports required often ask the same or similar questions, requiring services to repeat information a number of times.

c) Cumulative burden of donor reports

Services with the capacity to do so often access funding from different sources in order to provide additional programs and services. Some ECEC services have reported feeling overwhelmed by the multiple reporting requirements they face.⁹³ The National Early Childhood Education Strategy states that given the complexity and multiple funding sources on offer across the ECEC sector, to better respond to and engage with children and families requires “Accountability mechanisms capable of capturing this complexity without overburdening service providers.”⁹⁴

d) Inadequacy of report contents

Whilst DEEWR’s reports have recently been streamlined, a further concern expressed by services is that the current reporting format does not allow them to showcase the quality of the work they are doing, being more focused on quantitative rather than qualitative data.

Example 5.1

Brewarrina Mobile Children’s Service is required to produce bi-annual service reports. The Director estimates that the most recent of these required approximately 28 hours of work, and totaled 110 pages. Staff feel that this is a highly unsustainable requirement.

Section E: Consideration and practical examples of the constraints and relevant issues with the Child Care Benefit (CCB) model

Recognising that Government views CCB as a potential alternative model to the BBF program in order to open up funding amounts, the next section considers whether CCB is a viable option or not, and explores some of the potential limitations and challenges within the model. As with Section D, the information presented reflects discussions SNAICC has participated in, in particular drawing on reflections from services who have transitioned from BBF to CCB, or who have always operated under CCB but who also service Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. The same structure has been used to present this information.

6. Incompatibility with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC service objectives

Issue

Services are concerned about two major impacts resulting from a shift to CCB that would directly contradict the mandate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services, and

shift service focus to creating profits, instead of supporting all children and families within their community:

- Firstly, to be viable under CCB services would need to raise fees – which would limit access for the most disadvantaged families in the community. This would result in a flow-on effect whereby families' access to the additional programs so integral to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services would also be cut off.
- Secondly, operating under CCB would create pressure for services to maintain high enrolments. This which would force a shift in focus from providing for the most disadvantaged children in the community to prioritising access for families who can afford to pay fees. One report, drawn from extensive consultations with services, identified significant concerns about a utilization funding basis, "because this disadvantaged Indigenous services dependent upon a population with quite different needs to the general community", and who were often absent for cultural and family reasons.⁹⁵

Evidence

As stated by DEEWR, BBF services operate in areas "where mainstream or conventional child care services are not available or viable, and where there is a need for culturally competent services, in particular Indigenous focused child care."⁹⁶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities resoundingly affirm that their early childhood services are not purely about supporting families' work choices and/or providing children with early childhood development opportunities; they are about holistically supporting the wellbeing of all children and families in the community. They also act as key hubs to link families in with a variety of early childhood support services such as parenting and child health programs. However, a user-pays model inherently risks children's participation in a service being terminated due to unpaid fees and/or families not adhering to administrative requirements. This is directly counter to the BBF philosophy of fostering participation of all children in a community, regardless of family circumstances or capacity to pay.

Example 6.1

Yarrabah PCYC School Age Care operates in Yarrabah, a Queensland community with nearly 100 per cent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The centre opened in 1998, running a drop-in centre until 2003 when, upon receiving BBF funding, it commenced vacation and after-school care.

Yarrabah transitioned to CCB funding in 2005. DEEWR felt that CCB would be viable at Yarrabah due to the high numbers of eligible children (980 children in the community, and with - at that stage - 130-150 children attending daily). However, many children have become ineligible under CCB, because of:

- Inconsistencies between a child and carer's Centrelink details and Yarrabah's records (often caused by misspelt names or incorrect birthdates);
- Lapsed immunisation or missing immunisation records; and
- Children living with multiple families – meaning that the adult claiming child support for the child changes frequently without information being passed on to Yarrabah.

This has left Yarrabah unable to claim CCB for these children and therefore substantially unable to meet its budget. It has also resulted in a drop since 2005 from 130-150 children attending daily, to 40-50.

Based on the community context, Yarrabah PCYC also does not charge fees. Although 45 kilometers from Cairns, Yarrabah is an isolated community with high unemployment and low personal wealth. Most families do not have their own transport, and so obtaining and

sustaining work outside the community is challenging. The centre's management know that to charge even minimal fees would deter almost all families from sending their children to the centre and so covers all gap fees within the centre's budget.

Children's intermittent attendance at Yarrabah, has also meant that the CCB allowable absences requirement is unworkable. Of the 40-50 children attending daily, about 10 % attend for three or more days a week. Most children therefore exceed their allowable absences within the year. Once their CCB has been terminated, the centre then has to cover the full fees. All of these factors lead to a heavy and unsustainable financial burden on the service.

Yarrabah has sought to counter these challenges. Since 2006 Yarrabah has run two annual open days to sign up new children and correct enrolment and Centrelink details for enrolled children. However, the higher numbers of children registered under CCB quickly fades. Required to operate with minimal staff, Yarrabah does not have the staff capacity to constantly monitor and maintain the administrative requirements to ensure that children do not drop out of the Centrelink CCB system.

Since the transition to CCB, attendance has consistently fallen. Because Yarrabah covers the CCB gap fees - and in many cases full fees – they have had to make difficult decisions in order to continue operating. Required staff cuts have meant that staff to child ratios cannot be met, and child numbers must therefore be reduced to comply with state and national regulations. The centre therefore currently caters for an average of 40-50 children per day, or roughly one third of the children participating under BBF funding.

Yarrabah has also had to reduce its opening hours and cut back its program to save money. The program now runs from 3pm – 6 pm (rather than until 6.30pm), with the evening program (6pm - 9pm) reduced to a basic program. This has led to reduced attendance. The centre has also had to sell their larger bus, relying now on one small bus to pick up and drop children.

Yarrabah experiences a \$300,000 deficit between funding received and funding required to operate. The centre is currently heavily subsidised by the Queensland PCYC Head Office. Whilst Yarrabah does apply for and receives some grant funding, most grants are not available for operational funding, which is the most pressing need.

Yarrabah PCYC operates to provide disadvantaged children with a safe, secure and supervised environment in which they can participate in a range of enriching and stimulating activities. Yarrabah is the only service within the community that provides after-school and vacation care. The service cannot however continue operating on the current model. This is very distressing because if it were to cease operating, the children would have nowhere else to go.

Example 6.2

At Yappera MACS fees are set at \$60 per week, but this is not dependant on which day(s) the children attend. As ECEC is not compulsory parents often keep their children home or are away for extended periods for family and/or cultural reasons. This flexibility has enabled the service to establish a strong system of attendance and retention based on good communication, but one that allows for differences in circumstance and lifestyle of each individual family. Under CCB funding is distributed strictly according to children's attendance. The service is concerned that this will negatively impact funding stability, as well as create an imbalance where children whose parents are working or studying and who attend often will be preferred and targeted. This goes against the principle of providing services to the most disadvantaged children as well as challenges service delivery in a culturally competent manner.

7. Fees

Issue

Several concerns have been identified regarding a user-pays model:

- Whilst many BBF services can and do collect fees (albeit in most cases low fees) from their families, not all families – particularly those with unstable incomes - are able to consistently pay. With a fee-driven model such as CCB, when families cannot pay fees, children will be forced to drop out of the service. As well as the detrimental effects this will have on families and children, it will also lead to gaps in service budgets and cause services to operate at a loss until fees can be recovered or enrolment rates raised;
- Reliance on fees as a service's major income source would be inadequate to cover the range of costs a service incurs, without escalating fees to prohibitive levels; and
- Collection of fees can be highly challenging, and can have a negative impact on the relationship between staff and families.⁹⁷

The current CCB model has major flaws, and is demonstrated to be inappropriate and actually very damaging for disadvantaged families, and higher cost targets such as ages birth to three; rural communities; and children/families with additional needs.

Evidence

a) Viability of the current system

The majority of ECEC services in Australia are delivered by private, for-profit organisations under a market service model. This type of model "impacts on accessibility and affordability because...whether they are profit-making or not-for-profit operations, services must operate as viable commercial enterprises and make decisions about location, costs and fees accordingly."⁹⁸

There is increasing concern that the current system is resulting in escalating, unaffordable fees, limiting many families' participation in early childhood services.⁹⁹ Child care rates have recently been increasing at a rate faster than the Consumer Price Index (CPI), with one study indicating that since its introduction over a decade ago, CCB has declined in value by more than 15 per cent.¹⁰⁰ Given the higher requirements for staff qualifications and staff-to-child ratios under the National Quality Framework, fees are projected to further increase over the next few years – potentially over 15 per cent in some jurisdictions.¹⁰¹ Whilst CCB rates are indexed to the CPI, the fact that ECEC rates are rising at a faster rate means that child care is increasingly becoming less affordable – "as out-of-pocket costs rise faster than subsidies".¹⁰² The Productivity Commission predicts that this situation is only set to continue, citing that "The value of the CCB will not change as it is based on the standard hourly rate, rather than

the actual costs paid by parents, and the CCR will only refund half of the additional costs.”¹⁰³ Given this, research by Price Waterhouse Coopers states that “Linking funding increases to increases in the cost of delivery is...an appropriate basis for determining public funding rates”.¹⁰⁴ The higher costs are forecast to have a particularly detrimental effect on lower-income families, who will be forced to spend a larger proportion of their income on child care fees compared to higher income families.¹⁰⁵ That funding should reflect actual costs is therefore also an argument of equity as well as one of effectiveness. As PWC explain,

For ECEC services, costs are likely to differ for children of different ages, for delivery in regional locations, and delivery to children with high needs. In the Australian child care context, observers have noted significant undersupply of high cost places – that is, places in regional or concentrated urban areas, places for younger children and places for children with special needs. Providing funding that is linked to the costs of delivering these places will help to reduce these disparities.¹⁰⁶

The recent review of Australia by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child cites the unaffordability of child care in Australia as a major challenge, and recommended that the Government “further improve the quality and coverage of its early childhood care and education, including by: Increasing the availability of early childhood care and education for all children, by considering providing free or affordable early childhood care...”¹⁰⁷

b) The need for subsidised places for disadvantaged families

Given the wealth of evidence that indicates that participation in an early childhood service is particularly beneficial for disadvantaged children, it is key that low-income, non-working and/or disadvantaged families receive particular assistance with the cost of child care fees to support child development.¹⁰⁸ Supporting families’ participation in such services is key to breaking intergenerational cycles of disadvantage by providing children with a fundamentally strong base from which to transition on to school.

With a clear link between participation in an early childhood centre, and cost to families, “a policy of offering free services or capping the cost to low-income families is most likely to facilitate access.”¹⁰⁹ In contrast, “fee subsidies and tax relief are more likely to impose cost burdens on families in the form of gap fees, administrative barriers, delays between paying the fee and receiving the benefit, and exclusion of non-taxpaying families. Participation of children from low-income families is therefore less likely.”¹¹⁰ The Review of Australia’s Future Tax System suggests a model that ensures that low-income families “receive up to 90% of fees – and 100% for at risk or vulnerable children”.¹¹¹

The *Universal Access to early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children strategy* identifies fees as a particular issue impacting on the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in ECEC services.¹¹² The Strategy highlights a wealth of evidence that demonstrates “that particular approaches have been shown to be effective in maximising enrolments, participation and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children (including) no fees, or minimal fees”.¹¹³ Considering this, it follows that to promote the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families suffering from complex and multiple disadvantages, child care should be fully subsidised, and that it is not appropriate to link child care assistance with family income. Instead, “better measures of disadvantage may come from the health, community services or child protection systems.”¹¹⁴

Example 7.1

The operation of services with a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients in disadvantaged areas demonstrates the failure of a user-pays system for these clients. For example, KU Children's Services has stated that their centres in wealthier areas directly subsidise those in lower socioeconomic areas, explaining that "Without this surplus generated by our 'giver' centres we would not be able to fund our Affordable Fees Program and the fees at our centres in the most disadvantaged areas, where children perhaps need KU most, would be unaffordable for families."¹¹⁵

Example 7.2

Gundoo, in Cherbourg, Queensland, operates BBF funded MACS and a CCB funded long day care (LDC) service. The service has found that the fees derived from the CCB service do not cover operating costs, and therefore the LDC budget has to be supplemented from the BBF MACS budget – including covering additional services such as food.

Example 7.3

Nurapai Kazil Centre on Horn Island, operating a playgroup, after school hours care, vacation care and long day care, has experienced significant difficulties with the user-pays basis of the CCB model. These have included:

- Enabling both staff and families to understand the CCB requirements;
- Inability of a families to pay fees – either because they are on low-incomes, but also due to the lack of a 'user-pays' culture within the community – resulting in a significant barrier to families paying fees.
- Resentment from families directed at the service over perceived high fees;
- Significant administrative time to support parents to understand CCB requirements; and
- Families not applying for CCB and then not paying the full fees.

The service has found that the CCB funded long day care service needs to be partially funded from the BBF budget, in order to keep running. However this still does not address the significant issues associated with non-payment of fees.

Whilst the service has had a held a number of meetings with the community to negotiate various options for repayment plans, including direct wage deductions, none of these options have been accepted by families in the community. The current situation is therefore that a number of families have incurred high debts. When faced with the option of having to shut down, the centre has opted to suspend the child instead. This is a last resort option and not ideal for anyone, but it has been necessary to keep the service running.

Example 7.4

Thursday Island Child Care centre, operating both a long day care and after school hours program, experiences extensive difficulties in collecting fees from families. Some weeks families do not pay fees, which means that the service operates at a loss for that period. Families then have two weeks to pay the overdue fees, and after this their child's participation from the service is terminated. The families cannot re-enroll at the service until they pay the overdue fees. This means that a number of children cannot participate at the service. The service management do not want to limit participation – but in order to continue operating they are forced to do this.

Example 7.5

The newly established Children and Family Centres model also faces similar challenges. Recent SNAICC research found that,

“The absence of guaranteed and ongoing funding for new integrated centres creates pressure to pursue self-sustainability. Some leaders in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres identify that a self-sustaining funding model for integrated service delivery at the Centres is unachievable while maintaining costs at a level that will encourage and enable access to ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This creates concern that Centres will increasingly need to accommodate higher fee paying families and lose their focus on targeted service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.”¹¹⁶

An operating centre, Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre (CFC) in Thomastown, Victoria, have costed out their service to balance financial viability with affordability to ensure access for their families. In order to ensure families most in need can attend the centre, Bubup has set families’ fees at an amount that currently delivers half their annual operating costs – approximately \$500,000. Whilst they can and do seek alternative/additional funding to account for some of the remaining operational costs, they still require government-funded support to operate and to continue to offer the range of programs for which, as a Children and Family Centre, they are mandated. These include “a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs (including)...child care, early learning and parent and family support services.”¹¹⁷ If the extra \$500,000 cannot be found annually, Bubup will need to cut back on staff or programs, both of which will impact negatively on the children and families who use the service.

Bubup staff feel the current CCB arrangement puts them into a ‘deficit’ model, with funding constraints threatening their operation as a fully integrated service providing for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Staff describe the impact this has on families – who, despite paying what they can and participating in and contributing to the service – are still incurring debts and being made to feel that they are second class citizens.

Example 7.6

A number of services have reported that they have trialed a fees system and have found that families would not pay (Brewarrina Mobile Children’s Service, Wunala Creche, Yarrabah PCYC). Adopting a fees system would therefore mean that children would not be able to access the service.

8. Funding fluctuations

Issue

The CCB model brings the potential for funding fluctuations due to sporadic and/or changing enrolment numbers, and a lag in CCB registrations, both of which create budgetary uncertainty. A number of services have communicated that enrolments change frequently throughout the year due to seasonal/environmental factors, because families migrate between areas for cultural or family reasons, and because families lose their CCB entitlement (for reasons such as exceeding the allowable absences, discussed in Part 9; or not meeting CCB administrative requirements, discussed in Part

Example 8.1

Yawarra Child Care Service in Mount Druitt, NSW, frequently experiences fluctuating enrolments and income from fees, for example when families leave the service or their CCB percentage changes. There is often a lag – in some cases up to three weeks - between the change in family details and the service receiving this information. With government BBF payments being processed to the service in arrears, this means that the service often does not receive the right amount of CCB, and is underfunded.

9. Allowable absences

Issues

Several issues have arisen with the number of allowable absences mandated under CCB, including:

- The allowable absence maximum of 42 days is too few and results in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families frequently exceeding the allotted time;
- Families are often unable to provide the supplementary documentation required to increase the number of allowable absences;
- The discretionary additional days are often not given even for absences caused by health problems; and
- There is no discretion to grant additional days for absences caused by attendance at cultural and/or family events.

Evidence

Services have reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in general require more absences for a number of reasons, including:

- Cultural affairs (for example families taking time away for Sorry Business, NAIDOC week, to go back on Country, and other cultural events);
- Family reasons (for example families travelling to spend extended periods of time with each other); and
- Recurrent health reasons such as ear or respiratory problems.

A number of services have reported that families have incurred large debts by exceeding their allowable absences. Families often are unable to pay their debts, causing services to terminate a child's enrolment. Services then have to bear the burden of the unpaid fees themselves, and children are deprived of ECEC services.

Possible alternative

Given this, one significant report has recommended that Centrelink "review its arrangements to enable....services to extend the allowable absence to ninety days where children and families need to attend cultural events such as funerals."¹¹⁸

Example 9.1

Yawarra Child Care Service has identified significant problems with families frequently exceeding their 42 days of allowable absences. Once this has happened CCB payments are terminated and the family must then pay the full fees. If parents can't then pay the full fees the centre loses out on the full fee cost of each subsequent day – or is forced to terminate children's access. Staff feel that the 42 days maximum does not take into account children's chronic health conditions and cultural/family responsibilities - which account for most excessive absences. The fact that public holidays count towards allowable absences serves to aggravate the situation. This requirement does not reflect appropriate cultural practices targeted towards their specific community.

10. Higher administrative burden for families

Issue

The CCB model creates a more complex and higher administrative burden for families, which can result in some families not contacting Centrelink, or being put off registering for CCB because of the requirement to go through Centrelink. Services have reported that families often face lengthy phone calls or long waits at Centrelink offices, and this also acts as a disincentive to go through Centrelink. A further challenge is that some families forget to initially register with CCB when they begin using a service – and this either means that they are paying full fees until their CCB registration is approved – or the service pays their CCB gap fee.

Evidence

Comparative research indicates that “administrative complexity discourages eligible families from applying for fee subsidies.”¹¹⁹ A solution to counter this is suggested within the NIRA Service Delivery Access principle, which states that “programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people...attention is to be given to: minimising administrative red tape that may be a barrier to access; and providing adequate information regarding available programs and services.”¹²⁰

Possible alternative

A further recommendation to mitigate against difficulties and/or delays families may experience in signing up for CCB is for “Centrelink to review its arrangements to enable clients to access 100 per cent fee subsidy while waiting to have their claim processed.”¹²¹

Example 10.1

Gundoo MACS has found that the extensive CCB administrative burden can discourage families from applying for or continuing with CCB. Staff have found that to overcome this the service needs to provide administrative support to families to complete and update their CCB documentation – for example phoning Centrelink and/or assisting families to fill out forms.

Example 10.2

Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre are concerned that there is a significant delay in families reporting changes to income and/or personal situations to Centrelink, and these changes being processed to result in an ensuing drop in fees. The service has observed, for example, families whose income has dropped dramatically having to then wait months for this information to be processed, and their fees to be accordingly lowered. This results in the family either experiencing increased financial pressure, or incurring large debts from non-payment of fees.

11. Termination of CCB

Issue

Services report frequently inaccurate details that result in families having their CCB payments terminated. These include:

- Inconsistencies between a child and carer’s Centrelink details and the service’s records (often caused by misspelt or incorrect names and/or incorrect birthdates);
- Missing documentation such as immunization records, birth certificates and/or employment details;
- Lapsed immunization;

- Not notifying Centrelink of changed financial circumstances; and
- Children changing residences. In many communities across Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children frequently change who they live with. This creates difficulties with their CCB registration, as CCB requires that a child and carer's client reference numbers (CRNs) are linked. Services have found that when children move house and carer, and the adult claiming child care benefit for the child therefore changes, this information is frequently not passed on to the service. This results in the families' CCB being terminated, and the service or family then having to cover the full fees, or the child dropping out because the family can not pay the full fees. In some cases it has been reported that children change residence up to seven times per month.

Once they are cut off from CCB, families have 28 days to rectify any lapsed immunisation, inaccurate or missing data. However, services have explained that this often doesn't happen in time, resulting in families incurring higher fees. Furthermore, a number of services have indicated that families often don't communicate this information to services in time for services to readjust their fees once they stop receiving CCB on behalf of the families.

Example 11.1

Gundoo MACS has found that the CCB immunization requirements and lapses have meant that many families have had their CCB eligibility cut off, resulting in them incurring higher fees or withdrawing the child because they can't afford the fees.

12. Children with additional needs

Issue

Under a CCB model, if a service needs to decrease their child to educator ratio to respond to children with additional needs, they must cover this cost themselves. Whilst services can access additional funding for children with diagnosed additional, such funding is not available for children whose additional needs do not meet the criteria. This includes children demonstrating developmental delays associated with disadvantage, poverty and challenging home environments.

Evidence

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services provide care for the most disadvantaged communities in Australia, and therefore generally cater for a larger proportion of children with additional needs. The extent of poverty experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples ranges from between 40 to more than 50 per cent across Australia, whether for remote or urban areas.¹²² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience significant disadvantage across all economic and social development indicators, including gross overrepresentation of children in the child protection system, with a substantiation rate of 7.4 times that of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹²³ The causes of for these indicators of disadvantage are recognised as complex, and include the legacy of past policies of forced removal, intergenerational effects of separations from family and culture, poor socio-economic status and perceptions arising from cultural differences in child-rearing practices.¹²⁴ The Western Australian Aboriginal Health Survey¹²⁵ (2005) found a link between adverse life outcomes and the forced separation of Aboriginal people from their natural families and intergenerational effects caused by policies of forced separation and removal. In terms of the intergenerational effects of forced separations and removals, the survey found that children cared for by a primary carer who was forcibly separated from their natural family were over twice as likely to be at high risk of clinically

significant emotional or behavioural difficulties when compared with children whose Aboriginal primary carers were not forcibly separated. More generally, the survey found that children whose primary carers were forcibly separated experience many negative life outcomes when compared with children whose carers were not forcibly separated. It is therefore not surprising that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children present at early childhood services with a variety of additional support needs.

Example 12.1

The Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA), a BBF service operating in Launceston, provides flexible, individualised services for a high proportion of children with additional needs such as trauma, and/or family substance abuse and violence. TACCA is able to provide this additional support by keeping educator to child ratios low – sometimes dropping them down to as low as one educator to two children when needed. They also charge a daily fee of approximately \$20 to ensure affordable access for families. Staff believe that their ability to provide individual flexible service and low fees are key to how they operate in the community and their success in doing this. They perceive that a shift to CCB would require them to raise fees to the point that families access would be threatened. It would also lessen their ability to budget for lower educator to child ratios when needed.

Example 12.2

Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre perceive that a major deficiency within the model is that it assumes that children and families do not have additional needs, and it doesn't cater for families on low-incomes. This therefore ignores both the large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children with additional needs, and the large number of families who are working but still on low-incomes.

The service currently has seven children with significant additional needs. Despite their needs, these children don't qualify for an extra worker, and the centre is not able to fund this. They also have two children under the care of the Department of Human Services who have varied and serious additional needs/issues, for whom only one extra worker is provided. Staff feel that the intense needs of these children – requiring much staff time - has a detrimental effect on the other children in the room. They also report that the administrative requirements for these nine children are significant and take up much staff time.

13. Limited hours of care

Issue

Only parents who meet the work/study requirements (or fall into the other specific categories) can access care for more than 24 hours per week.

Evidence

This requirement prioritises access for working and studying families, and is in contradiction with the principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services – which are to provide services to *all* children in the community, particularly targeting the most disadvantaged (see Section E, Part 6). The requirement fails to understand that families most in need may need to access full-time care for their children, regardless of whether they are working or studying, and fails to take into account the significant impact that quality early childhood care has on the most disadvantaged children.¹²⁶ Access to early childhood programs are therefore particularly relevant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

children, who are at a higher risk of experiencing significant disadvantage during their early years, yet participate at lower levels within early childhood education and care programs.¹²⁷

14. Priority of access

Issue

The CCB Priority of Access Guidelines¹ discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are not working or studying, placing them at a lower priority than those who are working or studying. This is in contradiction to the principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services (see Parts 6 and 12), and may have the effect of decreasing access for the most vulnerable children in a community.

Evidence

Whilst priority of access does enable services flexibility to give preference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or disadvantaged families – this must still be within the three priority areas. Under CCB an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child whose parents/carers do not fit the requirements of Priority 2, but who is also not within Priority 1, would still therefore be at a lower priority than a non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child whose parents/carers fit the requirements of Priority 2. Such a situation is in direct contradiction with one of the key outcomes within the National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Education, which is for “increased proportion of Indigenous children participating in quality early childhood education and development and child care services.”¹²⁸ It is also in opposition to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child recommendation that States take positive measures to eliminate the discrimination Indigenous children may experience in enjoying their right to education, including through “the application of special measures in order to ensure that indigenous children have access to culturally appropriate services in the areas of...education...”¹²⁹

15. Child Care Rebate

Issue

Two distinct issues arise in regards to the Child Care Rebate (CCR):

- The CCR is currently paid directly to families, who in theory then pay this to the service. However, this often does not happen, resulting in services having to cover the gap in fees; and
- The CCR is paid to families three weeks in arrears, however many services have voiced that they bill families one week in advance. Families therefore often wait to pay the service fees until they have received CCR, which means that the service has to cover the budget shortfall until they receive the reimbursement from families.

Example 15.1

Thursday Island Child Care Centre provides long day care and after school hours care. Staff feel that the CCR needs to be paid directly to the service - as parents often don't pass on the rebate to the service (despite paying fees that reflect both the CCB and CCR deductions), and this therefore means that parents go into debt, potentially have their access suspended, and that the service loses out on this money.

¹ These are:

- First Priority: a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect;
- Second Priority: a child of a single parent who satisfies, or of parents who both satisfy, the work/training/study test under Section 14 of the 'A New Tax System (Family Assistance) Act 1999';
- Third Priority: any other child.

Example 15.2

Yawarra Child Care Centre is also concerned that families receive the CCR rebate regardless of whether they have paid their fees or not. They have found that many families have outstanding fees but are still not paying their portion of the CCR back to the service. They believe that a solution to this would be for CCR to be paid directly to the service.

Section F. The way forward

BBF services have been subject to ad hoc, inconsistent, inequitable funding for too long. These services serve a critical need in community and in society more broadly that deserves recognition and support. The BBF review provides an opportunity to work towards a sustainable and effective model that in fact does meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, based on the principles outlined in Section C of this paper (recapped below). The BBF model provides a strong basis to work with. SNAICC believes that a model that is viable, equitable and efficient, and that meets these principles, is possible, and is happy to work with the Government over the next period to explore feasible possibilities.

The issues canvassed in this paper highlight some of the complexities of the funding needs of ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. SNAICC believes that these must be central considerations in the review of the BBF program, as must the core objective of the BBF program, namely:

To support the operation of services in areas where a mainstream, market-based form of child care would not be viable, and where there is a need for culturally competent services.

A strong Indigenous cultural model requires a specific approach. Prioritising access to reverse the cycle of disadvantage that many children experience as a consequence of colonisation and flow on effects of poverty and the Stolen Generations, also requires a specific approach. Significant Federal investment in Closing the Gap, with whole of Government commitment demonstrated through the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development, reflects this current context. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF services are well positioned to play a significant role in reversing current disadvantage, providing the necessary, culturally safe support in the early years. Any developments of this program or any other early childhood education and care model with similar objectives will also need to recognise and reflect this context if it is not to further exacerbate existing conditions through excluding children most in need of support, and undermine the broader national agenda.

While there is some evidence now of the importance of early childhood development to reverse cycles of disadvantage, there is less demonstrated evidence of what is critical to achieving these outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The principles we do know are encapsulated in Section C. SNAICC urges DEEWR to work with experienced practitioners in BBF services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood experts

Key principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF services

1. Innovative governance and self-determination
2. Strengths based, quality service provision
3. Values and incorporates identity and culture
4. Holistic and responsive to community needs
5. Community not centre focused
6. Supports ongoing learning, information-sharing in and across sectors, and innovation
7. Sustainability

over the next period to really understand these questions, the complexities of service needs, and the tools or models required to value the strengths of communities and to achieve sustainable change.

What is clear is that an ECEC funding model must be determined bottom-up based on the needs of children and families. SNAICC understands the need for clear eligibility requirements for services to be included within a non-mainstream model and the need to develop a consistent methodology to manage the BBF model. A flexible method that SNAICC considers would provide a reasonable balance is for services to demonstrate their need for support under the BBF model through a three year funding proposal. This could be repeated for each three year period, allowing DEEWR and the service to consider changing service needs over time. The funding proposal would demonstrate need through explanation of factors central to the cost of service provision within the local service area, including for example: geographical location (rural, remote); service type (such as playgroup, crèche, mobile service); socio-economic difficulties; proportion of children with high additional needs; proportion of children experiencing a disability; workforce development needs; infrastructure development needs.

Current pressures on the CCB model and the experiences of BBF services transitioning to CCB detailed in this paper highlight the need for caution in considering alternative models. In particular, it highlights the fundamental incompatibilities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC service needs and the CCB model. Careful consideration and thinking through the consequences of any alternative model proposed is fundamental to avoid damaging communities already in stress, discriminating communities with a model incompatible with their reasonable cultural needs, and excluding children from services. Simply shifting services to a CCB type model is clearly not the answer. Broad national consultations are a good beginning. The next step is to really interrogate how the diverse community needs translate into an effective national funding program.

There is significant expertise that SNAICC urges the Government to draw on in its consideration of how best to meet current government imperatives and early childhood education and care service needs. To assist this move forward, SNAICC proposes that DEEWR support a two-day workshop to frame a sustainable direction forward for non-mainstream child care. The workshop would consist of approximately 10 key practitioners and academics (majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander) with expertise in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood, modelling and workforce development.

Preparatory work would include:

- Working paper on needs, principles and eligibility criteria for the proposed program
- Review of existing program and learnings from key submissions to the BBF review
- Outline of some proposals for moving ahead
- Key questions requiring expert attention.

Workshop program could encompass:

- Response to key questions identified
- Development of eligibility criteria for the BBF program
- Development of key proposals for improving non-mainstream childcare and recommendations for the next stage of process.

SNAICC urges that any decisions for change be delayed until after emerging proposed options are developed and tested.

The importance of early childhood development in creating real equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and overcoming the historic disadvantage resulting from colonisation processes, is irrefutable. We can only move towards this outcomes however where early childhood education and care services are accessible, particularly to those most excluded, of high quality, responsive to community needs and culturally appropriate. The BBF model provides a strong foundation. Efforts to improve and strengthen this model, including with the provision of adequate funding, has the potential to see vastly improved outcomes over time. Other models may be appropriate, and should be explored. However, the only other current alternative, the CCB model, is at complete odds with the underlying objectives and needs of the BBF program. Combined energy is required then to determine how best to develop the BBF program in a manner that sustainably meets its targeted community needs and works within current government constraints.

¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2012). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Australia*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/AUS/CO/4, paragraph 29 (a), p7.

² Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Siggers, S. and Sims, M. (2007). "Indigenous Early Learning and Care". Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 9.

³ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2012). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Australia*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/AUS/CO/4, paragraph 29 (a), p19.

⁴ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011 Report*. Productivity Commission, 4.28; see also Sims. (2011). 'Early childhood and education services for Indigenous children prior to starting school'. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Government. Resource sheet no. 7, 4.

⁵ Wise, S. et al. (2005). *The Efficacy of Early Childhood Interventions*. Australian Institute of Family Studies. Prepared for the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. Melbourne, 47.

⁶ Reynolds, A. et al. (2002). 'Age 21 Cost-Benefit Analysis of the Title I Chicago Child-Parent Centers'. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. Vol. 24, No. 4, 268.

⁷ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 4.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ See Flaxman et al. (2009). 'Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services'. Occasional Paper No 23. National Evaluation Consortium, 34; SNAICC. (2004). *Indigenous Parenting Project: Main report*, 44; SNAICC. (2011). 'Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services'. Policy Paper, 1 & 3; and Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1), 4.

¹⁰ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2012). *Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families in Early Childhood Education and Care Services: Learning from Good Practice*. Melbourne, 10-14.

¹¹ Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Retrieved 3 September 2012 from: <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview> cited by SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 9.

¹² US-based Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development (Available at Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview>).

¹³ <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/closing-the-gap/closing-the-gap-engagement-and-partnership-with-indigenous-people>; see also the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Canberra, D-76.

-
- ¹⁴ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General comment No. 11 (2009) Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention. U.N. Doc CRC/C/GC/11. Paragraph 60, p.14.
- ¹⁵ United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007), Article 14.
- ¹⁶ See Sagggers, T. et al. (2006). Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 62; and Priest, K. (2005). *Preparing the Ground for Partnership - exploring quality assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care: A literature review and background paper*. Department of Family and Community Services. Commonwealth of Australia, 9.
- ¹⁷ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). 2012. *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Cited by SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 9.
- ¹⁸ NSW Ombudsman. (2011). *Addressing Aboriginal disadvantage: the need to do things differently*. Special Report to Parliament. Sydney.
- ¹⁹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs. (2012). *Our Land Our Languages: Language Learning in Indigenous Communities*. Commonwealth of Australia, 99.
- ²⁰ Turner, K. (2001). *Pipirri Wiimaku 'for the little kids' innovative child care report*, Waltja Tjutangku Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation, Alice Springs cited by Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Sagggers, S. and Sims, M. (2007). 'Indigenous Early Learning and Care'. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 22. Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Sagggers, S. and Sims, M. (2007). "Indigenous Early Learning and Care". Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).
- ²¹ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 17.
- ²² Sims. (2011). 'Early childhood and education services for Indigenous children prior to starting school'. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Government. Resource sheet no. 7, 6 & see also 8.
- ²³ SNAICC. (2012). *Learning from Good Practice: Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 45.
- ²⁴ Ibid.
- ²⁵ SNAICC. (2004). *Indigenous Parenting Project: Main report*, 42; see also Trudgett, M. & Grace, R. (2011). 'Engaging with early childhood education and care services: The perspectives of Indigenous Australian mothers and their young children'. *Kulumun Indigenous Online Journal*. Vol. 1, 17; Priest, K. (2005). *Preparing the Ground for Partnership - exploring quality assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care: A literature review and background paper*. Department of Family and Community Services. Commonwealth of Australia, 9-10; and Kitson R. & Bowes J. (2010). 'Incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing in early education for Indigenous children'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 35 (4).
- ²⁶ Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2007). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Services Plan*. Canberra, 9.
- ²⁷ COAG. (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Canberra, A-22.
- ²⁸ SNAICC. *Learning from Good Practice: implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Melbourne (forthcoming).
- ²⁹ Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Sagggers, S. and Sims, M. (2007). *Indigenous Early Learning and Care*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 22.
- ³⁰ SNAICC. *Learning from Good Practice: implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 10.
- ³¹ See Flaxman et al. (2009). 'Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services'. *National Evaluation Consortium*. Occasional Paper No. 23, 24, and Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1), 4.
- ³² Judy Trigwell. (2000). *Childcare Models and Options in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities*. Western Australian Council of Social Service for the Department of Family and Community Services,

-
- 43; SNAICC. *Learning from Good Practice: implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 19-28.
- ³³ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated Service Delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 10-13.
- ³⁴ Hallam. (2008) and Watson & Tully. (2008) in Sims. (2011). Early childhood and education services for Indigenous children prior to starting school'. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse, Australian Government. Resource sheet no. 7.
- ³⁵ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 18.
- ³⁶ SNAICC. (2004). *Indigenous Parenting Project*. Melbourne, 13 cited by COAG. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Canberra, 4.
- ³⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2005). General Comment No. 7 (2005) Implementing child rights in early childhood. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1. Paragraph 30, p14.
- ³⁸ SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.
- ³⁹ Ibid, 6-7
- ⁴⁰ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2012). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Australia*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/AUS/CO/4, paragraph 77 (b), p19.
- ⁴¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2005). General Comment No. 7 (2005) Implementing child rights in early childhood. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/GC/7/Rev.1. Paragraph 31, p14.
- ⁴² SNAICC. *Learning from Good Practice: implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 22.
- ⁴³ Ibid.
- ⁴⁴ SNAICC. (2012). *Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families in Early Childhood Education and Care Services: Learning from Good Practice*. Melbourne, 25.
- ⁴⁵ Lopez-Atkinson, S. (2008). Indigenous Self-Determination and Early Childhood Education and Care in Victoria. Unpublished PhD thesis. The University of Melbourne, 90.
- ⁴⁶ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 17.
- ⁴⁷ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 351; Windisch, Jenvey & Drysdale. (2003). 'Indigenous parents' ratings of the importance of play, Indigenous games and language, and early childhood education'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, Volume 28, No 3, September, 51.
- ⁴⁸ Flaxman et al. (2009). 'Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services'. Occasional Paper No 23. National Evaluation Consortium, 9.
- ⁴⁹ See further SNAICC (2012) *Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families in Early Childhood Education and Care Services: Learning from Good Practice*, SNAICC.
- ⁵⁰ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, Canberra, D-77.
- ⁵¹ For more detail on the barriers see Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2012). *Improved Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families in Early Childhood Education and Care Services: Learning from Good Practice*. Melbourne, 5-6.
- ⁵² SNAICC. (2012). *Learning from Good Practice: Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 4.
- ⁵³ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General comment No. 11 (2009) Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention. U.N. Doc CRC/C/GC/11. Paragraph 60, p.6.
- ⁵⁴ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General comment No. 11 (2009) Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention. U.N. Doc CRC/C/GC/11. Paragraph 60, p.13.
- ⁵⁵ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, Canberra, A-24.

-
- ⁵⁶ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra.
- ⁵⁷ SNAICC. (2012). *Learning from Good Practice: Implementing the Early Years Learning Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children*. Melbourne (forthcoming), 40.
- ⁵⁸ Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2010). *Belonging, Being, Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra, 13.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid.
- ⁶⁰ See for example Ware, V. (2012). *Improving access to urban and regional early childhood services*. Resource sheet no. 17 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, 5; and Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Saggars, S. and Sims, M. (2007). *Indigenous Early Learning and Care*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 29.
- ⁶¹ SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 13.
- ⁶² Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, Canberra, D-77.
- ⁶³ SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 13.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid, 43-44.
- ⁶⁵ Ware, V. (2012). *Improving access to urban and regional early childhood services*. Resource sheet no. 17 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid, 6.
- ⁶⁷ Ibid.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid, 1.
- ⁶⁹ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Report*. Australian Government, 352; Bond, D (2000) Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services National Report. Melbourne; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2010). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Canberra, 43.
- ⁷⁰ COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 21.
- ⁷¹ SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 12-13.
- ⁷² Ibid, 12.
- ⁷³ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 166; see also Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2007). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Services Plan*. Canberra, 1.
- ⁷⁴ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 12; Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).16; Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 18.
- ⁷⁵ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 166.
- ⁷⁶ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2010). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Canberra, 42.
- ⁷⁷ Ibid.

-
- ⁷⁸ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, Canberra, D-76.
- ⁷⁹ ANAO. (2010). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches*. DEEWR. Canberra, 42.
- ⁸⁰ Ibid, 48.
- ⁸¹ See for example Ibid, 42
- ⁸² Bond, D. (2000). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services National Report*. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. Melbourne, 151.
- ⁸³ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 167.
- ⁸⁴ Ware, V. (2012). *Improving access to urban and regional early childhood services*. Resource sheet no. 17 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, 5.
- ⁸⁵ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 153.
- ⁸⁶ See Ware, V. (2012). *Improving access to urban and regional early childhood services*. Resource sheet no. 17 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, 11.
- ⁸⁷ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 106.
- ⁸⁸ Press, F. and Hayes, A. (no date). OECD Thematic Review of Early Childhood Education and Care Policy; Australian Background Report. Macquarie University, Sydney. Prepared on behalf of the Commonwealth Government of Australia, 35.
- ⁸⁹ A 2011 Productivity Commission report affirmed that "many Indigenous-focused ECEC services have poorer infrastructure and resources than mainstream services..." Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 355.
- ⁹⁰ Office of Evaluation and Audit (Indigenous Programs). (2009). *Performance Audit of Indigenous Professional Support Units*. Department of Finance and Deregulation, 28.
- ⁹¹ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 84.
- ⁹² ANAO. (2010). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). Canberra, 59.
- ⁹³ Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2007). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Services Plan*. Canberra, 15; and Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 151.
- ⁹⁴ Council of Australian Governments. COAG. (2009). *Investing in the Early Years – A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. Canberra, 21.
- ⁹⁵ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 151.
- ⁹⁶ <http://www.deewr.gov.au/Earlychildhood/Programs/ChildCareforServices/Pages/NonMainstreamServices.aspx>
- ⁹⁷ Department of Families, Housing and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2007). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Services Plan*. Canberra, 12.
- ⁹⁸ Early Childhood Australia. (2011). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia: a discussion paper*. Prepared for the European Union-Australia Policy Dialogue. Canberra, 14.
- ⁹⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2012). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Australia*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/AUS/CO/4, p19.
- ¹⁰⁰ Australian Childcare Alliance. (2012). *Federal Pre-Budget Submission*, 3.

-
- ¹⁰¹ Productivity Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 46; Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). Australia's future tax system: Report to the Treasurer. Canberra, 590; Access Economics. (2009). *An economic analysis of the proposed ECEC National Quality Agenda*. Prepared for DEEWR, 51-55; and Early Childhood Australia. (2011). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia: a discussion paper*. Prepared for the European Union-Australia Policy Dialogue. Canberra, 16.
- ¹⁰² Productivity Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 48.
- ¹⁰³ Ibid.
- ¹⁰⁴ Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). (2011). A practical vision for early childhood education and care, 28.
- ¹⁰⁵ Productivity Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 49.
- ¹⁰⁶ Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC). (2011). A practical vision for early childhood education and care, 28.
- ¹⁰⁷ Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2012). *Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention. Concluding observations: Australia*. U.N. Doc. CRC/C/AUS/CO/4, p19.
- ¹⁰⁸ Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). Australia's future tax system: Report to the Treasurer. Canberra, 585-6.
- ¹⁰⁹ Purcal, C. and Fisher, K. (2006). 'Affordability Funding Models for Early Childhood Services'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (December), p56; see also Productivity Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 49.
- ¹¹⁰ Purcal, C. and Fisher, K. (2006). 'Affordability Funding Models for Early Childhood Services'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (December), 56.
- ¹¹¹ Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). Australia's future tax system: Report to the Treasurer. Canberra cited by Productivity Commission. (2011). Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 49.
- ¹¹² Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs. *Universal Access to early childhood education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy*. Council of Australia Governments. Canberra, 5.
- ¹¹³ Ibid, 7; and Ware, V. (2012). *Improving access to urban and regional early childhood services*. Resource sheet no. 17 produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies, 7.
- ¹¹⁴ Commonwealth of Australia. (2010). Australia's future tax system: Report to the Treasurer. Canberra, 587.
- ¹¹⁵ KU Children's Services. (2010). Newsletter Issue 4.
- ¹¹⁶ SNAICC. (2012). *Coming together: the journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne, 39.
- ¹¹⁷ COAG. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Canberra, 4.
- ¹¹⁸ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 177.
- ¹¹⁹ Purcal, C. and Fisher, K. (2006). 'Affordability Funding Models for Early Childhood Services'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 31, No. 4 (December), 56.
- ¹²⁰ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*, Canberra, D-77.
- ¹²¹ Saggars, T. et al. (2006). *Towards an Indigenous Child Care Plan*. Centre for Social Research, Edith Cowan University, 177.
- ¹²² Hunter, B. (2006). *Assessing the evidence on Indigenous socioeconomic outcomes: A focus on the 2002 NATSISS*. 100.

-
- ¹²³ SCRGSP. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011*. Productivity Commission. Canberra, 4.107.
- ¹²⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Social Welfare, Child Protection Australia, 2010-11.
- ¹²⁵ Zubrick, S.R. et al. (2005). *The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Children and Young People*. Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Perth.
- ¹²⁶ Hutchins, T. Martin, K. Saggars, S. and Sims, M. (2007). *Indigenous Early Learning and Care*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY), 24.
- ¹²⁷ Early Childhood Australia. (2011). *Early Childhood Education and Care in Australia: a discussion paper*. Prepared for the European Union-Australia Policy Dialogue. Canberra, 13.
- ¹²⁸ COAG. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Canberra, 7.
- ¹²⁹ United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General comment No. 11 (2009) Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention. U.N. Doc CRC/C/GC/11. Paragraph 60, p.6.

JOINING THE DOTS

**Program and Funding Options
for Integrated Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
Children's Services**

Options paper prepared for
Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
by Professor Deb Brennan





SNAICC
Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

December 2013

Joining the Dots: Program and Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Services

December 2013

Thanks to Professor Deb Brennan for her thorough and thoughtful work writing the paper

Thanks to the many people around Australia who provided input on the draft

Thanks to Mazart Design Studio for the cover design

For more information: contact Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO frank.hytten@snaicc.org.au or Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO, emma.sydenham@snaicc.org.au

SNAICC

Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.org.au
Phone: (03) 9489 8099

A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Table of Contents

Summary	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Policy context.....	6
National Early Childhood Development Strategy	6
Quality measures.....	6
Access to early education	7
National Indigenous Reform	8
3. Evidence base.....	11
High quality preschool improves school readiness	11
Participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	11
Closing the gap in early education - what works.....	13
Closing the gap in early education - what doesn't work	14
Supporting children and families in remote and very remote communities	15
4. Funding and program options.....	16
'Mainstream' Commonwealth funding.....	16
Child Care Benefit	16
Child Care Rebate	17
State and Territory funding of preschool (kindergarten)	21
Would 'mainstream' funding represent social inclusion?	22
5. Towards new program and funding models	23
MODEL 1: Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood and Family Support Service	27
MODEL 2: Flexible and mobile support for remote and isolated children and families	35

Summary

This paper presents program and funding ideas to support integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Its immediate focus is the Budget Based Funded (BBF) services and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres (ACFCs). Its broader aim is to help develop policy and funding ideas for sustainable, community-managed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services. The paper calls for a new program objective and endorses, with minor modifications, a funding model developed by SNAICC following extensive consultation, research and analysis.

The paper situates integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities within the high-level policy context established by the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) in relation to both early childhood education and care and 'closing the gap'. It locates these services in the context of evidence about the benefits of high quality early education and care and the service features needed to deliver positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The BBFs and ACFCs are bedrock services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around Australia. They deliver services in flexible, locally determined ways that match community needs and build on community strengths. As a result of the goodwill and trust built up by these services and their staff, sometimes over many decades, they have tremendous potential to help 'close the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Supportive policy and secure funding would enable the BBFs and ACFs to become flagship services, demonstrating excellent and innovative practice with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, attracting inspiring teachers, linking with local schools and playing a key role in workforce development, leadership and community empowerment.

The building blocks are all in place: high-level **policy**, a strong and growing **evidence base** about 'what works' and a core group of **services** that have close and trusting relationships with their communities and a demonstrated commitment to improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. What is needed now is to 'join the dots' by bringing policy and evidence into alignment with program objectives and establishing secure funding arrangements to deliver long-term benefits in a cost-effective way.

1. Introduction

With Commonwealth funding for Budget Based Funded services and Aboriginal Child and Family Centres secure only until June 2014, the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) commissioned a report on program and funding options for integrated early years and family support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The analysis has been conducted independently but builds on extensive consultations conducted by SNAICC as well as documentation provided by the organisation.

Historically, the BBF services were established under a variety of funding arrangements. Despite their diversity, they were consolidated into the BBF program, a sub-program of the Child Care Services Support Program, in 2003 (DEEWR, 2012). Approximately 80% of the BBFs are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused services. Many of the BBFs have poor quality infrastructure and find it difficult to recruit and retain qualified staff.

Thirty-eight Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (ACFCs) established with funding from the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (2009) are also within scope for this project. These services have all been planned for areas with high Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and high levels of disadvantage. As with the BBF services, the funding agreement for these services expires on 30 June 2014 and many have been advised to prepare for funding through 'mainstream' program mechanisms such as Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate.

The services reviewed here provide holistic, community-led programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They seek to build on community strengths and to address a wide range of physical, social, emotional and learning needs – far wider than the needs addressed in mainstream early education and care services. By extending and building on cultural and social strengths, they provide a 'trusted community owned and driven entry point to tackle the trauma, poverty, dislocation and disempowerment many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families experience' (SNAICC, 2013). Typically, these are services that are actively engaged in building and strengthening their communities. In the words of the Director of the Tasmanian Aboriginal Children's Centre, 'I don't think we've ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community' (SNAICC, 2013).

There is a strong human rights basis to this approach. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child encourages early childhood programs that empower parents and other caregivers. It calls on governments to ensure that early childhood services are 'tailored to the circumstances of particular groups and individuals' and that services and programs reflect the needs and characteristics of the specific communities to which they are connected (UNICEF, 2005: 48).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated services address the needs of children, parents and families in a context of 'cultural safety', that is, active

understanding of, respect for and promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity. Cultural safety has been defined as 'a 'safe environment' where there is 'no assault, challenge or denial' of people's identity, of who they are and what they need. 'It is about respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening' (Williams 2008). Cultural safety is a far stronger concept than cultural awareness, although the latter may provide a useful foundation for becoming more mindful about the history, expectations, strengths and vulnerabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Community and cultural identity are fundamental to the resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Identity helps to create a sense of belonging and connectedness and helps to empower children so that they have the skills and capacities to 'take control' of events and influence outcomes (Armstrong et al. 2012: 15). A recent study shows the importance of 'cultural identity, self-reliance and adaptive coping strategies' in enabling children to achieve their goals. Connections to family and community provide the basis of the child's identity as an Indigenous person, their cultural connectedness, and the emergence of their spirituality (Armstrong et al., 2012).

Most BBFs and ACFCs are located in rural and remote parts of Australia, but a small number are in urban areas. The services frequently operate as 'community hubs' rather than conventional childcare centres. In addition to providing services such as early education and care, playgroups, outside school hours care and nutrition advice they link families with other services and agencies. The BBFs take an inclusive approach, catering as far as possible to the children and families who live in and visit their communities, rather than restricting support to those who are formally enrolled and/or able to pay fees.

Mobile services take the educator or play leader to the children, as well as toys, books and play equipment. Staff may travel thousands of kilometres every few weeks in order to take early education and parenting resources to children and families in remote areas. In remote communities where transport and fuel costs are major issues, these mobile services are vital.

A considerable body of research and evidence supports the integrated service model that underpins the BBFs and ACFCs and that connects early childhood services to health, nutrition, training and skills development. According to a recent review:

The move towards more integrated service delivery has been driven by a growing awareness of how fragmented services for young children and their families are, and how that fragmentation undermines the capacity of the service system to support children and families effectively (Moore and Skinner, 2013).

When planning, funding and service delivery are managed by different agencies and/or levels of government results the system that can be difficult for families

to understand and access. Further, 'the families that are most disadvantaged by this situation are those that are most vulnerable' (Moore and Skinner, 2013).

It is important to acknowledge the profound strengths of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities, even as we refer to the disadvantages they experience. The learning environments of these children can be extraordinarily rich. They may learn about kinship, cultural practices, respect for elders and community languages as well as bush tucker, first aid and navigating the bush. Parents and grandparents often work hard to foster a strong Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity and many are keenly aware of the benefits of structured early education. The parents in a recent study noted that 'those who do not attend preschool and other early learning programs miss out on some skills that make it easier for them to settle into school and know what school is about' (Bowes and Kitson, 2011: 4).

The Australian Council for Educational Research invites us to picture this scene:

A three year old Warlpiri boy is picking up tiny ininti seeds from where they have fallen in the red dust of the Central Australian desert. They are almost hidden amongst the leaf litter, or under a strip of bark, or in the shadow of a rock, but he can find them. The orange, red and yellow seeds will later be transformed into necklaces by his Aunties, who are accompanying the children on the walk. One of the women throws something hard at a tree to dislodge the seed pods, which cascade to the ground. The boy prises open the dried up pods and extracts the seeds from within. He places each seed into a plastic cup that is being used as a temporary bead collector. He makes his way around his environment independent of adults and of other children who are on this bush trip.

The boy's fine motor skills are clearly evident. The deft finger movements to grasp the seed and lift it from the ground, to open the pod and free the seed from its casing, the careful placement of the seed in a small receptacle are evidence of his skills. His actions in moving purposefully from seed pod to seed pod and from tiny seed to tiny seed, without close adult supervision, suggests independence, lack of anxiety, easy adaptation to these surroundings, a sense of purpose, confidence, the ability to focus on the task without being distracted by the seed searching of other children, a determination to locate as many seeds as he can and pleasure in the task. During the morning he is exposed to two languages, Warlpiri and English.

Children such as this little boy have considerable knowledge before they start school. They are not simply 'empty vessels ready to be filled with Western knowledge' or 'underperforming children' (Armstrong et al., 2012: 7). However, skilled teaching is required to recognize and build on these strengths. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to trust and to feel connected to the adults at the centres they attend (Shepherd and Walker, 2008; Mann, Knight and Thomson, 2011; Trudgett and Grace, 2011).

2. Policy context

Key policies introduced since the consolidation of the BBF program in 2003 create a powerful and positive framework for supporting and resourcing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These policies include: (i) the National Early Childhood Development Strategy (2009), that sets out a plan for improving the lives of all Australian children; (ii) the National Indigenous Reform Agenda (2008), *Closing the Gap*, that seeks to overcome the legacy of past injustices and the current disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; and (iii) the National Indigenous Child Development Strategy.

National Early Childhood Development Strategy

The National Early Childhood Development Strategy is a wide-ranging initiative addressing children's health, education and wellbeing. Its overall goal is to ensure that 'by 2020 all children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation' (COAG, 2009: 4). The strategy aims to:

... reduce inequalities in outcomes between groups of children. This is especially important for ... Indigenous children who, on average, have significantly poorer outcomes than non-Indigenous children (COAG, 2012: 4).

As part of the strategy, a range of measures has been introduced to improve the quality of early education and care and to ensure that children have access to services that will improve their readiness for school, as well as meeting parents' needs for childcare to support social and economic participation.

The benefits of providing early education for all children are widely accepted by governments, researchers and advocacy organisations. The 'human capital' approach proposes prioritising investment in the early years:

Early childhood is a critical time in human development. There is now comprehensive research that shows that experiences children have in the early years of life set neurological and biological pathways that can have life-long impacts on health, learning and behaviour. There is also compelling international evidence about the returns on investment in early childhood services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the work of Nobel Laureate James Heckman (COAG 2009b: 3).

Quality measures

A new National Quality Standard (NQS) for most early childhood education and care services came into effect at the beginning of 2012. The NQS addresses key determinants of quality in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), including educator and caregiver qualifications, group sizes and staff-to-child ratios. An important aspect of the NQS is the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

which Commonwealth approved services are required to apply when planning for and evaluating children's learning (DEEWR, 2009). Most long day care centres, outside school hours care services, preschools (kindergartens) and family day care services are covered by the new standard. Budget-based funded services, with the exception of those that receive Child Care Benefit, are currently excluded.

It is not the purpose of this paper to canvas the merits of bringing the BBF services under the NQS. Nevertheless, it is important to note the anomaly that services catering to some of the most disadvantaged children in Australia are specifically excluded from provisions that would require quality improvements despite evidence that high-quality ECEC services yield particular benefits for the most highly disadvantaged (Goodstart, 2012: 5). This goes directly counter to the recommendations of reports such as *An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in Children's Centres: The Evidence Review* that recommends a platform of universal service provision, with proportionately more resources and supports directed to those in greatest need (Pordes Bowers, and Strelitz, 2012).

The national Early Childhood Development Strategy and the EYLF have considerable potential to strengthen services that cater to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The framework recognises parents and families as children's 'first and most influential educators' and affirms the vital role of partnerships such as those that underpin the BBF and ACFCs (COAG, 2009a: 5).

The EYLF provides an excellent platform for supporting the kinds of holistic, community-controlled service model represented by the BBFs and ACFCs. It specifies that service infrastructure needs to be 'fit for purpose, support interdisciplinary and integrated approaches, and be located to enable ease of access within the community for children and their families.' It also notes that 'innovative approaches are required in providing infrastructure for Indigenous families, such as design that takes into account extended family relationships and that is culturally welcoming.' In relation to governance and funding, the EYLF endorses 'whole-of-government and cross-sectoral governance arrangements, effective consultation with children and families, and more flexible funding and administrative arrangements ... to better engage with children and families and respond holistically to their diverse issues' (COAG 2009a: 21).

Finally, the EYLF emphasises the importance of relationships, collaboration, partnerships and continuity in children's learning and development (Harrison and Murray, 2012: 12). It urges educators to develop 'learning communities', to become 'co-learners with children, families and community' and to 'value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders' (COAG, 2009a: 13).

Together, these elements read as a manifesto for the BBF and ACFC models.

Access to early education

In 2008, COAG endorsed the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, committing all state and territory governments to achieve 'universal

access' to preschool by 2013. The 2013-14 Budget extended the National Partnership until the end of December 2014 (Australian Government, 2012: 128-9). Under the agreement, 'universal access' was defined as meaning that:

By 2013 every child will have access to a preschool program in the 12 months prior to full-time schooling. The preschool program is to be delivered by a four year university qualified early childhood teacher, in accordance with a national early years learning framework, for 15 hours a week, 40 weeks a year. It will be accessible across a diversity of settings in a form that meets the needs of parents and in a manner that ensures cost does not present a barrier to access (COAG, 2009b: Clause 17).

For the first two years, national priorities included 'increasing participation rates, particularly for Indigenous and disadvantaged children', 'ensuring cost is not a barrier to access' and 'strengthening program quality and consistency'. Children living in remote Indigenous communities were identified as a special focus for universal access. The National Partnership Agreement is bolstered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy.

The models of community engagement and service delivery that underpin the BBF and ACFC services provide an obvious vehicle for advancing this agenda. Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, language and identity is deeply embedded in these models.

National Indigenous Reform

The disadvantages experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have been extensively and exhaustively documented. Disadvantage begins early, with rates of infant and child mortality two to three times higher than for other Australian children (Productivity Commission, 2011: 347). Indigenous children have lower levels of participation in ECE than non-Indigenous children. Without preschool learning opportunities, they are disadvantaged from their first day of school.

The COAG National Indigenous Reform Agreement has six targets to 'close the gap' on Indigenous disadvantage. Three of these relate specifically to children: halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade; ensuring *all* Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education by 2013; and halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade (COAG, 2008).

For an equal start in life, Indigenous children need early learning, development and socialisation opportunities. Access to quality early childhood education and care services, including pre-school, child care and family support services such as parenting programs and supports, is critical. Appropriate facilities and physical infrastructure, a sustainable early childhood education and health workforce, learning frameworks and opportunities for parental engagement are also important and require attention. Action in the areas of maternal, antenatal and early

childhood health is relevant to addressing the child mortality gap and to early childhood development (COAG, 2008: 6).

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement includes five principles that are to be central to the implementation of 'Closing the Gap'. Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families need to embody and express these principles – which is precisely the way that the existing BBF and ACFCs operate.

Closing the Gap principles

Priority principle: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.

Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.

Access principle: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible ... recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services (COAG, 2008: 6).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan

One of the strongest messages to emerge from research is the importance of services being delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. In order to be effective, programs need to build upon the rich cultural, linguistic and conceptual skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to early childhood education. Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan, adopted by governments around the country calls for early learning programs that:

- promote early engagement with learning;
- provide a strong foundation for future educational achievement;
- encourage the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of children from birth; and
- support children in their transition to school (MCEEDYA, 2010).

The *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* has adopted the Closing the Gap principles and added an additional 'Accountability principle' which states that 'programs and services will have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.

Key messages

- 1.** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have skills and strengths that are not necessarily recognised or valued in mainstream services.
- 2.** The early years have life-long impacts on health, learning and behaviour, so this is the optimum time to invest in high quality services.
- 3.** Children experiencing disadvantage have the most to gain from early education yet many, including many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are missing out.
- 4.** Together, the ECEC reform agenda and 'closing the gap' measures form a powerful basis for supporting and resourcing integrated services such as the BBFs and ACFCs. These service models strongly and directly advance these major reform agendas.

3. Evidence base

High quality preschool improves school readiness

Early education is central to most BBF services and ACFCs, and is a key element in improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Early education delivered by qualified educators – ideally indigenous educators – must be central to revised program and funding models (Carbonne et al., 2004).

A powerful body of literature shows that ‘children who participate in quality early childhood education are more likely to make a successful transition to school, stay longer in school, continue on to further education and fully participate in employment and community life as adults’ (MCEETYA, 2009: 9).

Participating in high quality early education for at least two years improves children’s readiness for school and their life chances in the longer term. The benefits of early education are especially strong for disadvantaged children, as noted in a recent report by the Productivity Commission (MCEETYA, 2009: 9).

Systematic studies such as the High-Scope Perry Preschool Program and the Abecedarian Project show positive, long-term effects of early enrichment on school achievement, employment and social behaviours (McLachlan et al., 2013: 103). The Perry Preschool Program provided intensive early education to disadvantaged African American Children for two years, as well as regular home visits. At the age of 40, adults who had participated in this program were more likely than their peers to have graduated from high school and to be employed, they had higher earnings and were less likely to have committed criminal offences than those who did not participate in the program. Another program that demonstrated the long-term effects of structured, high quality early education is the Abecedarian Project. Typically, children commenced this program when they were less than six months old and continued to be engaged until the age of eight. Graduates of this program were more likely than their peers to be employed, four times more likely to have college degrees and less likely to have used ‘public assistance’ (Conti and Heckman, 2012).

Participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

Although steps have been taken to redress the disadvantage and exclusion experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, there is a long way to go to ensure that these children have equal life chances with their peers. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, on average, have poorer educational and health outcomes and lower wellbeing than other Australian children. They have higher rates of hospitalisation and mortality, are at greater risk of being of low birth weight and suffer more childhood illnesses (AIHW, 2011; Productivity Commission, 2011). As well, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have lower rates of access to early childhood education and

lower proportions of students achieving the national minimum standards for reading (Baxter and Hand, 2013).

The disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal children is evident from the results of the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI), a population-level measure of children's health and development. AEDI results are based on a checklist measures development across five domains: physical health and wellbeing; social competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive skills; and communication skills and general knowledge. Almost half of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally vulnerable in one or more of these domains – twice the proportion of other children. Further, AEDI data suggest that participation in high quality early childhood education is skewed towards more advantaged populations (Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute, 2009: 12).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have relatively low rates of participation in Australian government approved services such as long day care, family day care and outside school hours care – even though they are a priority target for services. Only 2% of 0-5 year olds and 1.9% of 6-12 year olds who participate in Commonwealth approved care are Aboriginal children, even though they represent more than twice that proportion (4.7%) in the community. Children from regional and remote parts of Australia, which include many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, are also under-represented (Productivity Commission, 2013: 3A.15).

As well, despite the general strategy of delivering 'universal access' to early childhood education and the specific goal of ensuring that Aboriginal children in remote communities get access to preschool, a recent analysis undertaken by the Australian Institute of Family Studies for the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations shows that Aboriginal children are high on the list of those most likely to miss out on early childhood education (Baxter and Hand, 2013: xvii).

Access to early childhood education means far more than simply increasing the number of preschool places available or the proportion of children enrolled (Baxter and Hand, 2013: xvii). Even if places are available, families may face barriers relating to cost, quality, hours of opening location and – crucially – responsiveness to the needs and concerns of both parents and children. Accessible services need to be genuinely responsive to, and welcoming and respectful of, the children and families they serve. As well, programs need to be 'delivered in such a way that the child is able to fully experience the potential benefits of [early childhood education]' (Baxter and Hand, 2013: 55-64).

Whether services are targeted specifically at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, or at the community in general, participation by Aboriginal families is higher in services developed by and with these communities (Mann, 2012; Gooda, 2011).

Delivering services in this way gives effect to two principles of the National Indigenous Reform Agenda, specifically the Indigenous Engagement Principle, which posits that 'Engagement with Indigenous people and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services' and the Access Principle which calls for programs and services to be 'physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people' (COAG, 2008: 21).

Closing the gap in early education - what works

In Australia we are fortunate to know not only 'what is wrong' but also 'what works'. The Closing the Gap Clearinghouse summarises the policies and practices that have been shown to be effective in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

The key elements of 'what we know', according to the Clearinghouse, include:

- o The early years are a critical period where the pathways to a child's lifetime social, emotional and education outcomes begin.
- o Children's literacy and numeracy skills at age 4-5 are a good predictor of academic achievement in primary school
- o Indigenous children and economically disadvantaged families are less likely to attend an early childhood program than their non-Indigenous and more advantaged peers.
- o Indigenous families want culturally safe environments for their children in the years before school (Harrison et al., 2012).

What works

- ✓ Children at risk of poor developmental and educational outcomes benefit from high-quality education and care programs in the years before school
- ✓ Early learning programs that are supported by the community, provided by educators who are qualified, well-attended, well-resourced, and evidence-based are a key contributor to good early childhood outcomes
- ✓ Helping families and communities to be supportive and effective in their roles in children's lives is a key protective factor for the early years and a key component in the design and delivery of high-quality, effective early years programs
- ✓ Uptake of early learning programs by Indigenous families is enhanced by community partnerships, culturally relevant practice that values local Indigenous knowledge, and appropriate teacher training and support

Schools and early childhood education providers that work in partnership with families and communities can better support the education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These partnerships can establish a collective commitment to 'hold high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and foster learning environments that are culturally safe and supportive'. Evidence shows that children who are expected to achieve at school and who have high expectations of themselves are more likely to succeed. A sense of cultural and linguistic identity, and the active recognition and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages by

schools, is critical to student wellbeing and success at school. There are strong links between wellbeing and learning outcomes (MCEEDYA, 2010).

Services controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people build on the skills and strengths of their children, instead of emphasising their perceived 'deficits'. A recent study notes the independence and autonomy of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as well as their sibling and peer solidarity. In both remote and settled Australia, 'young Indigenous children's superior visual-spatial and motor skills and capacity to assess risks accurately have long been noted', the study says, but 'such skills rarely appear on ECE checklists or school reports as strengths to be encouraged' (Taylor, 2011: 148).

Closing the gap in early education - what doesn't work

- × Children attending early learning programs of poor quality show poorer outcomes at school entry, particularly when poor quality programs are combined with long hours of attendance or poorer home learning environments
- × Service delivery approaches that are too narrowly targeted can miss many of the children and families who need support
- × Programs that lack stability and continuity of staffing, and/or do not integrate families' access to programs, reduce the potential benefits for children
- × Early learning programs that do not reflect the culture and knowledge of the Indigenous community are not seen as culturally safe and tend not to be used by families in that community

Key messages

- 1.** Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children miss out on access to sustained, high quality early learning programs
- 2.** Quality measures such as educator qualifications and child to staff ratios make a real difference to children's learning
- 3.** Cultural competence and cultural safety are key components of service delivery for Indigenous families, including the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators

Supporting children and families in remote and very remote communities

Children living in remote or very remote parts of Australia are as entitled to early childhood education as every other child.¹ In reality, ensuring that early education is delivered to remote communities brings particular challenges, especially in relation to staffing, facilities and transport. Specific and proactive measures need to be taken in order to make 'universal access' a reality for children in remote communities. Further, funding agencies need to respect the clearly articulated vision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about 'what works' and 'what does not work'.

Early education services in remote communities not only look very different from their equivalents in suburban or regional centres; they often meet a far wider range of community needs. Communities typically seek to develop multipurpose facilities that meet a range of needs, rather than seeking to deliver a single service such as 'long day care' or even 'child care'.

Research conducted for the Northern Territory government in 2009 identified an urgent need for 'services that provide holistic health, care and education, particularly in remote communities. There was a very strong and consistent view ... that childhood services much be delivered as part of an integrated health, care and education strategy' (Elliott, Fasoli and Nutton, 2009: 11).

A 'whole of community' approach, rather than a narrow focus on children, is both desired and appropriate in remote Aboriginal communities. Community members who, from an outside perspective, appear to have no connection with the service, may play a critical role. This is especially likely to be the case with elders and language speakers. 'In the cultural context of many remote Indigenous communities in the NT, elders are seen as knowledge holders and are 'recognised as being able to provide advice, offer support and share wisdom in a confidential way with other members of the community, particularly younger members' (Fasoli et al, 2004). These people are unique to each community and should be part of any decision-making.

¹ The standard method of defining remoteness for statistical purposes in Australia is by reference to the road distance from services (Baxter, Gray and Hayes, 2011).

4. Funding and program options

In devising options for BBF and ACFC services, it is useful to consider the main funding and program models in operation in Australia. How do these position ECEC services in relation to the families and communities they serve? What are their philosophical starting points? What are their strengths and weaknesses as models for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families?

This analysis begins with the 'mainstream' model of Commonwealth funding built around Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate. Recognising that there are lessons to be learned from other jurisdictions such as the States, Territories and local governments, a brief survey of the major approaches to funding preschool/kindergarten is also included.

'Mainstream' Commonwealth funding

Most Commonwealth government expenditure on children's education and care is directed through Child Care Benefit (CCB) and Child Care Rebate (CCR).

Child Care Benefit

Child Care Benefit (CCB) is a means-tested subsidy that helps eligible families with the costs of childcare. It can be paid directly to service providers, thus reducing up-front fees. CCB is based on an hourly rate that varies according to family income, the number of children enrolled in approved care, the number of hours used, whether children attend school and the type of child care use. Parents who are not employed, studying or training and who use approved services such as long day care, family day care or in-home care may be eligible for up to 24 hours CCB for each child below school age; while those who are working, studying or training could be eligible for up to 50 hours CCB (or more in certain circumstances). The maximum CCB is \$3.99 per hour, which equates to a maximum of \$199.50 per week for parents who are working, studying or training and using 50 hours. Parents are responsible for the gap between CCB and the fee charged.

How does this work in practice? Take the example of a parent using two days child care in a centre that is open for 10 hours per day. Typically, the parent will be required to pay for the full number of hours the centre is open (in this example 10 hours) even if they only want to use, say 6 hours child care per day. CCB will be payable for the full ten hours. Maximum CCB for ten hours is \$39.90, leaving the parent to pay \$30.10 per day, or just over \$60 for the two days. No CCR would be received, as this is available only to employed parents. Many services charge more than \$70 per day, and out of pocket expenses rise accordingly. If the service charge \$90 per day, for example, the daily out of pocket cost to a non-employed parent would be just over \$50 per day – clearly out of the range of a mother on Parenting Payment (Single) where the base rate is about \$300 per week, plus Family Tax Benefits.

Parents receiving income support payments such as Newstart or Parenting Payment, and who are studying, training or undertaking rehabilitation in order to enter the workforce are eligible for additional assistance through Jobs,

Education and Training (JET) Child Care Fee Assistance (often called JET child care). JET child care pays most of the gap fee for these parents while they are undertaking 'approved activities'. Parents must make a co-contribution of \$1 for each hour of care. Parents participating in Helping Young Parents or Supporting Jobless Families² or who are teenage parents attending school pay a co-contribution of ten cents per hour of care.

Special Child Care Benefit (SCCB) provides additional assistance in situations where a child at risk of serious abuse or neglect, or a family is experiencing exceptional short-term financial hardship which has substantially reduced their capacity to pay child care fees. Services can approve SCCB for a maximum of 13 weeks. After that, Centrelink can approve an extension of the benefit, in 13-week periods, for up to a total of 52 weeks. Administrative barriers (such as the requirement that the cost of the SCCB should not exceed 18% of total fee reductions in the acquitted statement) limit flexibility, especially if there are a significant number of children who might be eligible.

Grandparent Child Care Benefit covers the total fee charged for approved care (up to 50 hours per week) for eligible grandparents who are the primary carers of their grandchildren and have responsibility for day-to-day decisions about their grandchildren's care, welfare and development. In principle, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander grandparents could be eligible for Grandparent Child Care Benefit, and thus free child care, but in practice the complexities of demonstrating that they are primary carers deters many from applying (Brennan et al., 2013).

Child Care Rebate

Child Care Rebate (CCR) assists working families by covering 50 per cent of out-of-pocket costs; that is, 50 per cent of fees less any entitlement to CCB and JET Child Care. CCR is not income-tested. It provides the highest levels of assistance to families who spend the most on 'approved' services. For example, a family able to outlay \$15,000 on approved ECEC receives Child Care Rebate worth \$7,500 each year from the Commonwealth. Substantial family expenditure effectively draws an additional \$7,500 from the public purse, meaning that the child in question has a total of \$15,000 (from private and public sources combined) spent on his or her early education.

CCB and CCR were designed to complement Australia's 'mainstream' market-based child care system. They are individualised subsidies that position parents as consumers shopping for a service in a competitive market place – not as members of a mutually supportive community. The idea behind subsidies of this type is that consumers discipline the market by shopping for the services that best suit their needs, withdrawing their custom from poor quality services and

² Helping Young Parents (HYP) and Supporting Jobless Families (SJF) are Commonwealth government programs targeted at recipients of Parenting Payment who live in ten specific Local Government Areas. HYP is for parents aged 19 years or less while SJF is for those under 23 years who have been receiving income support for two years or more and not working or studying and who have a child aged five years or under.

thus signalling to providers what kind of care they are seeking and what they are prepared to pay.

Application of CCB and CCR to BBFs and ACFCs

The CCB model was introduced in 2000 as part of the shift in Commonwealth funding away from the community-based, non-profit sector and towards private for-profit long day care (Brennan, 1998). Reliance upon CCB and CCR for core funding would be inappropriate for most BBF and ACFC services. These are not conventional or mainstream 'childcare' centres; nor do they aspire to be. Imposing the CCB/CCR model could jeopardise the integrated ECEC and family support model that characterises these services and could result in the exclusion of the most vulnerable children and families – the very children and families for whom these services were designed.

Under the CCB model, minor administrative and clerical errors such as misquoting a Customer Reference Number or inconsistent spelling of child's name can result in families missing out on CCB. This is inappropriate in service contexts where the primary aim is to engage children and families in supportive ways and potentially to provide an entry point to more formal services. Across Australia, more than 40% of the population is considered to have poor levels of literacy (ABS, 2006). Poor proficiency in English is far higher in communities with low levels of educational attainment and/or in where English is a third or fourth language (as it is in many remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities).

The CCB/CCR model has a number of requirements which impact on families and children as well as service providers. In order to be approved for CCB, services must, amongst other things:

- Operate for at least 8 continuous hours per working day for at least 48 weeks per year
- Provide care for at least 8 continuous hours on each working day
- Register with the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Agency and participate in the National Quality Standard.

These requirements are based on a 'mainstream' model where most children have at least one parent who is regularly employed and regular, routine attendance at a service is the norm even for children below school age.

Impacts of the transition to CCB funding

Yarrabah (Queensland) transitioned from BBF to CCB funding in 2005. With almost 1,000 children in the community and 130-150 attending the service each day, DEEWR saw CCB as likely to provide a sustainable funding base. In practice, strict eligibility and administrative requirements made it impossible for Yarrabah to claim CCB for many children. For example:

- The names and birthdates of children and/or carers do not always match Centrelink information
- Immunisation have sometimes lapsed or records are missing
- Children have moved between families without this information being passed on to Yarrabah
- Children exceeded their number of 'allowable absence' days and became ineligible for CCB

As a result of its rapid drop in funding, Yarrabah acquired a \$300,000 deficit and had to increase its fees further, excluding more families. The number of children attending has dropped to 40-50 (SNAICC, 2012: 19).

At **Yirrkala** in East Arnhem Land, modelling has shown that fees would need to rise from \$20 to \$143 per day for the service to operate without a deficit. At **Galiwin'ku**, the fee would need to be \$108 per day to break even under the CCB model. Fees of this magnitude are not sustainable in these communities.

Bubup Wilam Child and Family Centre (CFC) in Thomastown, Victoria, have calculated that if fees were kept at a level that enables the families most in need to attend, the annual deficit would be \$500,000. As an Aboriginal Children and Family Centre, this service is required to offer, "a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs (including) ... child care, early learning and parent and family support services." Absent the extra \$500,000 each year, Bubup will need to cut back on staff or programs, both of which will impact negatively on the children and families (SNAICC, 2012: 24).

At **Dala Yaroo** in Bairnsdale, Victoria, the local Gippsland community is seeking to develop 'a unique model of integrated service delivery'. The service is built around a multipurpose community facility focusing on early learning but addressing a wide range of children's and families' needs.

Currently parents attending the kindergarten and playgroup do not pay any fees and the Board and Management are exploring options to keep fees low. However, analysis of the CCB model shows that fees would need to be in the order of \$50 per day (before CCB) and that a subsidy of almost \$1.4 million over the first three years ((\$4.8 million over 10 years) would be required to keep fees low, even assuming growth in all elements of the program (CCC, 2013).

Although CCB and CCR are inappropriate as core funding mechanism for BBFs and ACFCs, they may in some circumstances be an appropriate way to fund the 'child care' component of services. Whether this is the case will depend on local circumstances, the range of services provided, the extent to which parents are engaged in the labour market (and indeed, whether there is a labour market for parents to engage in) and other factors relating to the community and the service. The quantum of funding involved in CCB and CCR is something that SNAICC might wish to consider when advocating for new models and funding benchmarks for the BBFs and ACFCs. The most significant of these is the level of per child investment that might be reasonable to lobby for, in light of the Commonwealth's current pattern of expenditure.

The 337 BBFs collectively receive approximately \$60 million, or around \$178,000 per service. By comparison, a 40-place long day care centre in a major city might have an operating budget of \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 (including parent fees). This provides a useful starting point for a discussion about appropriate and proportionate levels of funding.

As noted above, a family that outlays \$15,000 on approved ECEC is eligible for a non means-tested rebate of \$7,500 from the Commonwealth. Effectively, the family's private expenditure of \$7,500 is matched by an equal amount from the public purse, with the result that \$15,000 is invested in the child's early education. Almost 17,000 families earning more than \$150,000 a year, including 130 millionaire families, were projected to receive the full rebate in 2012 these included about 130 millionaire families (Karvelas, 2012a and 2012b).

Benchmarks for expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC

Maximum CCB for 50 hours per week = approx. \$10,000 per year per child.

This is a useful benchmark for expenditure on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services. Using this formula, a 30-place service would attract \$300,000 per year, a 40-place service \$400,000 and so on.

Total expenditure on children whose parents claim full CCR is another useful benchmark. Families that outlay \$15,000 per year or more on approved ECEC receive full CCR (**\$7,500 per year**). This provides another valuable benchmark for funding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services.³

Grandparent Child Care Benefit (GCCB) covers the total fees charged for up to 50 hours per week for each child in CCB approved care. It is available to grandparents who receive income support payments (e.g. Newstart, Age Pension) and who provide daily care for their grandchildren.

Preschool (or kindergarten) is free in several States and Territories.

³ Although families can receive both CCB and CCR for the same child, in reality, no child will receive the *maximum* amount of each payment in a given year. Maximum CCB requires the parent(s) to be working for 50 hours per week and to have family income under about \$42,000 (if one child is in approved care). In order to attract maximum CCB, families need to spend \$15,000 on approved ECEC per year – and this is not possible for a really low-income family.

State and Territory funding of preschool (kindergarten)

State and Territory governments use a variety of mechanisms to fund preschools.⁴ In some jurisdictions, preschool is funded and delivered by government as part of the education system. In these systems, fees are negligible or non-existent, although voluntary contributions may be requested. In other jurisdictions, government subsidises preschool but it is mainly delivered by non-government organisations (Baxter and Hand, 2013: 6).

According to the OECD, direct supply-side investment by governments in ECEC is the most desirable approach to funding. Supply-side funding results in 'more uniform quality and superior coverage of childhood populations than parent subsidy models'. Parent subsidy models are politically attractive for governments, the OECD argues, but are not as effective in delivering results:

[D]irect public funding of services brings ... more effective control, advantages of scale, better national quality, more effective training for educators and a higher degree of equity and access and participation than consumer subsidy models (OECD, 2006: 114).

Elements of preschool funding could be considered as possible models in relation to the BBFs and ACFCs. In particular, it is important to note that tens of thousands of children receive *free* or virtually free early childhood education regardless of family income. In general, preschool is free in government schools in Western Australia, South Australia, the ACT and NT (Urbis, 2012). In jurisdictions where preschool is free, parents are often encouraged to make a voluntary contribution but not doing so does not result in the child's exclusion, as it does in CCB-funded child care services where parents cannot pay fees.

A note on free vs. low cost provision

In this author's view, services for children and families served by the BBFs and ACFCs should be delivered free to families just as preschool is provided free in four states and territories across Australia. Given the historical treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the depth and persistence of disadvantage experienced by many and the documented benefits that will accrue from participation in high quality ECEC, the case for free service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is compelling. In the model outlined below, however, the possibility of parents making a modest contribution has been retained in order to respect the results of the consultations.

⁴ The term 'preschool' is used for sessional early education services in New South Wales, ACT and Northern Territory; 'kindergarten' is used in Victoria, Western Australia and Tasmania; both terms are used in Queensland and South Australia

Would ‘mainstream’ funding represent social inclusion?

Would the application of ‘mainstream’ Commonwealth funding models to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused services be a path to social inclusion?⁵ Social inclusion does not mean the imposition of a ‘one size fits all’ funding model. The following comment by researchers exploring ways to include vulnerable families in antenatal care and early childhood services explains why:

Inclusive services are easy to reach and use, and work to assist all-comers. They acknowledge people’s shared humanity, celebrate diversity and promote acceptance, belonging and participation. Inclusive services also recognize people’s different needs and the inequalities in people’s level of power and their control over resources, and attempt to counteract these inequalities. In their ideal form, therefore, inclusive services not only ensure they engage all people within their programs, but act as agents for social change, working to overcome deprivation and disadvantage (at times through positive discrimination strategies) to promote social inclusion (Carbonne et al., 2004).

Key messages

- 1.** Providing free early childhood education to children participating in BBFs and ACFCs would extend to them a benefit already enjoyed by tens of thousands of children Australia who access free preschools and kindergartens.
- 2.** An unknown number of children receive free ECEC Commonwealth approved services through Special Child Care Benefit and Grandparent Child Care Benefit.
- 3.** Maximum Child Care Benefit (\$10,000 a year) and/or Maximum Child Care Rebate (\$7,500 a year) provide useful benchmarks for considering appropriate levels of support for children participating in BBFs and ACFCs.
- 4.** Free services and/or substantial public and private investment in children’s early learning is already the norm for many children in this country.
- 5.** Substantial additional investments in the BBF and ACFCs is required in order to bring national investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early education into line with the funding of ‘mainstream’ services.

⁵ Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children use ‘mainstream’ services (Productivity Commission 2013).

5. Towards new program and funding models

The services under discussion have much in common, despite being established with distinct objectives. The BBFs offer flexible, integrated services that are deeply embedded in local communities and designed to meet their needs. Similarly, under the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Child Development, the ACFCs are expected to provide ‘a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs’ including ‘child care, early learning and parent and family support services’. They are to ‘be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems’ and ‘community engagement ... is integral to their successful implementation’ (COAG, 2009c: 4).

The official objective of the BBF program does not adequately reflect the goals and aspirations that underpin BBFs. It is ‘to provide access to childcare in communities where mainstream or conventional childcare services are not available or viable, and where there is a need for culturally competent services, in particular Indigenous focused services’ (ANAO, 2010: 39). In light of Australia’s new policy agenda around ECEC and measures to ‘close the gap’, it is time to revise the objective. A new program objective should address the following issues:

1. The current objective defines services by what they are *not* (i.e. not ‘mainstream’, not ‘conventional’) rather than what they *are*.
2. The BBFs and ACFCs are mainstream services for the communities they serve. They provide far more than ‘childcare’ and the wording of a revised program objective should recognize this.
3. The focus on ‘childcare’ is out of step with Australia’s current policy emphasis on the integration of education and care.
4. Appropriately resourced high quality early education should be a core offering in all Commonwealth funded ECEC services.
5. The objective implies that ‘culturally competent’ services are only required outside the mainstream whereas every service in Australia should be ‘culturally competent’.

The new objective should recognise that the BBFs and ACFCs are mainstream services for the communities they serve and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the right to maintain their cultural identity within early childhood settings. The wording below is offered as a suggestion and is not intended to be prescriptive.

Proposed objective

To work with local communities to provide integrated child, family and community centred services that offer flexible supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, rural and remote children and their families. A core offering of all services should be quality early learning for preschool children, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and delivered in a way that is culturally safe, respectful of local traditions and community-controlled.

The objective is intended to complement the funding model outlined below and to respect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family support services. Such diversity is essential if services are truly to respond to local needs. Neither the objective nor the funding models are intended to promote any particular service model, or to prescribe the elements that services should include.

The model is designed to support a range of integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family support services including mobile services that do not operate out of a building or centre. It provides a platform for funding mobile services and playgroups that play a vital role in some remote areas characterised by large distances and low population density. The second would apply to services for rural/remote areas and/or mobile children's services. Like the populations in which they are embedded, these services have diverse needs, and are not amenable to a single 'model'. Due to factors such as their size, location, community context and opening hours they have different needs to centres such as MACS, ACFCs, preschool and long day care centres, and therefore require a different model.

Crucially, the model is not only about funding. Services funded under this umbrella would be required to incorporate and express certain fundamental values in order to operate successfully.

a) Incorporation of identity and culture

The service acknowledges, affirms, incorporates and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture – particularly the culture of the local area – in all that they do. The service incorporates culture on an everyday, incidental basis by focusing on developing children's identity, sense of belonging and pride within their community, family and culture.

b) Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities

The service acknowledges that children's development cannot be viewed in isolation, but is intimately connected with the development, strength and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities. The ability of the service to assist in strengthening families and the community through support and capacity development is therefore integral to helping grow up strong children. The focus is also clearly on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

c) Community controlled governance

The service governance model supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and ownership, incorporating active participation of and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

d) Strengths based, quality service provision

The service builds on existing family and community strengths and expertise, recognising their unique qualities and context. It uses local cultures and languages to develop children's and families' capacity, confidence and pride. It recognises and values quality within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services – which may look different to quality in non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood and family services.

e) Holistic and responsive to community needs

The service seeks to cater for each child's unique developmental needs as part of an integrated approach to the program. A range of services beyond child care and development programs, including health, family support and capacity building, nutrition and early intervention, are also provided. Programs and approaches are targeted to the specific needs and context of their local community. This involves the capacity to adapt to short-term needs and/or changing community dynamics.

f) Community not service focused

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are about meeting the needs of *all* children in the community. Services do not focus solely on children attending the service but seek to reach all children who may be in need in the community. This is achieved, for example, through outreach, mobile services, and provision of care to children visiting the community. This 'community approach' to child care is consistent with a 'traditional' Indigenous approach. This principle is supported within the National Early Childhood Development Strategy, which states that a key element of a responsive early childhood services is 'active service outreach into the community'.

The service also values and fosters its role as a community development organisation. It works to build a stronger community through nurturing strong, positive local leadership and an enabled and skilled local workforce, encouraging community ownership of and engagement with services, fostering a sense of belonging for families and the community with the service acting as a 'gathering place', and supporting community and family capacity as outlined in (a).

g) Support for learning and information-sharing in and across sectors, and innovation

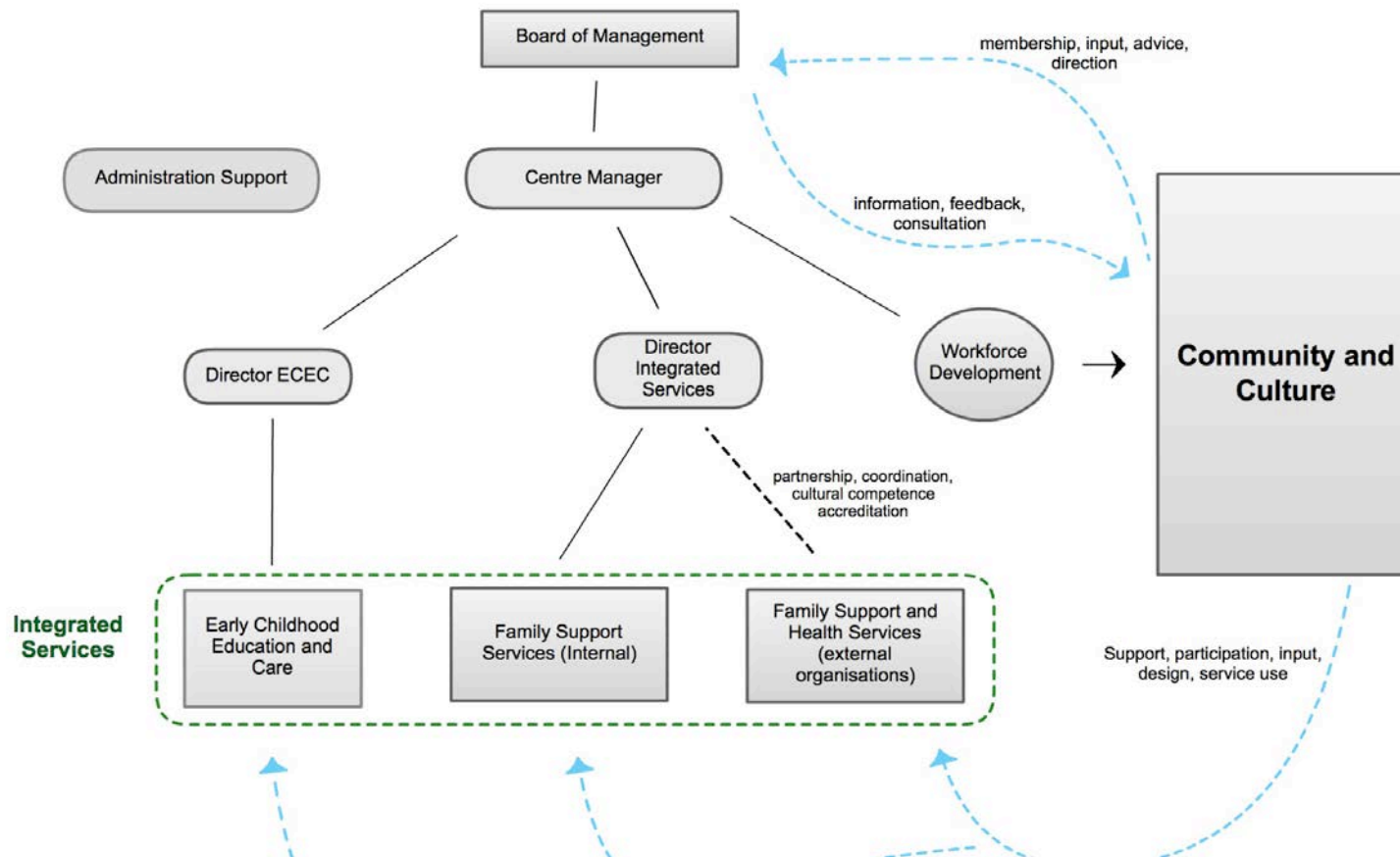
Ongoing learning within an early childhood service means that educators and staff 'become co-learners with children, families and communities, and value the continuity and richness of local knowledge shared by community members, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders'. This involves educators working within a cycle of reflection in which current practices are examined, outcomes reviewed and new ideas generated.

h) Sustainability

Services must be supported by sustainable foundations, encompassing:

- i. ***Local workforce development:*** service designs enable capacity building for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations. Training and workforce development for local community members are central in ensuring a skilled, qualified, long-term and culturally appropriate workforce who understand the local culture and community.
- ii. ***Adequate long term funding:*** Planning for sustainable, long-term funding is crucial to ensure ongoing, viable service delivery, community ownership and to facilitate and foster community planning in the long-term. Funding bodies must make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery (and that) Government is up-front and transparent about future funding arrangements.
- iii. ***Operational structures and systems that are determined by services and respond to service context:*** To be able to respond to and engage with children and families requires flexibility within funding and administrative arrangements. Flexible frameworks and service contracts to enable local service design that reflects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations, and responds to children and family needs.
- iv. ***Ownership or long-term control of land and building:*** Ownership or long-term control (i.e. a minimum 50 year lease) of the land and building from which a service operates is crucial for the stability and sustainability of a service. This supports self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and enables services to design and implement long-term program and service delivery.

MODEL 1: Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood and Family Support Service



Components and associated resources

The components are not intended to limit services to providing particular services, or prevent them from providing other features uniquely designed for their own local context. Instead, it is intended to *illustrate* the components of an effective integrated early childhood service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The components of any particular service would need to be based on the needs identified within the relevant community.

No.	Components	Resource inputs for a service operating for 50 weeks p/a, 5 days per week, 8am – 6pm.
1.	Strong, holistic service ➤ Strong governance – community control and community driven ➤ Accountability to community ➤ Long-term financial sustainability ➤ Compliance with relevant laws and funding agreements, and ensuring these are appropriate to community context ➤ Ongoing learning & PD ➤ Capacity building for local staff	Allocation of: ➤ 12 days p/a per staff member funded for professional development, staff wellbeing, strategic service planning (as opposed to weekly) and ongoing learning activities – as well as backfill whilst staff are participating in such events. ➤ Advisory Board (approximately 6-8 members) ○ Associated costs (i.e. catering, printing) for 3 x community forums p/a ○ Associated costs (i.e. catering, printing) for 12 x Advisory Board meetings p/a ○ 2 professional development sessions per year (for approximately 6-8 people) ➤ Rent (nb: this will vary according to each location) ➤ Utilities ➤ Repairs/maintenance and waste disposal ➤ Administrative expenses (including accounting, auditing, advertising, bank fees, staff amenities, Fringe Benefits tax, communications, IT, public liability and professional indemnity, insurance, licensing fees, management costs, office supplies, postage, printing, travel) ➤ Medical/first aid supplies ➤ Centre Manager ➤ Unqualified trainees ➤ Administrative assistant ➤ Director ECEC ➤ Director Integrated Family Services ➤ Bus driver/maintenance worker (as per Component 6)

		➤ Cleaner
2.	Parenting roles and supports and relationships	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker
3.	Information and referrals	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker
4.	Early years learning program (0-5)	➤ Director ECEC ➤ Pedagogical leader (role held either by Director ECEC or additional teacher) ➤ Qualified staff as per ratios, including additional staff (as per Table 2 below) ➤ Higher staff-child ratios (as per Table 2 below) ➤ Resources (art/craft supplies, learning resources, etc.) ➤ Meals (including breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch) (as per Component 7 below)
5.	Culture ➤ Reflects culture and uses language ➤ Embraces local cultural beliefs and practices ➤ Develops systems, processes and programs relevant to local Aboriginal families (including administration, fee setting and collection and management) ➤ Community involved in planning for service	➤ Budgetary allocation for annual sum for service to use on activities related to culture Suggested amount: \$20,000 p/a ➤ Advisory Board (as per Component 1) This amount is to be allocated as a lump sum p/a for services to use as appropriate for their context. Recognizing the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, activities services may choose to run with these funds include but are not limited to language/art/craft, music and dance sessions, visits by Elders and/or other community members, NAIDOC, NAICD or other community cultural celebrations, or the purchasing of specific cultural resources
6.	Transition to school	➤ Budgetary allocation p/a to deliver a transition program (including ECEC staff time, excursions to school, provisions for family meetings, etc. of \$10,000 p.a. ➤ Family Support Worker
7.	Access ➤ Days and times open to ensure availability when need arises	➤ Service open 50 weeks p/a, 5 days per week, 8am – 6pm ➤ Transport ○ Purchase/upgrade of 12-49 seat bus (or other vehicle, such as four-wheel drive, as

	➤ Transport service ➤ Affordable to families – access for families is the priority, with fee amount to be negotiated by each service in accordance with their local context and community	- needed by local community) ○ Conversion of vehicle to comply with child safety regulations ○ Regular maintenance ○ Depreciation ➤ Bus driver/maintenance worker (as per Component 1) ➤ Set minimum fee of \$5 per child per day, with service then given flexibility to determine whether to raise this. ➤ Meals (including breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch) (as per Component 3 above)
8.	Early intervention programs	➤ Budgetary allocation of \$10,000 p/a for service to determine how to spend (for example on particular allied health service of importance to the community that cannot be accessed for free) ➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker
9.	Intensive support and care ➤ Extra staff ➤ Provision of food	➤ Low staff ratios – see Table 2 below ➤ Provision within budget for breakfast, morning and afternoon teas, lunch ➤ Cook ➤ Nappies, hygiene supplies, etc.
10.	Outreach and family engagement ➤ To all families with young children in the community, even those whose children do not attend the early education program ➤ To children of prisoners	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker
11.	Family Support services	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker Each community will have unique family support needs, and so this model does not seek to prescribe what family supports should be funded. Component 11 is taken to include, but not be limited to, the provision of services such as: ➤ Family violence

		➤ Family counseling ➤ Maternal care ➤ In-home support ➤ Drug & alcohol ➤ Parenting groups for behavioral issues ➤ Play groups ➤ Family workers ➤ Family literacy and numeracy ➤ Support for aunties & grandparents caring for kids
12.	Community development activities	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Director ECEC ➤ Family Support Worker ➤ Budgetary allocation p/a for service to spend as they want (for e.g. NAIDOC, NAICD, community BBQs, etc.).
13.	Health services	➤ Director Integrated Services ➤ Family Support Worker Health services could include, but are not limited to, the following: ➤ Immunization ➤ Screening & development checks ➤ Maternal & infant health ➤ Speech pathology ➤ Occupational therapy
14.	Care ➤ Respite for parents	➤ Allocation of 2 places for 2 half days per week (i.e. one full day in total) for children in need, with no fees charged. As an example of this, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Child Care Association (TACCA) has cost-free places for two half-days per week to support two children from the local women's shelter.
15.	Partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations	➤ Centre Manager ➤ Director Family Support Services ➤ Director ECEC services ➤ Design/delivery of training sessions for mainstream organisations (remunerated, so does

		not need to be costed)
16.	Workforce development	➤ Centre Manager ➤ Early childhood trainees ➤ Allocated amount for trainees/educators to study for qualifications (including tuition fees, books and resources and back pay to cover staff absence whilst studying)

Remoteness allocation

An allocation for remoteness will be available for services located in areas classified as 'Remote Australia' and 'Very Remote Australia', as determined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure. The allocation is to cover elements including but not limited to:

- Higher wages and staff costs (i.e. for housing, incentive packages) to be able to provide competitive, appealing packages that compete with government contracts
- Travel time and associated costs to attend training and study
- Higher cost of food, equipment and supplies
- Higher transport costs to reach children in remote communities
- Provision of staff housing.

Staffing

The outline below shows examples of needs for 15, 30, 45 and 70 place services. These examples of service numbers are not intended to define or limit the number of families and children a service may however cater for – they are merely to be used to show an *example* of the staffing needs for different service types for costing purposes. This model recognises and supports the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities recognises that each community will have different and unique needs from their early childhood service. Note that positions are full-time unless otherwise stated (e.g. 0.5).

Table 1. Staffing for all non-early childhood education and care components

Family numbers are based on the average Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander fertility rate of 2.7 children (2011 Census, ABS).

Service size	15 place (6 families)	30 place (12 families)	45 place (17 families)	70 place (26 families)
Centre Manager	1	1	1	1
Director Integrated Services	1	1	1	1
Family Support Worker	0.5	1	1.5	2
Cook	0.5	1	1.5	2
Cleaner	0.5	0.7	1	2
Admin. staff	1	1	1.5	2
Bus driver/ maintenance worker	0.5	1	1	2
Vehicle	12 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	23 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	49 seater (or other vehicle appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)	49 seater and 12 seater (or other vehicles appropriate for local community, e.g. 4WD)

Table 2. Staffing for Components 4 (Early Years Program) and 6 (Transition to School)

Service size	15 place			30 place			45 place			70 place		
Age (months)	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above	0-24	24-36	36 & above
No. children	4	5	6	8	10	12	12	20	23	15	25	30
No. Cert III level educators			-	1	1	1	2	2	2	2	1	2
No. Diploma level educators	1	1	1	1	1	-	1	2	1	2	2	2
No. Teachers	-	-	-		1	1		1	1	1	2	2
No. unqualified trainees (not included in ratios)	1			2			3			4		
Director ECEC (not included in ratios)	1			1			1			1		
Additional teacher	1			1			2			2.5		
Additional educator (Diploma level)	-			1			0.5			1		

Fees

In regards to service fees, the fundamental priority must always be access for children and families. Services have raised two considerations:

- Services must not be forced, due to budgetary restrictions, to set their fees at a level that deters or prevents families from accessing the service. Fees must be set by the service itself according to the local context; but
- Having no fees is not an appropriate option for all services. Fees – however small - can be an important part of demonstrating to parents/carers the value of early childhood services, and raising parents'/carers' self-esteem in regards to their role to contribute to their children's development.

The proposed solution is that services raise a proportion of the service budget (say, 5%) with the balance funded by Government. Services could raise funds through a variety of methods including fees, fundraising and provision of in-kind services. If the service were not able to raise the required 5% in a given year, children would not be penalised by closure of the service. The ultimate priority must be to keep services open and to keep children, families and communities connected. The viability of a range of services – not only long day care – needs further exploration.

MODEL 2: Flexible and mobile support for remote and isolated children and families

This model would be appropriate for services that do not necessarily include a 'bricks and mortar' structure, such as mobile playgroups, 'roving preschools' and other services that go to children and families rather than operating from fixed premises. Such services require highly flexible funding, which would usually have an early childhood hub or space as a foundation. The hub might be a physical space, a virtual space or even a vehicle, which is used to deliver early childhood services and parenting support. Other services can be aligned with this 'hub', depending on community needs, wishes and context.

Components

The services offered might include any combination of the following programs and features as well as others not listed here:

- Transport
- Nutrition program
- Respite care services
- Family space – for example for families and children to shower, have breakfast etc. before school or work
- Parenting/family support
- Allied health services
- Family/parent educational programs

Fees

Due to the hours they operate (often non-regular hours/days), and the communities they operate in, fees at services such as these can vary from \$0-10 dollars per day. Considerable thought therefore needs to be given to the extent to which they can charge fees, or raise finances themselves.

Staffing

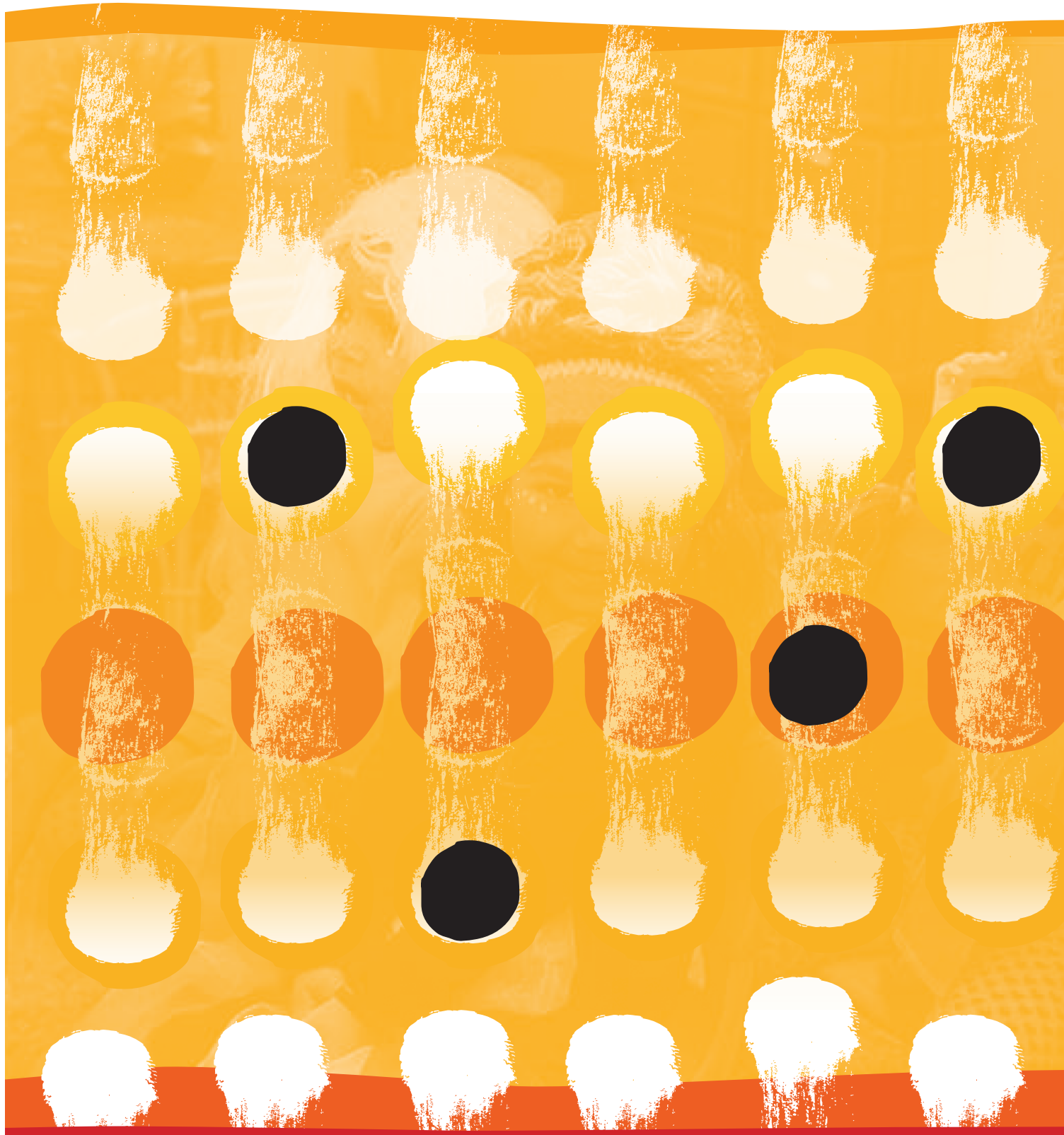
Recruiting sufficient numbers of appropriately qualified staff is a huge challenge for these types of services, particularly those operating in remote areas (which face the additional burden of staff housing). Child-to-educator ratios (both for numbers and for qualification levels) can be challenging, and often impossible, to comply with. To ensure that these centres can remain open, flexibility is essential.

REFERENCES

- ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2006). *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey, Summary Results*, Cat. no. 4228.0, Canberra
- ANAO (Australian National Audit Office) (2010). Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches, Audit Report No. 8, 2010-11
- Armstrong, S., Buckley, S., Lonsdale, M., Milgate, G., Bennetts Kneebone, L., Cook, L. and Skelton, F. (2012). *Starting School: A strengths-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*, A report prepared by the Australian Council for Educational Research, for the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Australian Government (2013). *Budget measures: budget paper no. 2, 2013-14*. Canberra: Treasury.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011). *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: An overview*. Canberra: AIHW.
- Baxter, J. and Hand, K. (2013). *Access to Early Childhood Education in Australia*. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Baxter, J., Gray, M. and Hayes, A. (2011). *Families in regional, rural and remote Australia*. AIFS Fact Sheet.
- Bowes, J. and Kitson, R. (2011). *Child Care Choices of Indigenous Families*, Research Report to the NSW Department of Human Services.
- Brennan, D. (1998). *The Politics of Australian Child Care*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Brennan, D., Cass, B., Flaxman, S., Hill, P., Jenkins, McHugh, M., B., Purcal, C. and valentine, k. (2013). *Grandparents Raising Grandchildren: Towards recognition, respect and reward*. SPRC Report 14/13, Sydney: UNSW.
- Carbone, S., Fraser, A., Ramburuth, R. and Neims, L. (2004). *Breaking Cycles, Building Futures. Promoting inclusion of vulnerable families in antenatal and universal early childhood services: A report on the first three stage of the project*. Melbourne: Victorian Department of Human Services.
- CCC (Community Child Care, Victoria). (2013). *Report to Gippsland and East Gippsland Aboriginal Co-operative*.
- Centre for Community Child Health and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research (2009). *A Snapshot of Early Childhood Development in Australia – AEDI National Report 2009*, Australian Government, Canberra.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2008). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement: Closing the Gap*. Canberra: COAG.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009a). *Investing in the Early Years*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009b). *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2009c). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Conti, G. and Heckman, J. (2012). *The Economics of Child Well-Being*. National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper Series, Working Paper 18466.

- DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The early years learning framework for Australia*, Canberra.
- DEEWR (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) (2012). *Quality Early Childhood Education and Care for Children in Regional, Remote and Indigenous Communities. Review of the Budget Based Funding Program*.
- Elliott, A., Fasoli, L. & Nutton, G. (2009). *Early Childhood Services Audit Report*. Northern Territory Department of Education & Training, Darwin.
- Fasoli, L. with Benbow, R., Deveraux, K., Falk, I., Harris, R., James, R., Johns, V., Preece, C. and Railton, K. (2004). *"Both Ways" Children's Services Project*, Darwin: Batchelor Press.
- Gooda, M. (2011). (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner). *Social Justice Report 2011*. Sydney, Australian Human Rights Commission.
- Goodstart Early Learning (2012). *Submission to Review of Budget Based Funded Services Program*. Brisbane.
- Harrison, L. and Murray, E. (2012). 'Interconnections among Family, Childcare and Education', in Bowes, J., Grace, R., and Hodge, K. (eds). *Children, Families and Communities. Contexts and Consequences*, Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 117-141.
- Harrison, L., Goldfeld, Metcalfe, E. and Moore, T. (2012a) *Early learning programs that promote children's developmental and educational outcomes*, Resource sheet no. 15, Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australian Institute of Family Studies.
- Hutchins, T., Martin, K., Saggars, S. and Sims, M. (2007). 'Indigenous early learning and care', Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth. http://www.aracy.org.au/publicationDocuments/TOP_Indigenous_Early_Learning_and_Care_2007.pdf
- Karvelas, P. (2012b). 'Taxpayers fund childcare rebate for 130 uber-rich', *The Australian*, 12 April 2012.
- Karvelas, P. (2012a). 'More rich families get childcare rebate', *The Australian*, 4 April.
- Lee-Hammond, L. (2013). 'Integrated services for Aboriginal children and families'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 38 (1), 55-64.
- Mann, D. (2012) Walking together. A model of social inclusion that engages Aboriginal families, and shows how listening to their voices increases Aboriginal access to preschools. Unpublished paper.
- Mann, D., Knight, S. and Thomson, J. (2011). *Aboriginal access to preschool: What attracts and retains Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in preschools?* Sydney: SDN Children's Services.
- MCEECDYA (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs) (2010). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*, Carlton, Victoria: MCEECDYA.
- MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs) (2009). *Four-Year Plan 2009-2012. A companion document for the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, Melbourne: MCEETYA.

- McLachlan, R. Gilfillan, G. and Gordon, J. (2013). *Deep and Persistent Disadvantage in Australia*, revd., Productivity Commission Staff Working Paper, Canberra.
- McRae, D., Ainsworth, G., Hughes, P., Price, K. Rowland, M. and Warhurst, J. (2010). *What works: The work program. Improving outcomes for Indigenous students: The workbook*. (3rd ed.). Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.
- Moore, T. (2009). *The Inclusion Agenda in Early Childhood Services: Evidence, Policy and Practice*, Melbourne: Centre for Community Child Health.
- Moore, T. and Skinner, A. (2013). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Paddington: The Benevolent Society.
- Moran, D. (2012). Galiwin'ku and Yirrkala Childcare Centres (East Arnhem Shire Council), Proposed outline of transition from BBF to CCB model.
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) (2006). *OECD Starting Strong*. Paris, OECD, 2006
- Pordes Bowers, A. and Strelitz, J. with Allen, J. and Donkin, A., (2012). *An Equal Start: Improving outcomes in Children's Centres: The Evidence Review*, London: UCL Institute of Health Equity.
- Productivity Commission (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce*. Research Report. Melbourne.
- Productivity Commission (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key indicators 2011*. Canberra: Productivity Commission, 2011
- Productivity Commission (2013). *Review of Government Services*. Canberra: Productivity Commission.
- Shepherd, C. and Walker, R. (2008). *Engaging Indigenous Families in Preparing Children for School*, Perth: Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth.
- SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) (2013). *Future Directions of the Federal Budget Based Funding Program*. Workshop Report. Melbourne: SNAICC.
- SNAICC (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care) (2012). *Submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Regional, Remote and Indigenous Communities Review of the Budget Based Funding Program*. Melbourne: SNAICC.
- Taylor, A. J. (2011). 'Coming, ready or not: Aboriginal children's transition to school in urban Australia and the policy push'. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 19 (2).
- Trudgett, M. and Grace, R. (2011). Engaging with Early Childhood Education and Care Services: The perspectives of Indigenous Australian mothers and their young children. *Kulumun: Journal of the Wollotuka Institute*, 1 (1), 15.36.
- UNICEF (2006). *A Guide to General Comment 7: 'Implementing Child Rights in Early Childhood*. The Hague: Bernard van Leer Foundation.
- Urbis (2012). *Evaluation of the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education: Annual Progress Report 2011*. Sydney.
- Williams, R. (2008). 'Cultural safety; what does it mean for our work practice?' *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, 23 (2), 213-214



Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care

www.snaicc.org.au



Early Years PATHWAYS

– positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children

A 10 year plan for integrated child and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

The program would:

- support demonstrated evidence based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services currently funded under the Budget Based Funding (BBF) program;
- support the 38 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres (ACFCs); and
- establish at least 40 new services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities every three years.

WHY INVEST IN *Early Years* PATHWAYS?



FIRST, evidence clearly demonstrates that the early years of a child's life are a critical predictor of transition to school, as well as future education, health, development and wellbeing outcomes, particularly for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Long term randomised trials show particular benefit from age zero to three.

SECONDLY, where they exist, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and family services are a bedrock of their community. These services are a community development engine that nurture and protect children, and support families to raise their children strong, healthy and proud of who they are. There are also significant 'flow-on' impacts of such services in Indigenous communities to local workforce development, local governance, leadership, family strengths and stability, health and community empowerment.

THIRDLY, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face persistent disadvantage as a result of a variety of historical and ongoing factors. As a consequence, children consistently achieve lower educational, health and wellbeing outcomes. This is exemplified by the 2012 Australian Early Development Index findings that 43.2% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are developmentally vulnerable, twice the rate of non-Indigenous children. This means nearly half Indigenous children EVERY year are developmentally vulnerable. This has significant ongoing consequences for education, health, child protection, justice, welfare, housing and employment.

FOURTH, integrated early childhood development programs hold great potential for change. Environments that encourage and support optimal early childhood development greatly increase the likelihood of a successful transition to school; positive learning outcomes at school; and enhanced education, employment and health (Australian Early Development Index, 2012). Evidence also confirms that engagement in early childhood education and support reduces risk of harm to a child, and subsequent involvement with statutory child protection authorities, as well as reductions in remedial services and criminal behavior in the longer term.

"There is ... compelling international evidence about the returns on investment in early childhood services for children from disadvantaged backgrounds, including the work of Nobel Laureate James Heckman"

(Council of Australian Governments) (2009) *National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education*. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

The time for action is now.

A crisis – or opportunity - looms with National Partnership Agreement funding ending in June 2014 and a review of the BBF program underway. With minimal investment, this proposal enables the Government to significantly advance its Closing the Gap agenda to see Indigenous children across the country, physically, emotionally and developmentally ready for the challenge of school.



THE NEED FOR CHANGE

The Budget Based Funding program is dramatically under resourced and is beyond capacity. The \$63 million annual BBF program commitment to support non-mainstream early years development compared with the \$6 billion spending on mainstream early childhood education and care, is clearly inadequate. This equates to around \$178,000 per service, in comparison to an operating budget of \$800,000 to \$1,000,000 for a 40-place long day care centre in a major city (with parent fees).

This has implications for: attracting and maintaining qualified staff and appropriate infrastructure; number of children the services can support; ability to service the high percentage of additional needs children; and the provision of the essential programs within

the community. The program is now under review, with services provided one year further funding until June 2014.

One-off funding was provided in 2009 under the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development, 2008, (NPAIECD) to start to redress the dearth of services for children in Indigenous communities. This funding ends in June 2014, and the 38 integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres developed will likely be moved to the mainstream funding model. This is despite a Government report recently confirming that this is not a feasible option.

There is a clear need for holistic, community controlled early childhood development services that prioritise

those children most in need. Programs and services focused on strengths-based, quality, culturally appropriate programs can make change happen.

The evidence for change is clearly supported by the national policy framework. The National Indigenous Reform Agenda, 2008, along with a series of other early years instruments, provide a clear principled basis for a holistic, integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years program that is driven by parents and communities, adequately resourced over time, and accessible (physically and culturally) to communities.

What is missing is an appropriate program for implementation of the national policy framework.

PROPOSED MODEL

More detailed information is contained in D. Brennan (2013) *Joining the Dots, Program and Funding Options for Integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's services*.

The program would be based on clear and principled program criteria and a new program objective.

It would support only evidence based education and care models with clear indicators for outcomes for children. This includes playgroups, mobile services or long day care centres, based on capacity and needs of the local community, as well as integrated service support to children and families. Integrated services include: health; additional needs; parenting skills; family outreach; transition to school;

counseling; family violence; drug and alcohol support; and related programs.

Consultations with services and review of the evidence suggests a tripartite funding structure, with:

- \$10,000 per child (the same of maximum Child Care Benefit in mainstream services) to be allocated to services based on number of licensed places;
- 5% raised by services, whether through fees, in-kind support, fundraising or rebate; and
- Foundation funding for critical integrated service supports and workforce development needs.

"I don't think we've ever thought this place is about strengthening just children, this place is about building a stronger community."

Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre



For more information contact Frank Hytten or Emma Sydenham on 03 9489 8099 or visit

www.snaicc.org.au

COST

An estimated \$200 million annually. This includes the existing \$63million BBF program and unspent funding under NPAIECD.

"The BBFs and ACFCs are bedrock services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around Australia. They deliver services in flexible, locally determined ways that match community needs and build on community strengths ... they have tremendous potential to help 'close the gap' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children." Brennan, D (2013)



Bringing the services to life!

Wynbring Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS)

Whyalla Stuart, South Australia

We are a valuable part of the community, we provide a service that employs local Aboriginal people, and are an advocate for the families that we serve

In the past year, 74 children were enrolled at Wynbring Jida MACS, with 70% identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Wynbring Jida employs 10 Aboriginal staff, with four new or returning into the workforce.

Wynbring Jida offers long day care, as well as a *Lets Read* and *Think Feet First* program. Previously, there was a bus service to support families, however due to financial constraints this is no longer operating. Wynbring Jida work closely with Nunyara Aboriginal Health Service to support families with immunisations, maternal and child health checks, and any areas of development of concern. In the past year, approximately 24 children participated in these checks. Wynbring Jida also refers families to other specialist support, like speech therapy.

In the past year:

- 9 children have additional needs, including visual impairment, language/speech and physical delays;
- 8 children have been referred to the special care unit for additional support;
- 6 children have been referred for speech therapy;
- 2 children have been referred to occupational therapy;
- 1 family to grief counselling;
- 3 families to financial support;
- 4 families to respite care;
- 4 mothers to maternal care;
- 8 families have been provided with housing support;
- 5 children were involved in an out of home care placement; and
- 10 child protection notifications were made.

Wynbring Jida is the longest community-run Aboriginal service in Whyalla Stuart.

It is a respected and valued part of the community, which is imperative to relationships with families. Current funding does not cover basic costs of service operation, nor the development of new needed programs at the centre.

Yappera Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Service (MACS)

Melbourne, Vic

In 2012, 74 children, all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, were enrolled at Yappera. 12 staff are Aboriginal, with one quarter new to the workforce or returning to the workforce.

Yappera runs a range of childcare programs, including: long day care; early start (family grouping); early start and preschool kindergartens; and two school holiday programs. The kindergarten programs have a pick up and drop off service, and 11 new families have joined the service through outreach. Nutrition, physical activity, drama, science, cultural, traditional dance, and parenting/carer programs and workshops are also offered at no additional cost.

In the past year,

- 58 children have participated in health checks, including audiology, optometry, paediatric assessments, dental, immunisations, and general health checks.
- Specialist health services have also been sourced for children, namely speech therapy, occupational therapy and cognitive/developmental support.
- several children with additional needs, including language/speech delays, cognitive delays, social/emotional delays and Autism spectrum disorder, have received additional support.
- 12 children were identified as requiring further assessment;

- 9 referrals were made for families to services including specialist children's services, counselling, family violence support, maternal care and health,
- 13 children have child protection involvement and 7 were in an out of home care placement.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture underpins all program planning, delivery and learning at Yappera, in recognition that children learn best with a strong connection to culture and robust support network of family and community. Family are considered to be the primary educators of children and with 50% of staff being local Aboriginal community members, a sense of trust between families and the service underpins its strong outcomes.

Every year, Yappera experiences significant budget gaps between received grants and projected expenditure. In the 2012/2013 financial year, DEEWR funding received was \$615,0590. Projected salaries alone for this period were \$698,894. Yappera has raised fees, however the collection rate is only 50 – 70%. Despite fees, \$9500 fundraising monies and DEEWR wage incentives, a huge budget shortfall remains.

Yarrabah PCYC School Age Care

Yarrabah, QLD

Yarrabah PCYC School Age Care opened in 1998 as a drop-in centre and in 2003, with BBF funding it commenced vacation and after-school care. Yarrabah was transitioned to mainstream child care benefit (CCB) funding in 2005. Since then, numbers have reduced from 130-150 children attending daily to 40-50 children.

Many children have become ineligible under CCB, because of:

- Inconsistencies between a child and carer's Centrelink details and Yarrabah's records (often caused by misspelt names or incorrect birthdates);
- Lapsed immunisation or missing immunisation records;
- Children living with multiple families – meaning that the adult claiming child support for the child changes frequently without information being passed on to Yarrabah; and
- Exceeding allowable absences for the year.

This has left Yarrabah unable to claim CCB for these children.

Based on the community context, Yarrabah PCYC does not charge fees. Although 45 kilometers from Cairns, Yarrabah is an isolated community with a 100% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community with high unemployment and low personal wealth. Most families do not have their own transport, and so obtaining and sustaining work outside the community is challenging. The centre's management know that to charge even minimal fees would deter almost all families from sending children to the centre.

Other consequences of the reduced income from the shift to mainstream CCB funding have been:

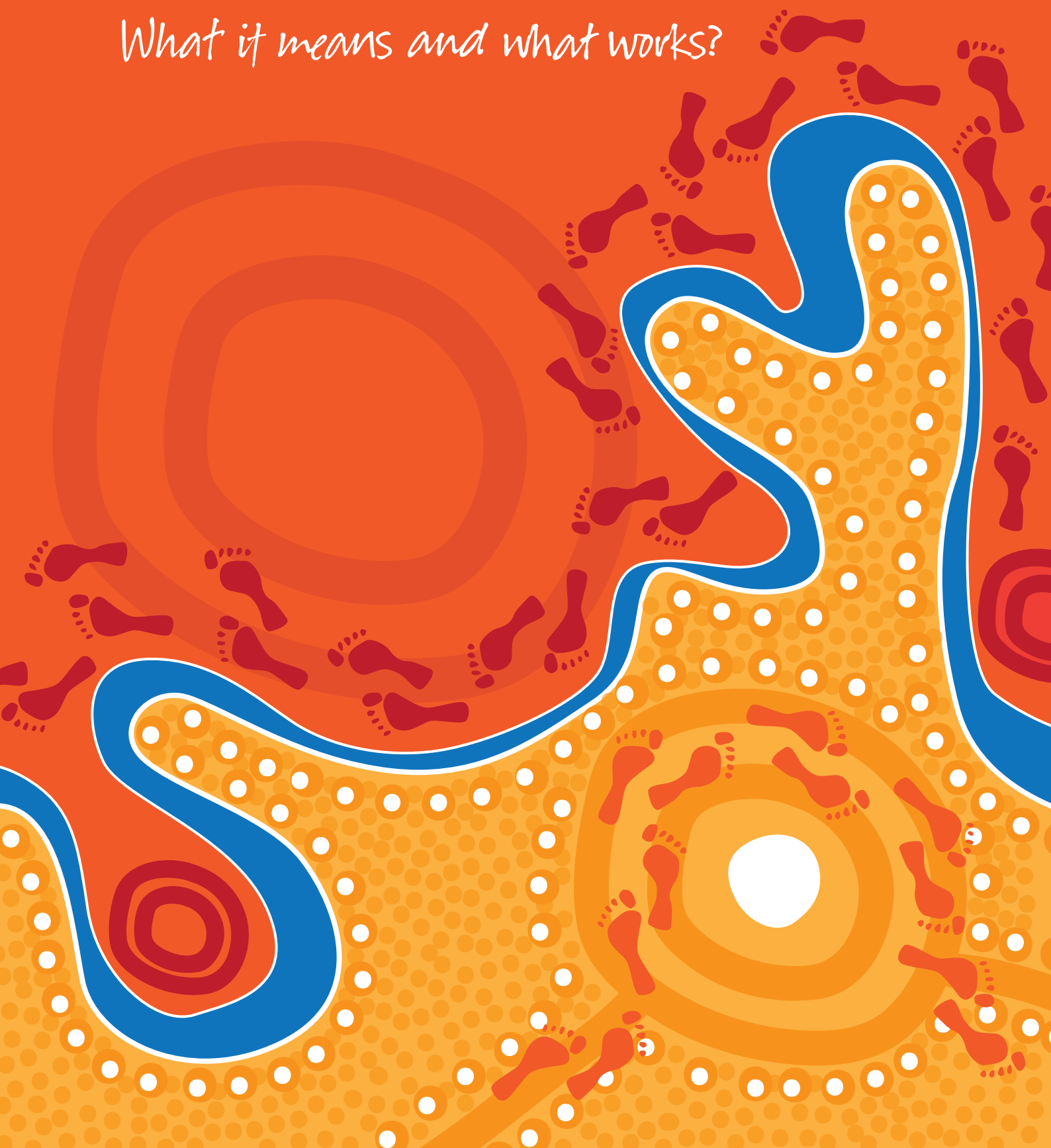
- staff cuts;
- reduction in opening hours;
- cut backs to program; and
- sale of their larger bus, relying now on one small bus to pick up and drop children.

Yarrabah still experiences a \$300,000 deficit between funding received and funding required to operate. The centre is currently heavily subsidised by the Queensland PCYC Head Office. Whilst Yarrabah does apply for and receives some grant funding, most grants are not available for operational funding, which is the most pressing need. Yarrabah has sought in many ways to counter these challenges. Since 2006 Yarrabah has run two annual open days to sign up new children and correct enrolment and Centrelink details for enrolled children. However, the higher numbers of children registered under CCB quickly fades.

Yarrabah PCYC operates to provide disadvantaged children with a safe, secure and supervised environment in which they can participate in a range of enriching and stimulating activities. Yarrabah is the only service within the community that provides after-school and vacation care. The service cannot however continue operating on the current model.



SUPPORTING TRANSITION to School for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: *What it means and what works?*





Researched and drafted by:

Holly Mason-White, Policy Officer, SNAICC

With input from SNAICC National Executive members, Sharron Williams, Dawn Wallam, Garry Matthews and Geraldine Atkinson, and SNAICC staff, Emma Sydenham and Susan Salmon.

External reviews by Sue Dockett, Charles Sturt University, and Myfanwy McDonald, Murdoch Children's Research Institute. SNAICC acknowledges their time and expertise in reviewing this paper. SNAICC greatly appreciates their support.

Cover design: Mazart Design Studio

Layout: Deadly Design

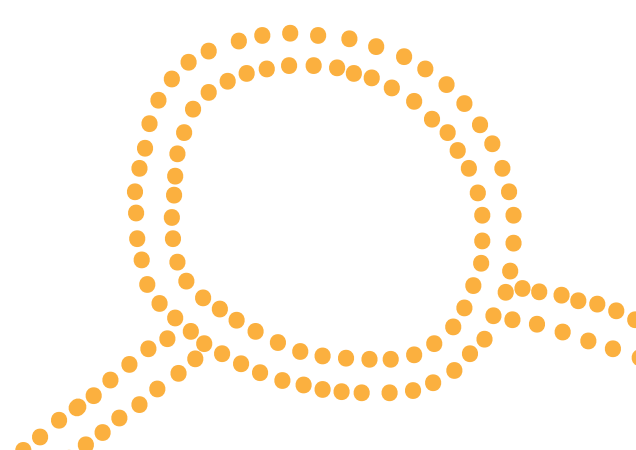
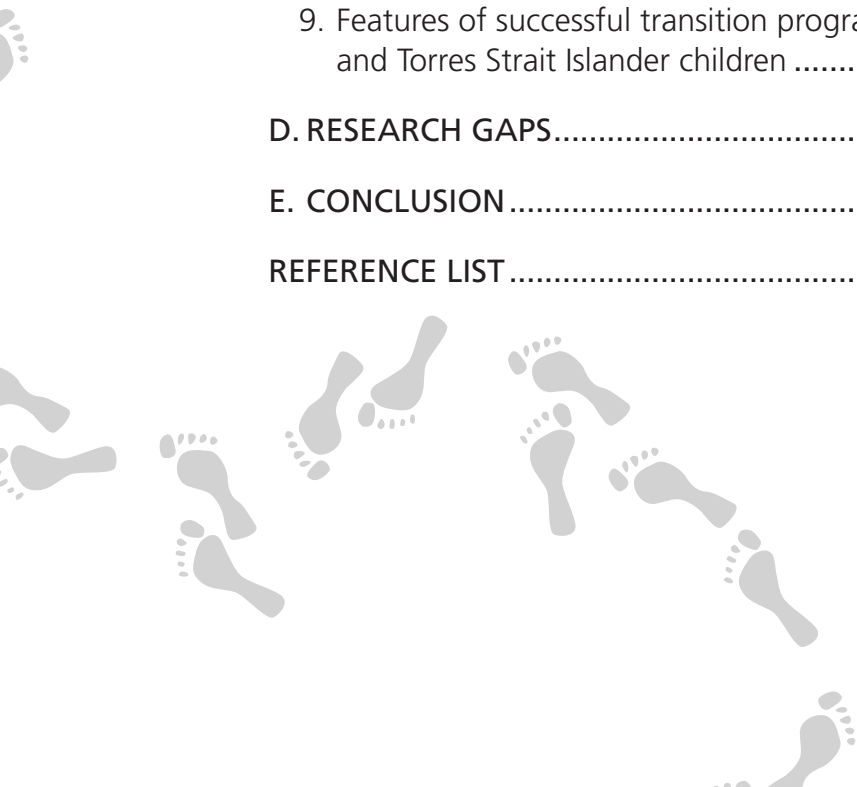
SNAICC copyright June 2013

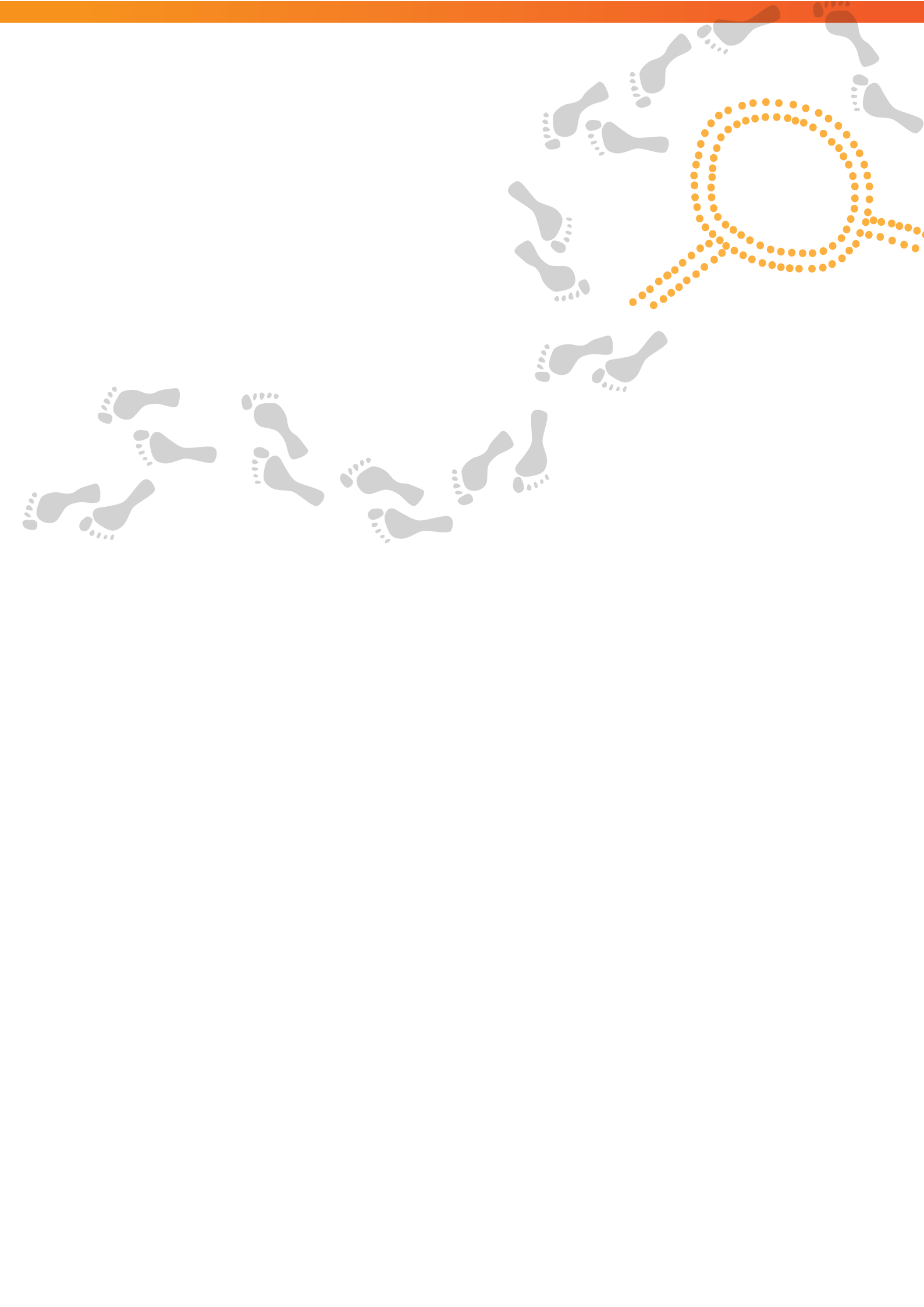
SNAICC also thanks the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations for the funding support to conduct this research. The views in this publication do not necessarily represent those of the Australian Government.



TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....	3
A. INTRODUCTION.....	5
B. METHODOLOGY.....	7
C. KEY THEMES.....	9
1. Understanding school transition	9
2. The importance of a successful transition	10
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' expectations and hopes of the early years and the transition to school.....	12
4. Ready schools	15
5. Ready communities	26
6. Ready families	27
7. Ready services	29
8. Ready children.....	30
9. Features of successful transition programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children	34
D. RESEARCH GAPS.....	39
E. CONCLUSION.....	41
REFERENCE LIST	46





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Education is a key strategy through which to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to overcome generational disadvantage. Every child begins their schooling life with a transition from home or an early childhood centre to pre- or primary school. The experience of this transition period for a child and their family is crucial in providing a foundation for future schooling life and education outcomes.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children this transition period presents significant challenges, but also opportunities. Notably, a successful transition can facilitate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's engagement with the school community and environment, enabling them to experience a range of positive academic, developmental, physical, socio-emotional and wellbeing outcomes. It can also support and encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to engage with their children's education, and promote a sense of inclusion amongst children and families within the school environment.

For these outcomes to be achieved however, evidence indicates that particular attention is required to the holistic engagement of multiple stakeholders including children, families, communities, schools and early childhood services. Furthermore, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the importance of applying a cultural lens to all aspects of the transition process is critical.

A review of Australian literature on successful school transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children confirms that a series of key features are essential:

- relationship building and engagement with a range of stakeholders;
- high quality programs and experiences;
- strengths-based approaches;
- flexibility;
- cultural competence; and
- involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

In keeping with contemporary approaches to school transition, this review views five 'dimensions' as important for positive school transitions: ready

schools; ready services; ready communities; ready families; and ready children. Together these elements provide a holistic foundation for children's transition to school that utilises the range of necessary supports and stakeholders that are crucial to children's early development.

Research on these five different dimensions is of varying breadth and quality, and there remain significant research gaps. There are strong commonalities emerging, however, indicating the following:

- The key features of **ready schools** are:
 - school and family relationships;
 - welcoming and inclusive school environments;
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and presence;
 - positive relationships between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
 - cultural competence;
 - high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by all involved in transition; and
 - valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and ways of learning
- Comprehensive understanding of **ready early childhood services** is a knowledge gap. It is well understood, however, that these services play a vital role in preparing children for school in terms of academic skills and adaptation to a school environment. Key to this are positive relationships between early childhood education and care professionals, and teachers.
- Current thinking proposes that **ready communities** provide safe, supportive and nurturing environments for children to transition. Little research has examined this however within the Australian - and specifically within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander - context. Some preliminary findings indicate that community leadership and ownership of early childhood services is important.
- In regards to **ready families**, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families possess qualities that can support their children's transition to school, but they may also experience a range of barriers in engaging with schools during the

early years and the transition process. Transition programs need to address these barriers and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are able to engage both in the process of preparing their children for school, and also with the school environment and educational process.

- The meaning of the term **ready children** reflects a broad holistic capacity, encompassing a range of developmental, academic, socio-emotional and physical skills and qualities that can enable children to smoothly transition to school. Current assessment measures are criticised for being too narrow in their assessment criteria, and for being culturally inappropriate. A strengths-based approach to evaluating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's readiness for school is needed, to appreciate and acknowledge the qualities and skills (including language skills) that they bring to school.

In summary, the paper proposes that to be effective, current approaches to school transition must recognise that transition requires a multidimensional focus, with a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's development and learning, applying a cultural lens, and targeting the five dimensions of 'readiness'.





A. INTRODUCTION

Beginning school is a key transition phase within early childhood. Children and families' first experiences with school have significant implications for educational and broader developmental outcomes.¹ This is accentuated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, who experience higher vulnerability and exclusion in early childhood, including particularly low enrolment and attendance rates in preschool and early childhood programs.² Current research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children frequently begin school demonstrating poorer indicators of development in areas such as literacy and numeracy than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.³ For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, the transition to school will set the pattern for inclusion or exclusion, and thus engagement or non-participation, within mainstream education for that child's schooling life.⁴

Myriad challenges exist within the transition process, not least being the cultural competence of the 'receiving' school and how it facilitates relationships with the child, their family and community. Countering this, however, we also know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children begin school equipped with a wealth of strengths, knowledge and experiences.⁵ With careful nurturing, these can be critical building blocks from which to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the transition process and build a positive foundation for their future education.

Key to this is understanding that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children must make a significant shift in cultural contexts when moving into mainstream schools.⁶ For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, school is an "unfamiliar place" and one that is socially, culturally and physically very different to their home environments.⁷ Even for those children attending early childhood services, school can still represent a new environment with potentially different structural and programmatic approaches.⁸ It is imperative that schools apply a strengths-based approach to take into account the significant knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children already have, and support them to "learn

'both ways' and confidently participate in and contribute to two worlds."⁹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's experiences of the transition to school therefore poses both unique challenges and opportunities, and requires the application of a culturally competent approach.

This literature review seeks to identify and explore what we know about supporting successful transitions to school for Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait Islander children.

A successful transition is defined in this context as one that:

- enables children to feel comfortable, connected and engaged with their school environment and community;
- facilitates readiness to achieve early learning outcomes; and
- promotes, amongst parents and families, a feeling of engagement in the school experience and school community.

Current thinking frames the transition to school within the ecological theory of child development, where a child's development is contextualised within a series of relationships that form the child's environment. These relationships are structured within layers, from the child's immediate family outwards through the community, school, wider society and to global structures¹⁰. Framed within this model, the transition to school is therefore conceptualised as the confluence of a system of interconnected contexts and relationships¹¹.

Successful transitions are therefore supported by the application of a multidimensional approach to transition that takes into account these relationships and influences. Within this ecological model of transition five corresponding dimensions of 'readiness' - ready schools, communities, families, early childhood services, and children - are all fostered and supported. Such a holistic perspective views transition as a dynamic, multi-stakeholder, long-term process, moving away from traditional notions of 'school readiness' as a quality that largely rests with the child.



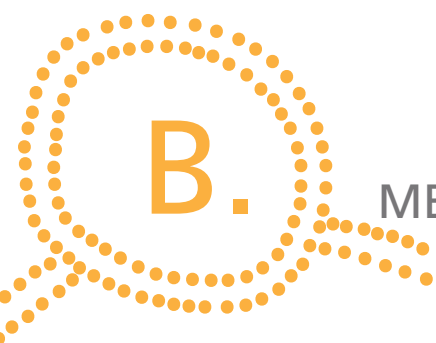
This review will examine the implications of each of these dimensions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transition to school. Of these five dimensions, recent research has focused most heavily on 'ready children' and 'ready schools', so these dimensions will be discussed in the most detail. Drawing on findings from the five dimensions of readiness, the paper will then describe the main features of effective transition programs.

Finally, the paper will examine significant research gaps relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transition to school and propose recommendations to ensure that future practice and policy rests on a solid evidence base in order to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The transition to school is an area of critical importance for future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A successful transition to school creates a pathway to positive academic, social and wellbeing outcomes. However the transition process is complex and requires a targeted, carefully considered and culturally appropriate approach.

This paper proposes that to be truly effective, approaches to transition must expand their focus with: a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's development and learning; application of a cultural lens; and a multidimensional approach that targets the five dimensions of 'readiness'.





B. METHODOLOGY

The aim of this literature review is to explore current evidence regarding:

- The meaning of a successful transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as well as the causes of unsuccessful transition;
- Examples of good practice supports for quality transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and
- The hopes and fears Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have regarding the transition process, and how they feel their children can be supported through this process.

It is acknowledged that the transition process is generally considered to begin at birth and continue on into a child's early primary years, because development is cumulative.¹² However for the purpose of clarity, this paper will consider the programs that support children at the following times:

- The transition from an early childhood centre or their home to preschool/prep/kindergarten; and
- The transition from preschool/prep/kindergarten to grade 1 (primary school).

This accounts for the difference in school systems across Australian states and territories.

Relevant literature was identified using 'Scopus', 'Google Scholar', 'Indigenous Education Research Database', and the 'Closing the Gap Clearinghouse' databases. A variety of key search terms were used, including: 'Indigenous AND transition to school'; 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander AND transition to school'; 'Indigenous AND Australia AND transition to school'; 'Indigenous AND transition to school'; and 'transition to school' (this latter phrase was only used within the two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific databases).

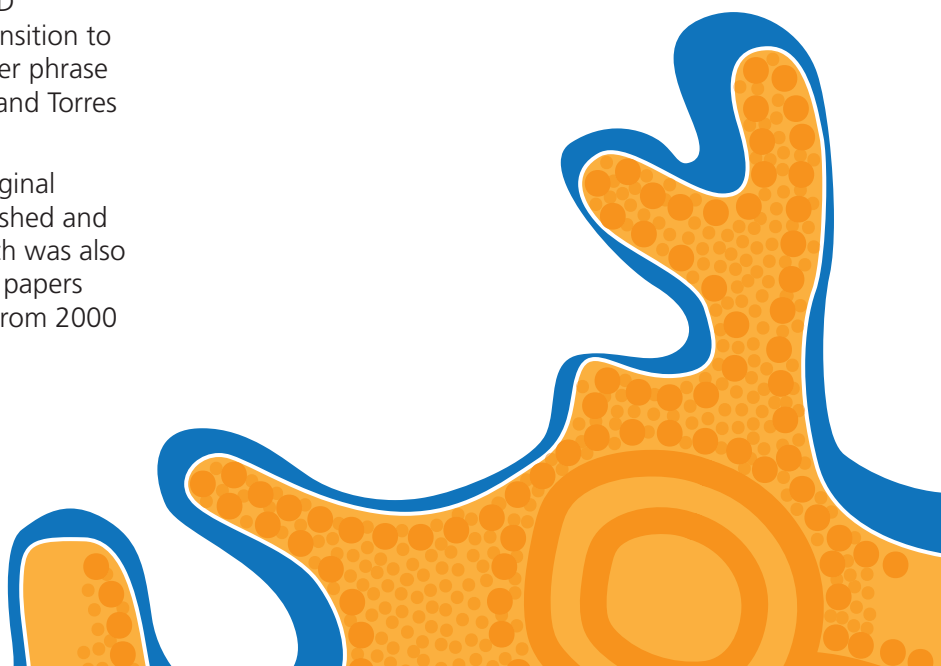
Recognising that much data on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sector is unpublished and usually not peer reviewed, a Google search was also undertaken to identify additional reports, papers and evaluations. Generally only research from 2000 onwards was considered.

Of the approximately 40 documents identified, roughly a quarter were particularly relevant for this literature review. These largely fell into two categories, in that they:

- provided a comprehensive, in-depth analysis of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transition to school generally, examining the five dimensions of readiness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and
- described more targeted research, typically highlighting particular insights into certain features of transition (e.g. assessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's school readiness, engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families around transition).

The majority of reports drew their evidence from available literature, or from the authors' personal experience as practitioners within the early childhood space. These reports tended to draw upon a range of sources and to critique the available literature in an informative way. A small number of reports drew on findings from current or past projects, which tended to highlight qualitative data.

This review uncovered limited evidence regarding the success or otherwise of transition programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The exception is a large body of research on current or past transition projects from New South Wales (NSW).





...transition is something that
is experienced, rather than
something that happens
to the child and family.



This section will consider the key themes that have emerged from the literature. Definitions of school transition are briefly considered, followed by an examination of the importance of a successful transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This section will then explore available literature on what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families hope for out of the early childhood years, and out of transition. Despite their role as the primary influence on their child's development and transition, the voices of families have largely been overlooked in discussions of transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The section will then turn to examine how the five main dimensions of readiness have been conceptualised within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander transitions to school. Finally, this section will draw together the available evidence into a transition table summarising the main features of successful transition programs.

1. UNDERSTANDING SCHOOL TRANSITION

Historically, a successful transition to school has been seen as dependent upon children's academic and organisational skills and behaviours¹³. A child's 'readiness' for school, is therefore usually evaluated by measuring these attributes. This approach has been criticised as being too narrow and based upon flawed testing procedures that are often culturally inappropriate, lacking the ability to accurately predict children's future school-based achievements, not relevant for all groups of children, and based on children's weaknesses rather than strengths¹⁴. (The limitations of these testing procedures are discussed below in Section 8.1).

This approach has now been superseded by research over the last decade that has focused on the broader factors that influence a successful school transition. The definition of school readiness has expanded to now incorporate "all aspects of a child's life that contributes directly to that child's ability to learn."¹⁵ The group of stakeholders considered critical to this process has expanded accordingly to include services, schools, communities and families¹⁶, in addition to children. Children's readiness is therefore seen as one

element or goal within the transition process, rather than the single, defining feature¹⁷.

This current understanding of school transition reflects the ecological theory of child development, where a successful transition is viewed as "a multifaceted process that involves many stakeholders over an extended period of time."¹⁸ This understanding of school transition suggests that rather than being a static, time-limited event, the transition period commences at birth and continues on into the primary school years.¹⁹ Positive, respectful relationships are a central feature of effective transitions. As Dockett et al highlight, the entire process is actually one of relationship building,

...supported by a range of activities or experiences. In this sense, transition is something that is experienced, rather than something that happens to the child and family.²⁰

This more contemporary, holistic understanding of school transition is most often described in terms of the 'Ready Child Equation'.²¹ According to this equation, the transition process encompasses four dimensions of 'readiness':

Ready services deliver quality and affordable proven school readiness programs, *ready schools* foster relationships with families and communities and are geared and resourced for child development, *ready communities* provide appropriate support and resources to families and *ready families* create facilitative home environments.²²

In their 2010 Closing the Gap Issues Paper, Dockett, Perry and Kearney draw upon a large body of work, most notably the US National Education Goals Panel (1997), and further refine this definition into a readiness 'triangle', encompassing schools' readiness for children; children's readiness for school; and community and family readiness.²³

Community and family readiness is described as "the capacity of families and communities to provide the necessary opportunities, conditions and supports to optimise children's development and learning."²⁴ This category therefore represents an amalgamation of families' readiness to support

their children, and the services or supports available within a community that assist children and families to be ready.²⁵

The critical message emerging from research is that only when all stakeholders are actively engaged can transition be successful. This approach, described as a holistic conception of the transition to school,²⁶ is viewed as being particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This is because the multidimensional focus “ostensibly accords well with many traditional Indigenous cultural models of learning as well as conceptions of family and oneness with environment.”²⁷

Whilst theoretical understandings of transition have evolved to reflect this multi-faceted approach, some literature suggests that transition programs commonly still focus on the child’s readiness.²⁸

KEY FINDINGS

- Past understandings defined transition to school solely as children’s readiness, largely focusing on their academic skills.
- Current interpretations now define transition as a dynamic process which requires the active engagement and participation of children, schools, families, communities and early childhood services.
- Genuine, respectful and trusting relationships between all stakeholders are a foundational element.
- Despite advances in our theoretical understanding of school transition, in practice narrowly defined evaluations of children’s readiness still prevail.

2. THE IMPORTANCE OF A SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION

The majority of literature examines what works to promote a successful transition, rather than what a successful transition actually means for children and families, and the positive outcomes it can produce. Whilst examining what works within transition provides insights into how to define a successful transition, it still leaves much unanswered about the impacts of positive transitions.

In the following discussion, we summarise four key themes regarding the importance of successful school transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Inclusion and belonging

Educational institutions can create a child’s framework of exclusion from their society or inclusion as a unique and special part. Social inclusion is identified as a critical aspect of long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and is constructed with a person’s “full participation in the social and economic life of the nation.”²⁹ Taylor notes that “Like academic success and failure, once patterns of inclusion and exclusion, favour and disfavour, popularity and isolation become entrenched they are likely to continue for a long time.”³⁰

Large-scale research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families across NSW indicates that transition programs can effect how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and schools engage with each other, and can lay the foundation for children and families’ sense of belonging or not at the school.³¹ The same research indicates that transition programs can enable children, families and communities “to feel comfortable, valued and successful in school and to assist educators as they develop positive learning environments for children starting school.”³²

This is an important outcome given that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children are more likely than non Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families to feel alienated and disconnected from the school community. This can be caused by a variety of reasons, including the negative associations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may have with educational institutions (this is discussed below under Section 6); differences between home and school cultures and expectations,³³ and the unique values, practices and approaches to learning that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may have.³⁴

Educational and social wellbeing outcomes

A number of authors discuss the immediate impacts for children of a successful transition, including that:



- “Children have good feelings about their school, teachers, parents and peers
- Children show good progress in terms of their physical, social, emotional, and intellectual development”.³⁵

Drawing on earlier work, Dockett et al discuss how successful transition programs can “build on children’s competencies, extend their social supports and relationships, and promote ongoing school success”.³⁶ Transition programs can also have profound impacts on children’s emotional wellbeing. Lessening children’s anxiety during transition may improve their wellbeing and thus their subsequent willingness to attend school.

In addition, Dockett et al cite earlier work by Viadero (1999), highlighting how successful transitions also have positive impacts for families and parents, who through the process are supported to “express positive attitudes toward school and promote children’s learning”.³⁷

Reconciling home and school cultures

Effective transitions play a key role in enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to move between home/community and school cultures without losing their own culture.³⁸

Beginning school can mark what Carbines et al describe as a period of ‘discontinuities’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.³⁹ Such changes can include shifts in the cultural and social environments, the expectations placed on children by adults, and the level of support, connection and interaction children experience with teachers as significant adults.⁴⁰

This period can also be characterised as one in which children must strive to integrate what are often significantly different environments (i.e. home and school). A 2008 ARACY report suggests that this is particularly difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, given the potential differences with mainstream language, culture, social behaviours and life experiences.⁴¹ These are illustrated in the quote above.

*School life and camp life are often like two different worlds. The differences are related to the way we bring our children up, our different child rearing practices.*⁴²

(statement from the Waltja Tujtangu Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation)

Transition programs therefore play an important role at this critical time of change in supporting children to reconcile notions of ‘home’ and ‘school’, and to prepare schools to be ready for children so that the levels of discontinuity children may experience are reduced.⁴³

Forming positive relationships

Effective transition programs also lay the foundation for a number of fundamental relationships that are critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s engagement with and success at school – including those between their teachers, families, and service providers and communities.⁴⁴ Dockett, Mason and Perry stress that these relationships are essential, potentially providing “the key to children’s (as well as the family’s and community’s) sense of engagement at school and to building resilience to a range of risk factors.”⁴⁵ Carbines et al indicate that positive relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and teachers can help families to feel comfortable and valued within the school environment.⁴⁶

The transition period is especially important for families whose members have had negative experiences with schools or educational institutions. As ARACY highlights, transition programs provide an opportunity for families and schools to build trustful relationships, thereby helping families to overcome prior negative associations.⁴⁷

In summary, a child and family’s first experiences with school often set the tone for later achievement. These experiences also lay the foundations for children and family relationships to education and their attitudes towards school participation and performance.⁴⁸ Negative experiences during the transition to school can limit a child’s options post school, and impact upon their employment prospects, socioeconomic wellbeing and health.⁴⁹

KEY FINDINGS

- Schools play a significant role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families experience of exclusion or inclusion within society.
- A child and family's initial experiences with a school lay the foundation for their engagement with the school during the child's school years.
- Negative experiences during the transition to school can have far-reaching adverse results, including lower school attendance, poorer school, wellbeing and health outcomes, and lowered employment prospects and participation.
- Beginning school can bring particular challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, as they strive to reconcile different home and school environments and cultures. Transition programs must recognise and appropriately respond to this.
- Effective transition programs can help to build a foundation of strong relationships between children, families, communities, early childhood services and schools.

3. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER FAMILIES' EXPECTATIONS AND HOPES OF THE EARLY YEARS AND THE TRANSITION TO SCHOOL

There is limited information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' views on the school transition process and their hopes for their children's educational experiences. Turning first to the latter, Dockett, Mason and Perry highlight that a significant finding from their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in NSW is that,

...there is no one "Aboriginal view" about transition to school...What is common...is the desire for their children to have a positive start to school and to succeed at school.⁵⁰

Carbines et al indicate that,

...as a general but not universal rule, Indigenous people value early childhood education for similar reasons non-Indigenous

people do, that is, as providing children with a good start to schooling.⁵¹

The Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children (LSIC) presents some useful insights about the aspirations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have for their children. LSIC is a nationally representative study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Data from the 2012 LSIC demonstrates that the most common aspirations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary carers have for their children are that they,

...have a good education, have a good career or job, be good at sports, do well at school, have lots of friends, be successful, have a better life and have kids, have time to play, be happy, healthy, confident, strong, have respect for others, learn about culture and support the family.⁵²

The main aspiration listed by primary carers was for their children to receive a good education, with over half of all parents or carers citing this as an aspiration.⁵³ They defined a good education as:

- access to an affordable, high quality and well resourced school;
- a supportive, non-racist school environment;
- one that relies upon a mainstream curriculum;
- high quality teachers;
- one where children are supported to develop a range of competencies (including academic, social and life skills);
- one where children finish school; and
- schooling that provides children with a good future – in particular, that it leads to employment.⁵⁴

Drawing on this research, one study finds that whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers view education as a significant contributor to their child's success in mainstream culture, they also "have a sense that growing up strong requires a balance between this and cultural learning, understanding and identity."⁵⁵ Dockett, Mason and Perry affirm this. They highlight that most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents strongly value mainstream education, viewing it as a critical way to overcome the disadvantage that many communities face. However, they also place

value on the skills and identities that their children have developed in their early years, and want schools and teachers to recognise and incorporate these as assets into transition to school programs.⁵⁶

We know that in both remote and urban Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children demonstrate excellent visual-spatial and motor skills,⁵⁷ and that “Indigenous parenting styles tend to promote independence, curiosity, a willingness to explore and to learn by modeling.”⁵⁸ However little is known about how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families want to see these competencies and developmental outcomes valued and nurtured within mainstream early childhood programs and schools.

There is also limited evidence on what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and carers actually want in terms of the transition to school process itself. A significant body of research has been undertaken in NSW, but this appears to be the only state in which comprehensive studies have taken place.

Based on their study of Aboriginal families in NSW, Dockett, Mason and Perry identified a list of factors that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families feel helps to support a smooth transition to school:

- Aboriginal people and materials within the school;
- children are supported to express and maintain their culture;
- valuing and supporting family and community involvement;
- flexibility in family-school relationships;
- respect for Aboriginal families and their strengths;
- high expectations of Aboriginal children;
- flexibility within group structures to ensure that Aboriginal children don’t feel isolated;
- access to health services; and
- focusing on children’s strengths and knowledge, and enabling them to view school as a positive place to be.⁵⁹

Small-scale studies with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Western Australia and Queensland identified that:

- The current preparation for school in Queensland was not sufficient. Parents and

carers reported that “the model of transition to school provided by a single year of kindergarten education from 3.5 to 5 years was too simplistic and not adequate to optimise the learning, development and well-being of Queensland’s children.”⁶⁰ There was however little discussion of what ‘simplistic’ meant in this context, or how the transition process could be improved.

- Parents require sufficient information and support in the year prior to school to help their children prepare for starting school. The research did not however provide evidence of what types of unique information or support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families require.⁶¹
- An important factor for Aboriginal families in a remote community in Western Australia was the effort that teachers put into the transition process, particularly in ensuring that all children were valued as part of the school community, and that early intervention was provided to address any problems children encountered.⁶²
- The importance of viewing transition as an ongoing process, with no right or wrong approach for each child, was highlighted by families in Victoria. These families “believed transition can occur at different times for different children. One participant in the Indigenous focus group stated, “Some children may fit right in; others may take a year to settle.”⁶³

Aside from NSW, existing studies regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expectations and hopes for school transition have small and geographically limited sample sizes, and largely focus on examining what support families need during the transition period, rather than the aspirations and fears they may have about this process. The evidence from some states, such as the Northern Territory, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, is especially limited.

This lack of research has serious implications for the design and implementation of transition programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are the primary influences and supports for children throughout the early years and transition period, and are critical stakeholders within the ecological framework of school readiness. Without their input



vital knowledge is lacking about the challenges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children face in transitioning to school, and how they can be best supported to begin school.

KEY FINDINGS

- According to the 2012 LSIC, a good education is the main aspiration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers for their children.
- Whilst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people value early childhood and primary school education for similar reasons as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they also want their children to develop a strong cultural identity, and to grow up strong by learning about and understanding their own culture.
- Further research is needed to better understand how particular competencies Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may demonstrate can be better reflected in early childhood and transition to school programs.
- Evidence on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' fears and aspirations for the transition process is sparse. Some studies have suggested that:
 - Parents/carers require more information in the year before their children commence school;
 - The effort teachers are seen to put into facilitating the transition process is vitally important;
 - The transition experience is unique for each child and family, and therefore requires a tailored approach; and
 - The school's incorporation of culture, building positive and respectful relationships, high expectations of children, and strengths-based approaches are key.

The following sections now focus on the dimensions of readiness, exploring the breadth of these dimensions and what they mean in practice.

4. READY SCHOOLS

A focus on 'ready' schools addresses the limitations inherent in the traditional view that readiness rests upon the child. It recognises that a lack of readiness is,

...a mismatch between the attributes of individual children and families, and the ability and resources of the school to engage and respond appropriately.⁶⁴

There are several features identified across the literature as significant in creating a 'ready' school:

- Positive school and family relationships
- welcoming and inclusive school environment
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and presence
- positive relationships between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
- cultural competence of all school staff and staff involved in the transition process
- high expectations of children
- valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and ways of learning

4.1 School & family relationships

The most critical relationship throughout the transition period and early schooling years is that between the school and a child's family.⁶⁵ Fundamental to this is that school staff understand that relationships need to be built with the broader family, not just a child's parents,⁶⁶ reflecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family structures.

Studies have shown that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family involvement, trust and confidence in a school and its teachers has a direct impact on the educational attainment of their children.⁶⁷ For example, the former Department of Education, Science and Training (now the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations) 2005 National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy found that when parents have confidence in the principal and teachers at their child's school, their children's educational prospects are enhanced, although the Inquiry did not examine why this is the case.⁶⁸

The negative experiences with educational institutions suffered by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families presents, however, a significant barrier to such involvement and trust. Evidence from the 2004 Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey indicates that the generational legacy of such experiences reportedly affects the educational engagement and outcomes of Aboriginal children.⁶⁹

Longitudinal research of children transitioning to school in a remote Queensland community confirms the findings of these studies. Although the study had a limited sample size, it indicated that when parents do not feel confident to attend the school or engage with teachers, the educational, home-based supports they are able to offer their child are limited.⁷⁰

A study highlighting research in Canadian Indigenous communities unpacks a number of barriers that affect the relationship between Canadian Indigenous parents and schools. These include:

- families' negative associations with educational institutions;
- language/communication barriers;
- lack of understanding by schools of barriers/challenges faced by Aboriginal families;
- lack of cultural awareness;
- poverty and illness within families;
- lack of genuine engagement or consultation;
- families feeling intimidated by the school/teachers;
- contact between families/schools limited to when something has gone wrong' and
- 'segregation' of Aboriginal students in support/special classes.⁷¹

Discussing this research, Dockett et al indicate that whilst Canada obviously presents a different cultural and political context, these factors "resonate with issues identified in discussions of parent-school collaboration and communication within Australia."⁷² The authors also indicate several approaches shown to be successful in overcoming these issues, including:

- Schools and teachers "engaging parents in the decision-making process –viewing parents as genuine partners in school activities and decision-making, particularly – but not only – in relation to Aboriginal curriculum.
- Communicating – using processes that built trust between schools and parents; used multiple channels of communication; and provided opportunities for parents to meet in a social setting."⁷³

Throughout the literature three main points are raised that discuss how schools can facilitate positive family relationships. These are discussed below.

Supporting family capacity and understanding

Shepherd and Walker discuss the importance of transition to school programs that facilitate the development of family capacity to prepare children for school. They highlight the Parents and Learning (PaL) program in the Aboriginal community of Napranum, Queensland, which has actively applied this approach by providing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents with practical support and engaging activities to overcome some of the mystery that surrounds schooling for parents and children.⁷⁴ The authors discuss how it is important that families are supported to understand "the processes and requirements of the education system so that they can be actively involved in preparing their children for school...While many parents know that school is important they are unsure how to translate that [into] practical [strategies] within the home environment."⁷⁵

Trusting relationships

Dockett et al highlight that "Families who feel involved with, supported by and connected with the school are likely to support their children in ways that promote their engagement with school."⁷⁶ Trusting, respectful relationships between families and teachers are crucial to this. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in Queensland reported that crucial for them was feeling that teachers respected them, and that they were approachable – "provid[ing] an open door."⁷⁷



Fleer confirms that trust is critical to the school/family relationship. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may have a different understanding of what it means for a teacher or school to take a child into their care – especially in regards to a teacher’s ‘obligation’ and ‘commitment’ to the child/family.⁷⁸ The quote below by an Aboriginal family member consulted by Fleer illustrates.

An important thing in Aboriginal families, in any family, is trust. If you send your child to some other place that isn't your usual place, or part of where your family usually goes – who is going to be taking care of them? Are they going to be responsible for them? Are they going to care for them in the same way as your family would? Can they do that? ...Often teachers are strangers to Aboriginal people; you don't know anything about them.... how can you entrust the most valued and important person to you to a stranger? That is who your teacher often is, unless they are someone from the local community.⁷⁹

Family partnerships and involvement

To facilitate positive relationships with families, schools must first recognise the need to move beyond a model of ‘parent participation’ to that of ‘family partnerships’.⁸⁰ Schools must reflect on and redress power differentials - whether perceived or real - that may exist between school staff and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.⁸¹ Fleer relates how one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent she interviewed stated that many parents “are afraid of going to the school, the teacher is still someone they don’t feel comfortable with, having personal relationships with.”⁸² Adding to this, Dockett et al stress that;

Family and community members will avoid interactions where they expect to be blamed, shamed, judged negatively, or their expertise and knowledge ignored. They are much more likely to engage in interactions that acknowledge their strengths, respond to their challenges and respect their knowledge.⁸³

In a 2006 study with Aboriginal parents, Dockett et al outlined the difficulties Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families can experience with communicating with the school, quoting one Aboriginal parent who stated that “Teachers always talk down to you. I don’t think it matters who you are – they don’t listen to what you are saying about your child.”⁸⁴

Fleer’s research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families indicates that an important step towards rebalancing power relations is therefore to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to firstly have a voice, and have this respected in the family-school relationship.⁸⁵ The families in her study described how attending and talking to the school teachers, and passing on their knowledge about their children, gave them a sense of power.⁸⁶ However Fleer describes how this power can be lost when families feel that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values are only acknowledged when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are physically present at the school.⁸⁷ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family participation must not however become too bureaucratic or formalised “to the point of being ritualised” as this prioritises a universal approach to family involvement that can be unsupportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family involvement.⁸⁸

Lastly, Fleer notes that a common scenario is that “families are physically [present at the school], but... cannot see [themselves reflected] within [the] environment.”⁸⁹ This constrains families’ involvement in the school.

4.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and presence

As with any social service, the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff is a significant determinant in the success or otherwise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s engagement with that service. Numerous studies have espoused the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff presence in enabling a positive transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into schools,⁹⁰ and their value as positive adult role models within the school environment.⁹¹



As well as providing tangible reassurance that students 'belong' at the school, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are more likely to "understand the culture and language and ...can provide a link for Indigenous children between home, community and school (Sarra, 2005)."⁹² Dockett et al note that when teachers and children share common background features such as language or culture, teachers are more likely to view children in a positive light.⁹³ The literature strongly confirms that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers, aides, general staff and members of committees/councils also facilitate "the trust and active engagement of parents (Frigo et al., 2004)" in both the school and in their child's education.⁹⁴ Furthermore, local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff help to provide a familiar face for children, as illustrated by an educator from a NSW preschool, "we've always tried to employ people from the community so that there is always someone here, a familiar face that the children will recognise, or somebody else that the children might know."⁹⁵

However, the issue is more complex than merely the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff. These staff must be appropriately supported, particularly as they are often themselves expected to straddle different worlds.

4.3 Relationships with teachers

The development of a strong relationship between teacher and student is integral in the transition process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.⁹⁶ Positive relationships with teachers help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to feel connected with school, which in turn means that "they are more likely to engage with the life of school, including the educational curriculum."⁹⁷ Dockett and Perry state that teachers act as,

...important social resources for children, impacting on their willingness to engage in learning experiences at school... In particular, strong emotional support from teachers is linked to enhanced engagement and academic performance...and school policies and programs that promote positive teacher-child interactions are reported to facilitate children's school readiness..."⁹⁸

The importance of trust and respect between teacher and child during and subsequent to the transition process was highlighted as a common theme in a study of NSW-based transition programs. The study authors describe that,

Having children who trust the teacher, who are keen to be with the teacher and who respect and respond positively to the teacher, provides a solid base for children starting school. This needs to be matched by teachers who have a similar trust and respect for the children, their knowledge and understandings and their ability to become successful school students. This requires a conscious effort on the part of the teacher to engage in interactions that build such trust and respect.⁹⁹

One potential barrier to these relationships, however, is the different approach to adult-child relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and teacher-child relationships in Western culture. Hudsmith describes the challenge this creates as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are generally raised to experience and expect equitable relationships with adults, which is often very much at odds with the mainstream construct of the teacher-child relationship.¹⁰⁰ Taylor asserts that this privileges non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children within the classroom, as these children are more likely to be socialised into the childhood dependency and deference to adult roles privileged by the system."¹⁰¹ Carbines et al add to this that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, a teacher's title or position was less important than being able to place that person within a structure of relationships.¹⁰²

Evidence from a Western Australian study indicates that the nature of the child/teacher relationship is also highly important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents/carers. The study found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families want teachers who are 'looking after' their child, as opposed to just teaching them. This suggests that for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the role of the teacher is different to the typical Western understanding of that role.¹⁰³ These highlight some of the differences that need to be acknowledged and understood by teachers in

their relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

4.4 Cultural competence

Almost all evidence regarding successful school transitions points to the underlying need for schools and teachers to be culturally competent. However, despite the abundance of references to cultural inclusivity or competence, there is little consensus within the literature on what this means in practical terms within transition processes.¹⁰⁴ Carbines et al propose that one reason for this is that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not have a homogenous culture; it can be location and even family specific [and therefore] [w]hat people mean by cultural inclusion can vary considerably.”¹⁰⁵ It could also indicate the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors writing on the topic and limited general understanding of cultural competence.

The lack of a clear definition within the literature reflects the confusion surrounding practical applications of cultural competence. This is likely to be caused by underlying limited understandings of cultural competence within many mainstream schools.¹⁰⁶

For the purpose of clarity, this section sets out a definition of cultural competence within the early childhood sphere. The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency’s (VACCA) definition is widely

recognised within the child and family support services sector as the most up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive. Contextualising international notions of continuity and cultural safety within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, the VACCA Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework proposes that cultural safety is a right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Key cultural competencies outlined in the Framework are detailed in Table A below.

The paper will use this framework to examine how each element of cultural competence is addressed within the literature. Cultural awareness and respect will be grouped together as the literature tends to consider them as overlapping concepts.

Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and respectful partnerships

The literature speaks of the need to engage families and communities within transition programs, but is largely silent on how to enable family and community agency within this process, beyond parent attendance at the school.

As mentioned in Section 4.1, there is some discussion of the need for schools to move beyond *participation* to *partnerships* with parents and families,¹⁰⁷ without overtly defining what this may mean.¹⁰⁸

Table A: VACCA Cultural Competence Framework

Competency	Key features
Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and respectful partnerships	Enhancing the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and services Demonstrating a commitment to partnerships
Cultural awareness	Understanding cultural difference and diversity, and that approaches must be targeted to take these into account
Cultural respect	Valuing and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures
Cultural responsiveness	Having the ability and skills to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Cultural safety	Creating a service environment that is safe and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Cross-cultural practice and care	Being able to use the lens of culture to promote the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

VACCA (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Victorian Government Department of Human Services, Melbourne, Victoria

Discussions on partnerships between schools and early childhood services largely focus on information-sharing and staff exchange, rather than building long-term, deeper partnerships that affirm Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service agency.

Cultural awareness (knowledge and understanding) and Cultural respect (attitudes and values)

In order to be “ready” for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children schools need to understand how the values and beliefs embedded within the school culture and environment can be adapted to reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity, mirroring “Indigenous family values and community beliefs and practices.”¹⁰⁹ This is discussed in more detail below.

Understanding cultural diversity, identity and ways of learning and applying this within the curriculum and approaches to teaching

Teachers’ understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community knowledge and cultures, the way they value cultural diversity and identity, and their ability to bring these into the curriculum is highly influential in facilitating successful transitions to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹¹⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring a wealth of different experiences, beliefs and knowledge to school. Fleer highlights this, quoting an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parent in the box above right.

Ready schools, therefore need to respond to this by employing culturally appropriate approaches to teaching, learning and school structures.¹¹² Effective transition programs can be key in encouraging and preparing teachers to provide programs that are targeted at each child’s individual development, and their cultural or linguistic background.¹¹³

How teachers respond to differences in learning styles is also crucial. Whilst acknowledging that

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups are diverse and do not have one distinct ‘learning style’, teachers do need to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may learn differently from non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and adopt their teaching approach accordingly.¹¹⁴ This involves engaging with each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child as a unique student and connecting teaching methods with their particular learning style.¹¹⁵ A critical aspect of this is recognising, valuing and building off a child’s knowledge, experiences and abilities.¹¹⁶

How Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people view the world, their knowledge and ways of learning can often be highly contrasted to those

catered for within the mainstream educational system.¹¹⁷ A failure by teachers and school systems to appreciate and value this has been identified as one of the causes of apparent “failure to learn” by Indigenous children.”¹¹⁸

Valuing and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s home language is a significant aspect of valuing Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander knowledge, and supporting improved school performance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹¹⁹ The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health survey identified that for some Aboriginal children English is their second or third language, and this presents particular challenges upon entering school.¹²⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including Aboriginal English, reflect the culture and identity of those who speak them, and teachers therefore need to create a bridge for students between their home languages and Standard Australian English.¹²¹ Taylor highlights that this will entail enabling the “necessary supports that work to lessen the linguistic...constraints considered to create anxiety and difficulties for many young children entering the system.”¹²²

Deficit-focused approaches neglect to value and build off the knowledge, skills and linguistic abilities

When [our]...children go to school they take their family with them. They take their skills, their knowledge, their beliefs... You don't just leave all of that at the door. You take it in with you, so you can't change and be something else as you enter the classroom.¹¹¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may have developed through their home, community, early childhood service, or 'bush' learning experiences.¹²³ Taylor highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are particularly concerned that their child's strengths won't be valued within school.¹²⁴ Ready schools therefore employ a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's learning, which is generally described within the literature as encompassing a number of distinct elements:

- recognising and valuing protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including family support and shared activities, and strong cultural and self-identities;¹²⁵
- cultural competence training for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers;¹²⁶
- incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture into the school curriculum,¹²⁷ and building teaching resources and activities from children's strengths;
- recognising and valuing existing skills in the community to support children;
- establishing the school as welcoming and culturally safe for family members and community;¹²⁸
- developing appropriate strengths based assessments;
- holding high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and viewing their strengths as dynamic and developing qualities;¹²⁹
- fostering and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in schools and communities; and
- employing innovative and dynamic school/staffing models.¹³⁰

A 2001 Government taskforce found that in order to facilitate a strengths-based approach, educators must have "a better understanding of how to build on and encourage Indigenous children to move fluently amongst and between cultures in a way which allows them to reposition their cultures, languages, histories, beliefs and lifestyles and affirm identity".¹³¹

Dockett, Mason and Perry describe the concept of the 'fire stick period', where transition is not viewed

simply as a "one-way journey towards something better",¹³² but instead a journey back and forth between two different worlds. In this sense teachers and families all have roles to play in reinforcing to children that it is safe to move between cultures, and that the transition to formal education doesn't require them to leave their culture behind.¹³³

This is affirmed by Colquhoun and Dockery's research that explores primary carer responses in the 2012 LSIC data. Their research indicates that "central to the healthy and successful development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is learning about their culture and understanding that this culture and its connections can sit within a mainstream, western cultural context."¹³⁴

Understanding and perception of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and home life

A further aspect of cultural awareness is seen within the way schools view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and families. Fleer identified in consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in 2004 that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children need to be seen as "a composite of an extended family, community and set of cultural beliefs", and that teachers need to acknowledge that these may be different to those of the school.¹³⁵ In the same article she proposed that a shift in understanding needs to take place that recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children do not come to school as individual units, but should instead be seen,

...as part of a complex family and community system...The teacher is not only expected to think of the child as 'the family', but to recognise and maintain the obligation associated with the concept of family. In having an Indigenous child in an early childhood centre [or school], staff are accepting the family unit (not an individual child) and the cultural obligations associated with this responsibility.

To be culturally competent, schools therefore need to recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are individuals who develop within a web of interconnected relationships and responsibilities, and that they bring these with them into the school environment.



Further evidence demonstrates the importance of increasing teacher understanding of a child's home and cultural life through "outreach and the building of positive home-school relationships."¹³⁶

This will assist teachers in better understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's early socialisation, and their "culturally specific entry-level capacities and dispositions."¹³⁷

Cultural responsiveness (ability and skills)

Multiple authors note that a first step in working towards a culturally competent transition process is cultural competence training and/or mentoring for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers.¹³⁸ ACER notes that such training particularly needs to focus on the strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring with them to school.¹³⁹

Aside from cultural competence training, the literature does not discuss the ability and skills that staff need, nor does it go into detail as to what cultural competence training should entail. The section prior however does detail a number of important areas that could be considered.

Cultural safety (environment and experience)

How a school looks and feels – whether it supports children and families to feel culturally safe - is a key feature in assisting the transition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Taylor indicates that Indigenous students rarely see images of themselves in school resources and, coupled with a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, this can result in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feeling that there is little point in engaging with the school environment.¹⁴⁰ In their 2008 report Dockett et al identified that many Aboriginal families felt that schools viewed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture as homogenous, and that their resources and

curriculum often portrayed outdated or stereotyped forms of local culture, or were missing these altogether.¹⁴¹

Extensive sources point to the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feeling welcomed, included and that they belong – through visible and non-stereotypical displays of their culture within the school environment.¹⁴² This has also emerged as a theme in consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, who have stressed that when schools visibly display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, such as flags and artwork, families are more likely to engage with the school.¹⁴³

Cross-cultural practice and care (applying the lens of culture effectively)

This criterion refers to the ability of schools to evaluate how they apply cultural understandings and respect, or the 'lens of culture' within the school curriculum, processes, policies, and environment. Whilst the literature does contain comprehensive discussions on how schools can be culturally competent or inclusive, it does not reflect on how schools do or could evaluate their transition programs through a cultural 'lens'.

Taking these elements as reference points, the following table provides a summary of the key ways cultural competence within schools and transition programs is addressed within the available literature.

Whilst there is little consensus in the literature on the meaning of cultural competence, there are major commonalities in the approach. There are also significant gaps however, which the VACCA cultural competence framework helps to identify. Such a framework could be a useful tool for application in developing transition programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.



Competency area	Meaning of competency area	Key issues identified as important in the literature
Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and respectful partnerships	Enhancing the agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and services Demonstrating a commitment to partnerships	• Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and services • Recognition of importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency within the transition process
Cultural awareness	Understanding cultural difference and diversity, and that approaches must be targeted to take these into account	• Understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse • Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture • Understanding children's home and community life, and how this may differ from the school environment • Understanding the role of children's home language and ensuring assessment systems don't discriminate against this • Incorporating these understandings into program content and teaching methods
Cultural respect	Valuing and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures	• Respecting and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, languages and experiences • Respecting and valuing the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities • Demonstrating this within the curriculum and school programs, policies and processes • Supporting children to move between cultures
Cultural responsiveness	Having the ability and skills to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	• Culturally competent training and mentoring for all school staff
Cultural safety	Creating a service environment that is safe and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	• A school environment that visibly represents and reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture • Presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff
Cross-cultural practice and care	Being able to use the lens of culture to promote the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	• Incorporation of culture within school systems, policies, processes and practices



4.5 High expectations

Much of the literature identifies the importance of teachers and school staff having high expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, both to facilitate and sustain a positive transition.¹⁴⁴ Having high expectations of students is a key aspect of a strengths-based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's education.¹⁴⁵

Starting school is an important time in which "children establish identities of themselves as learners within the context of school."¹⁴⁶

The development of such identities is directly influenced by the expectations teachers place upon children. McTurk et al highlight findings from a large Victorian study examining the factors that underpin learning difficulties in early primary school. They summarise that "Indigenous children develop a more positive concept of themselves as students when teachers focus on encouraging their academic achievement early on in their schooling."¹⁴⁷

In conclusion, the literature reviewed for this project has comprehensively investigated what constitutes 'ready' schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. More research exploring how positive relationships between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children can be formed and maintained – such as the research conducted through the national *Dare to Lead* project - would also be beneficial, whilst acknowledging that there will be no specific recipe for this beyond building trust and familiarity between teachers and students. An exploration of the challenges that might arise due to the different cultural approaches to adult-child interactions would be particularly useful.

The crucial role of cultural competence within the transition process is likewise an area that needs significantly more attention, firstly to address the definitional issue, and secondly to examine how cultural competence can be embedded within all facets of transition processes.

KEY FINDINGS

- The development and maintenance of strong family-school relationships is key during the transition process. Building these relationships requires schools to take an active leadership role in order to tackle barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may face in engaging with schools, including overcoming power inequalities between families and school staff.
- Schools need to present genuine and non-stereotypical visual representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the school environment and provide resources to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sense of belonging and inclusion.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school staff can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to feel that they belong at the school, and can provide a link between school and children's home/community environment.
- Strong and caring relationships between teachers and children enhance children's academic achievement and school engagement.
- The cultural competence of a school, and a school's transition program, plays a fundamental role in its ability to positively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. While there is significant discussion within the literature concerning how schools can better understand, respect and reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, there are still gaps in how schools can partner with families and communities in ways which enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agency.
- High yet realistic staff expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enables children to develop positive images of themselves as competent learners, and is a critical aspect of a strengths-based approach.



5. READY COMMUNITIES

It is well established that what happens within the communities where children grow up is critically important for their school readiness and educational outcomes.¹⁴⁸ The ready schools equation discussed earlier in the paper discusses the role of the community as being to provide a range of services, such as health or family support services, to facilitate children's school readiness. A comprehensive understanding of what constitutes a 'ready community' is still however needed,¹⁴⁹ and, in particular, what constitutes a 'ready' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.¹⁵⁰

Dockett, Perry and Kearney draw on findings from the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) to highlight the positive correlation between "neighbourhood culture, stability and heterogeneity" and children's school readiness.¹⁵¹ Aside from this, however, Australian evidence seems to be rare, with many authors relying on evidence coming out of the United States. The most cited work is that of Kagan and Rigby,¹⁵² which indicates that ready communities provide a safe, supportive and nurturing environment,¹⁵³ and have accessible community-based health services so that children can be physically prepared for school.¹⁵⁴

Dockett, Perry and Kearney highlight research coming out of the US on the 'readiness equation', which considers that,

School readiness is an outcome of the resources (including knowledge and skills), attitudes (including priorities) and relationships of a community. School readiness, conceptualised as the community's readiness for the child, will vary from one community to another, and over time within the same community. Assessing a community's level of preparedness for children is therefore required.¹⁵⁵

There is little further consideration of what this might mean, with discussion focused on community safety/stability and the provision of supports. A number of authors conclude that many Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander children do not experience safe or stable communities,¹⁵⁶ causing them to experience stress which then impacts negatively upon their school readiness.¹⁵⁷

Within the literature, community support is interpreted as the services available within a community. Dockett et al refer to the need for health support in preparing children for school, particularly speech therapists, and support for children suffering from otitis media.¹⁵⁸ ARACY's literature review briefly mentions parenting classes and/or home visits, but does not discuss these in any detail, dwelling more on the role of early childhood services and preschools.

Early childhood education and care programs are also considered a key community support in preparing children for school. Whilst these are discussed in more detail below under Section 7: Ready Services, it is worth drawing out here how discussions of ready communities have touched upon the role of ECEC services. McTurk et al indicated that community leadership within early childhood services has been identified as "potentially important for the capacity of communities to improve children's school readiness."¹⁵⁹ There is however again little discussion of what this entails in practice. Findings from the Northern Territory Integrated Early Childhood Project demonstrate that community ownership of early childhood programs is an essential element in the success or otherwise of enabling children's school readiness.¹⁶⁰

Dockett, Perry and Kearney discuss how readiness can't be viewed as merely a 'systems issue', and that the nature of a community's engagement with early childhood services makes a key difference in supporting children to be school ready. They suggest that the critical factor is engagement, highlighting that children's participation in early childhood services – a significant element of readiness for school – is enhanced when communities are actively engaged in training and the provision of early childhood services.¹⁶¹



In summary, although considered to be one of the main tenets of school readiness, it is clear that what constitutes a school-ready Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community keenly requires further exploration. There is a need to better understand the community supports and strengths that help prepare and support children and families for school, and to appreciate the role of community leadership and ownership of transition processes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Whilst we know that communities have an important role to play in transition processes, there is little understanding of what this entails.
- 'Ready communities' are safe, supportive and nurturing. What this means in an Australian context is not clear.
- One identified element of support is that communities are actively involved in and leading the provision of early childhood services.

6. READY FAMILIES

'Ready families' are vital in preparing children for school and supporting them through school transition. Research from the Federal *What Works* program suggests that "Families who actively support their children during transition to school, and build positive relationships with staff, are likely to continue their positive engagement with school."¹⁶²

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family involvement, trust and confidence in the school and its teachers has a direct impact on the educational attainment of their children. This in turn supports children's longer-term positive engagement with school.

Most of the literature reviewed for this project recognises the negative associations many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families have with mainstream education and the need to overcome this, as well as the effect these associations can have on families' capacity to support their children through transition. Significant gaps do however remain in our understanding

of the role of the extended family in children's school readiness,¹⁶³ and more generally about the supports needed to enable ready Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families possess significant strengths in supporting their children to transition to school.¹⁶⁴ For example, McTurk et al, drawing on evidence from the LSIC, indicates that children in the Torres Strait region have "a number of people watching over their growth and development who help to teach them life skills, and endeavour to keep them on track."¹⁶⁵

For a multitude of reasons, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families also, however, face significant barriers in supporting their children's school readiness. Research indicates the importance of families promoting a positive view of school to their children,¹⁶⁶ but a parent's capacity or willingness to do this can be affected by their own personal experiences of school.

Carrington and Walker suggest that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families struggle to engage with their children's educational progress due to "their own poor experiences at school – experiences marred by racism and a lack of respect for Indigenous people and culture. As a result, many Indigenous families do not have the capacity to support their children's learning nor sufficient trust in, or understanding of, educational systems."¹⁶⁷

Canadian research indicates that additional barriers faced by Indigenous families in engaging with schools can include:

- language or communication barriers;
- lack of understanding by schools of the barriers and challenges faced by Aboriginal families, and lack of cultural awareness, genuine engagement or consultation with families;
- personal disadvantage within families;
- families feeling intimidated by the school and/or teachers;
- contact between families and schools limited to when something has gone wrong; and;
- the segregation of Aboriginal students into support or special classes.

As would be expected, these barriers can result in families struggling to see the value of institutional education, and limited engagement with their child's school and their child's educational progress. Shepherd and Walker add that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may also have different world views that make it hard for them to share a sense of the importance of schooling for their child and community's futures.¹⁶⁸

Whilst we have some understanding of these barriers and their impact, we are less informed about strategies and approaches to overcome them. The literature reviewed for this project largely focused on supporting families to interact with their children in ways that promote school readiness, and less so on the provision of appropriate support mechanisms and programs to assist this.

Although the evidence is limited, some issues highlighted in the literature that are considered key in overcoming these barriers and assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to support their child's transition include:

- ensuring that families are able to enjoy positive, respectful relationships with early childhood services and schools (discussed extensively under Section 4.1);
- incorporating a focus on parent/carer-child relationships in early childhood programs;¹⁶⁹
- ensuring that educational institutions are ready for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and children – including being culturally competent (see Section 4.4); and
- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' active and meaningful engagement within these institutions and their role in the in the planning, decision-making and delivery of early childhood programs.¹⁷⁰

It is also important to note that despite the negative experiences they may have suffered during school, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents strongly believe in the importance of schooling and education for their own children,¹⁷¹ and display resolve and strengths in engaging with schools.¹⁷²

In summary there remains a need for further detailed research on what constitutes ready Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families,

and the strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families possess that support their children to be school ready. Whilst the Canadian research highlighted above provides an evidence base from which we can draw conclusions about the barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may also face, specific research is needed within an Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context on both the barriers families face, and strategies for overcoming these.

KEY FINDINGS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families play a vital role in preparing their children for school, and in conveying positive messages about school and education to their children.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families possess significant strengths in preparing their children for school and the transition. Further research is required in this area.
- They also face a number of barriers in engaging with their children's schools and educational experience, including:
 - negative views of school because of their own negative school experiences
 - lack of cultural awareness and understanding within schools
 - communication barriers
 - contact with their child's school being generally limited to negative experiences.
- Little is known about approaches to overcome these barriers. However, some existing strategies include:
 - developing positive school-family relationships;
 - carer/parent-child relationships in early childhood programs;
 - developing schools cultural competence; and
 - supporting the active and genuine participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in schools



7. READY SERVICES

Less has been written about the requirements of 'ready' services,¹⁷³ than about 'ready' schools. Whilst the literature on the mainstream ready schools equation suggests that a range of services are needed to help support children to make a positive start to school (for example health or family support), these are generally described as being within the dimension of 'ready communities'. The role of ready services is instead largely focused on providing school readiness or transition programs.¹⁷⁴ The provision of more general service has therefore been discussed above under Section 5: Ready Communities.

Accordingly, this section will focus on what has been said about the role of ready early childhood services. The literature frequently refers to the role of early childhood services in preparing children for school through their curriculum and daily activities. Also stressed throughout the literature is the significant role these services play in building relationships with schools.¹⁷⁵ Such relationships are particularly important to ensure a mutual understanding of each other's roles and context, and to enable the communication of information about particular children from the early childhood service to the school.¹⁷⁶

The literature suggests that early childhood services play an important role in preparing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children for the school environment and academic demands - particularly when they increase the educational content of their programs and support children's language and cognitive development.¹⁷⁷

The national Early Years Learning Framework provides direction for early childhood centres on their role in transitions, highlighting as a key practice the importance of 'continuity of learning and transitions'.¹⁷⁸ It explains that educators support children to understand "the traditions, routines and practices of the settings to which they are moving" and to help children to "negotiate changes in their status or identities" as they transition.¹⁷⁹ The Framework further sets out that early childhood educators and schools must,

...commit to sharing information about each child's knowledge and skills so learning can build on foundations of earlier learning. Educators work collaboratively with each child's new educator and other professionals to ensure a successful transition.¹⁸⁰

The incongruence between play-based learning in early childhood services and the academically oriented school environment has been identified as a source of tension in the transition to school journey - particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹⁸¹ Whilst there is not an extensive discussion within the literature of why this is the case, it appears to be in part because play-based learning accords with the ways that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children generally learn, including through learning situations that are informal, participatory and not conducted within an adult-child hierarchy.¹⁸²

Other factors relating to the role of services in the transition process include: the alignment between early childhood centre's programs and school curriculums, which helps to ensure continuity of learning,¹⁸³ and the capacity and strategies used by early childhood centres to support children to understand 'school culture'.¹⁸⁴

A number of sources point to the significance of the quality of relationships between early childhood educators and teachers in effective and positive transitions.¹⁸⁵ Close connections between early childhood educators and school teachers help early childhood educators understand what will be expected of children within the school environment. Such relationships also enable early childhood educators to communicate to future teachers information about each individual child's strengths and needs. This allows teachers to begin their interactions with a child on an individual basis that meets their unique needs.¹⁸⁶

Early childhood educators and teachers often hold differing views of what constitutes school readiness, necessitating the need for "a common agreement about what the outcomes from preschool experiences will be, including all stakeholders, in local settings." This can only come



about through effective communication between all stakeholders.¹⁸⁷ Several practical ways that these relationships can be fostered and maintained include:

- recognition of and respect for each other as professionals;¹⁸⁸
- information-sharing and regular meetings between early childhood educators and school teachers, and visits to each other's classes to help both groups understand each other's beliefs and programs; and¹⁸⁹
- planning, implementing and evaluating collaborative projects, including transition to school processes.¹⁹⁰

Evidence from NSW indicates that an additional benefit of these relationships is that they support families to trust teachers. Reporting on findings from their NSW study Dockett et al explain that,

When educators in prior-to-school [institutions] and schools were seen to work well together, families were likely to transfer some of the trust they had built up with the prior-to- school educator to school educators, on the basis that someone they already trusted (the prior-to-school educator) also trusted the other (school educator).¹⁹¹

In summary, although there is some discussion of the process elements of early childhood services collaboration with schools, there is little deeper exploration of the different roles such services play in the transition process. Further research is needed to better understand how they can provide support to children and families prior to and during the transition process, as well as their function in forming a crucial bridge between the child, family and school.

KEY FINDINGS

- Ready services play an active role in preparing children for school in terms of academic skills, and also in terms of readiness for the school environment, rules and routines.

- Ready services also form relationships with schools to enable communication on transition initiatives happening within the service and school, individual children's experiences and strengths, and for planning joint transition programs.
- These relationships between services and schools help families to develop trust in the school.
- More in-depth research is needed to explore the distinct role of services, particularly in their provision of support to children and families throughout the transition process.

8. READY CHILDREN

Formerly considered to be the main focus of transition to school, children's readiness for school is now acknowledged to be only one (albeit important) dimension of the transition process. Children's readiness is a key facilitator of a smooth transition to school, and is therefore a critical factor to explore.

The concept was frequently misunderstood as encompassing a child's ability to learn, but is now understood as a child's ability to transition to school based learning, comply with school requirements, engage with curriculum, and demonstrate additional skills such as social capacities and learning the rules and procedures of the school context.¹⁹²

There is growing support for the view that children should not be required to demonstrate 'readiness' prior to starting school, but instead that their readiness,

...develops within environments where adults and peers support children's learning and development through participation in meaningful and relevant experiences.¹⁹³

The literature reviewed for this project focuses on a number of factors relating to children's readiness, including:

- physical and social/emotional development;

- emotional wellbeing and the existence of trauma;
- health; and
- cognitive and intellectual development.¹⁹⁴

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children generally perform lower on standardised cognitive and language measures, with this gap largely being attributed to factors such as poverty, lower participation in early childhood services, different home/school environments, and the prevalence of risk factors with the home and community.¹⁹⁵ A further significant factor in this gap is the inappropriateness of the testing measures themselves – including only testing all children in English, which may not be their first language. This latter aspect will be discussed in more detail below, as will the issues of the protective factors Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children may experience that can support them to make positive transitions to school, and the impact of their attendance at an early childhood centre.

8.1 Current assessment measures

A discussion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's readiness for school is incomplete without reference to current assessment measures used to determine readiness within schools. Whilst children's readiness is only one aspect of the transition process, how children are assessed as being ready for school carries important consequences for their initial experiences of school. Assessment results help teachers understand what children know and can do, providing an evidence base to inform curriculum design and specific educational programs that build on a child's experience and knowledge.¹⁹⁶ The accuracy of these evaluations is therefore critical to how teacher's view children, and how they design curriculum that responds to children's knowledge, experience and skills.

There is much discussion within the literature about the capacity of current assessment measures to adequately capture and evaluate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's knowledge and skills. Common criticisms assert that assessment tools are not designed to take into account complex factors such as poverty, welfare involvement, parent education, ethnic background, health, and home and community environments.¹⁹⁷

Docket, Perry and Kearney highlight that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children generally don't score as well on standardised evaluations as non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.¹⁹⁸ This is due to a range of factors that are not necessarily related to a child's inherent ability.

Taylor, for example, asserts that the Australian Early Development Index (AEDI) (a population measure used to report on community-wide early childhood development) is an inappropriate measure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's development because it does not take into account cultural factors, possesses an innate contextual bias, and relies on the child being proficient in Standard Australian English (SAE). In particular, Taylor criticises the AEDI for disregarding the bilingual skills that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children possess which, instead of being valued, count "for nothing if they still do not display, on teacher request, the delineated SAE competency indicators selected as the 'readiness' benchmark."¹⁹⁹

The AEDI is drawn from primary school teachers' reports on children's development across five domains, including literacy, language and communication. This underlies the importance of teachers having good relationships with children so as to make the best-informed judgments about their knowledge and skills. Carbines et al discuss how when viewed through the ecological lens, the importance of relationships in evaluation measures becomes all-important. Summarising this view, they highlight that,

...because relationships are reciprocal, and take time to develop, readiness cannot be assessed by considering the child alone, or by a one-off test before a relationship is established. Rather, interactions need to be assessed over time, through strategies that involve children, parents and teachers making judgements about learning.²⁰⁰

A further limitation of the AEDI is that it is only conducted in English. Several authors note that non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers often consider student's Aboriginal English as "bad or poor English",²⁰¹ which would no doubt contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' low scores on these domain evaluations

and accordingly their assessed readiness for school.²⁰² This has led many authors, such as McTurk et al, to highlight the need for assessment methods that are not culturally biased and that value bilingualism.²⁰³

Culture is also neglected within assessment measures, even though it is a significant factor in children's development. Taylor indicates that current assessment measures do not reflect,

...the diversity of lived experience of the taken-for-granted everyday reality of Indigenous children. Such an understanding that sees beyond poverty, deficit and divergence from a so-called norm cannot be generated by mass standardised surveying and assessment.²⁰⁴

Such an approach lacks a strengths basis, where evaluations build on and recognise the existing skills of children. Dockett, Perry and Kearney assert that,

Assessment of Indigenous children through tests based in non-Indigenous culture can reinforce 'gaps' in knowledge and skills, rather than building positive images of Indigenous children as learners.²⁰⁵

Similarly, Taylor indicates that the skills which young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children demonstrate, such as independence, autonomy, sibling/peer solidarity, visual-spatial and motor skills, capacity to self-judge and assess risks are rarely measured or recognised as strengths in early childhood or school assessments.²⁰⁶

Therefore the literature proposes that what is needed is a specific assessment tool to measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's school readiness, developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers,²⁰⁷ and that takes into account Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's bilingual skills.²⁰⁸

Dockett, Mason and Perry highlight that a strengths-based assessment tool would recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's strengths and capacities, in particular in terms of life skills and maturity.²⁰⁹ This would enable children to,

...experience success, show what they can do, learn from what they cannot yet do,

grow in confidence and look forward to the next challenge that is presented.²¹⁰

Such assessments of readiness could then be "the start of an appropriate learning and teaching program, rather than a prediction about how performance levels are linked to future school success."²¹¹ Dockett, Perry and Kearney assert that this proposition,

...supports a view of readiness as a relative construct, where teachers in different schools will have different definitions of what is required to engage effectively in their classroom environments. Parents and caregivers are likely to have different views of readiness from educators...It also supports children's knowledge and skills being considered relative to the opportunities they have experienced...²¹²

Some limited research has been conducted on assessment tools that evaluate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children independently. One of these is the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) 'Longitudinal English Literacy and Numeracy Survey' (LLANS), which according to McTurk et al could potentially be an example of a culturally appropriate assessment tool.²¹³ McTurk et al claim that the LLANS assessment tasks are considered to be "consistent with good assessment practice for Indigenous students",²¹⁴ although the authors do not elaborate on what this means. A positive finding, however, is that children whose first language is not English have been amongst the tests 'high achievers'.²¹⁵

One further study, the '100 Children go to School' program, measured literacy development using materials familiar to children – such as objects that could be found around their homes.²¹⁶ The study only contained a small cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, with the designers suggesting that future research focus on,

'...how children live in homes and communities. We don't know enough about the complexity of networks which support families with minimal economic resources, their sophisticated multilingual and multi-modal language use and production'.²¹⁷



8.2 Protective factors

The literature discusses particular protective factors that can help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children make positive transitions to school. One such factor providing particular support for children through transition is a strong sense of their own identity and culture.²¹⁸

Analysing the 2012 LSIC, the Australian Council for Education Research indicates that “shared activities, family support, strong cultural identity... and positive self identity” are significant protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²¹⁹ The authors highlight that a strengths-based transition process therefore entails “recognising and building on what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have learned and can do when they begin formal learning.”²²⁰

Dockett et al confirm ACER’s conclusions, highlighting findings from their own consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families which stressed the importance for a smooth transition that children are strong in and proud of their identity.²²¹ Drawing on findings from the 2012 LSIC, Colquhoun and Dockery suggest that,

...knowing and understanding culture and understanding the importance of cultural and community connections will make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children strong and able to survive in the mainstream culture through education.²²²

8.3 Attendance at an early childhood education and care centre

Attendance at a high quality early childhood education and care (ECEC) centre makes a large difference in children’s transition and engagement with school.²²³

The MCEETYA Taskforce identified that teachers feel that children who have attended ECEC services are more likely to be developmentally ready for school, and able to more rapidly adjust to school practices, including

...predicting teachers’ questions, anticipating right answers or offering helpful reminders which mark them as ‘good’ students from the beginning of school.²²⁴

Conversely, children who have not attended an ECEC service are less likely to be familiar with the daily routines of a school setting, and more likely to be “disoriented by this strange new context for learning and being”.²²⁵ The same report identified that unfamiliarity with school routines and environments is often an issue for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.²²⁶

In conclusion, whilst current interpretations of ‘ready’ children have evolved to understand the relational nature of children’s readiness for school, this understanding is often not reflected in practice, nor in current assessment measures.

Unless assessment measures that take into account and value the strengths and knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school are designed and implemented, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will continue to suffer from a deficit-driven model that defines their school readiness according to gaps in their knowledge and skills. This works against “positive images of Indigenous children as learners.”²²⁷ The evaluation methods used in these assessment measures need to be culturally relevant and take a dual language approach.²²⁸ Importantly, they need to draw upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers in their design and implementation.²²⁹

Dockett, Perry and Kearney highlight that children’s ‘lack of readiness’ does not indicate insufficient skills, but instead reflects “a mismatch between the attributes of individual children and families, and the abilities and resources of the school and/or system to engage and respond appropriately.”²³⁰

KEY FINDINGS

- Contemporary understandings of children’s readiness have moved away from a child’s ability to learn, to a focus more holistically on a child’s readiness for school based learning and the school environment, and their physical, socio-emotional, health and cognitive development.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children generally underperform on standardised school readiness assessments, largely due to factors such as disadvantage and the inappropriateness of assessment tools.



- Current assessment measures focus too narrowly on literacy and numeracy, and are inappropriate to measure the experiences, skills, strengths and knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school.
- Some alternative tools have been developed, but they have not been widely used or evaluated.
- Particular protective factors known to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through the transition are family support and strong cultural identity. Strengths-based approaches need to build on these protective factors to enhance transition experiences and outcomes.
- Attendance at an early childhood education and care centre has a positive impact upon children's readiness for school.
- Further research is needed to expand understandings and practice around culturally appropriate, strengths-based assessment measures and processes to support the readiness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

9. FEATURES OF SUCCESSFUL TRANSITION PROGRAMS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN

The next section will consider how the elements of readiness outlined above are drawn together to create successful transition programs. Few sources consider the practical elements of transition programs or processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and even fewer provide evidence of successful programs implemented in Australia. It is clear however that successful transition programs do not arise unsupported, but are the result of collaboration between stakeholders and comprehensive planning, design, evaluation and modification.²³¹ They also involve stakeholders collaborating to define clear and tangible objectives against which the program can then be assessed and held accountable.²³² It is important therefore to look at how the elements of readiness translate into more concrete programs.

It is also important to note that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples do not belong to a distinct, homogenous group, and therefore experience differing connections to their traditional cultures, languages and beliefs.²³³ Given this, transition to school programs must be localised and context specific. Nevertheless, our review of the literature suggests that certain important features of transition to school programs or processes arise across many different contexts. It is therefore proposed that these elements, with appropriate adaption for the local context, can be considered important aspects of an effective transition to school program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Existing evidence on the key characteristics of transition programs comes largely from two reports. The first is a large study by Dockett et al with services and families across NSW.²³⁴ This report identified five key elements of successful transition to school programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children:

- high quality programs and experiences;
- active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the various stages of planning, implementation and evaluation;
- specific focus on relationship building across and between different stakeholders;
- recognition of strengths that exist within the community; and
- recognition of the complexity of transition and respond in flexible and meaningful ways.²³⁵

The second is a national study exploring the qualities and characteristics of successful school readiness programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with a focus on the replicability of such initiatives in other settings.²³⁶ The study, by Carbines et al, sets out 10 key dimensions of early childhood education that can potentially promote an effective transition process. These are:

- staffing
- cultural inclusiveness
- preschool organisation
- teaching and learning (pedagogy)
- curriculum





Features	Summary
High quality transition to school programs and experience	• Programs concentrate on academic and school organisational skills, and preparation for the school environment, but also address the social, emotional and educational (including ensuring continuity of learning) dimensions of the transition process. • Allow sufficient time for the transition process. • Provide support to families to assist their child as they engage with school. • Multidimensional approach that considers different aspects of transition – critically including the five sections addressed below.
Relationship building across and between different stakeholders	• Focus on building and maintaining relationships between: families and school; children and school; communities and school; educators in different settings; children; educators and families; other stakeholders as appropriate. • Understand that in forming relationships with children and families ECEC services and schools will need to be aware of local cultural sensitivities, protocols to be observed, and community dynamics. • Recognition that the transition to school is also a time of family transition – and provide appropriate support to families to enable them to smoothly transition. • Recognition of the complex barriers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families may face in engaging with school and school staff and incorporate active strategies to overcome these. • Celebrating the positive stories and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and education. • Focus on forming relationships of mutual trust, care and respect between educators/teachers and children. • Appreciation of the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prior-to-school and school staff in forming relationships with children, families and communities. • Ongoing and appropriate support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prior-to-school and school staff, recognizing the roles they play in connecting educational and community contexts.
Active involvement of a wide range of stakeholders in the various stages of planning, implementation and evaluation	• Commitment to genuine and meaningful participation of children, parents/carers, families, schools and services across all program/process stages. This involves a move beyond ‘family participation’ to ‘family partnerships’ – not mere physical attendance but meaningful engagement • Engagement between educators and teachers focuses on: - Appropriate information about children’s strengths, interests, areas for development, achievements and any other relevant information (whilst still meeting children and family’s privacy and confidentiality requirements). This provides teachers with a foundation from which to connect with each child individually, and build school educational programs and approaches accordingly. It requires more than teachers merely receiving a child’s file, but active discussions with the early childhood educator to explore each child’s background information. - Valuing each other’s knowledge, including parent/family knowledge - Role-swapping to “better understand from their own observations the practices, expectations and outcomes for children in the other setting.



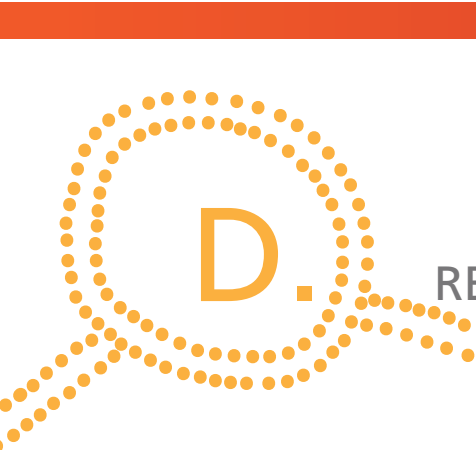
Features	Summary
Recognition of strengths that exist within the local community	• School readiness assessments incorporate a focus on the unique strengths, experiences, language skills and knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children possess • Programs recognise and value the unique strengths, experiences, language skills and knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school, and use these as building blocks for transition programs and school learning • Programs integrate family and community strengths, including connecting in with existing programs within the community • Programs utilise the connections Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators have with their local community
Recognition of the complexity of transition and respond in flexible and meaningful ways	• Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families and children are not homogenous and therefore require localised responses to transition • Programs consult widely with stakeholders across all stages (eg in the design, implementation and evaluation stages) and respond to input
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members involved in the transition process	• Programs employ and actively support (where possible local) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and school support staff in meaningful roles (eg Aboriginal Education Workers)
Cultural competence	• Applies a cultural competence framework that takes into account: - Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and partnerships - Cultural awareness - Cultural respect - Cultural responsiveness - Cultural safety - Cross-cultural practice and care

- links with other agencies (eg health)
- assessment, monitoring and evaluation
- links to schools
- underpinning values
- parent/family/community involvement²³⁷

Some of these dimensions relate more to preschool programs themselves, and are focused more on children's readiness. Others however are equally relevant for transition processes – such as cultural inclusiveness. Drawing upon these two studies, and evidence on the dimensions of 'readiness', this literature review proposes the following framework for effective school transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The purpose of this framework is to provide a research-based guide of the key elements that appear in effective transition programs/processes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The framework is not designed to encompass every aspect of transition programs, or to provide an exhaustive list of practical examples, but instead to be used by policy makers and services alike as a reference guide in the design, implementation and evaluation of programs. The framework is thus far based solely on evidence from the literature, and would benefit from development through service consultations.





D.

RESEARCH GAPS

From this review of the literature it is apparent that there are a number of critical gaps in our understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's transition to school.

Whilst the research indicates that the ecological, multidimensional approach to transition accords well with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures,²³⁸ current research gaps centre around the need for more complex exploration and comprehension of how the current framework for transition to school – ready children, schools, communities, families and services – accords with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understandings, values and needs.²³⁹ Specific elements of this, as well as broader knowledge gaps, are outlined below.

1. Lack of input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families

Without knowing what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' through the early childhood and school transition periods, we lack the perspectives of those who know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children best. We also limit our understandings of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's first teachers – their families – can be engaged as active stakeholders in the transition to school process. This constrains our capacity to design high quality transition processes that respond to the unique needs of these children.

There is, therefore, a pressing need for more research to enable us to better understand the outcomes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families want for their children in early childhood. A focus on a strengths-based approach to support these outcomes would be valuable. And, appreciating that there will be diverse interpretations and that approaches to family engagement will therefore need to be context-based, it is important to understand what successful transitions look like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, the challenges families experience throughout the transition, and how these challenges can be overcome.

2. Understandings of cultural competence within schools and transition processes

The literature elaborates on how schools can acknowledge, value and reflect diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being and knowing within the school environment, curriculum and processes. It also explores the need for schools to understand family within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, children's home life and language. However it is clear throughout the literature that transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children has yet to be conceptualised within a comprehensive culturally competent framework.

More research is needed into how schools can embed culturally competent practice within their policies and processes, beyond individual staff training on cultural competence practice.

3. Understandings the strengths Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children bring to school

Research is required to better understand the unique strengths, experiences and knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are equipped with in the early years, and that they then bring to school.

The MCEETYA Taskforce proposed that further research,

...needs to be undertaken to develop a holistic view of development and learning across transition points which shows how the mental, social, physical and emotional development of Indigenous children interacts with their learning.²⁴⁰

Tying in with this is the need for further research to examine the connections between risk and protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and the role that extended families play in mediating risks.²⁴¹



4. Lack of holistic, culturally appropriate assessment measures

The lack of culturally appropriate assessment measures that focus on a child's holistic development disadvantages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, limiting understandings of their readiness to a narrow set of skills. There is therefore an urgent need for research into, and the design and validation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific assessment measures.²⁴²

5. Why some programs are successful

A further area for focus is the evaluation of factors that are important for fostering successful transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children – particularly those beyond their own readiness for school. As West and Nolan assert,

Much of the literature around measuring transition to school focuses on skills-based measurements of individual children's readiness for school, rather than focusing on whether transition to school programs have been successful.²⁴³

There are, however, difficulties with identifying and evaluating important factors in fostering successful transitions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Certain elements that support the readiness of schools, families, communities and services may not be easily quantifiable, including for example,

...the cultural appropriateness of communication approaches, 'tone' of classroom interactions or the strengths of Indigenous children in Indigenous knowledge may be difficult to measure.²⁴⁴

This highlights the need for the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities in the evaluation of programs in order to provide localised knowledge from those most affected by the program.

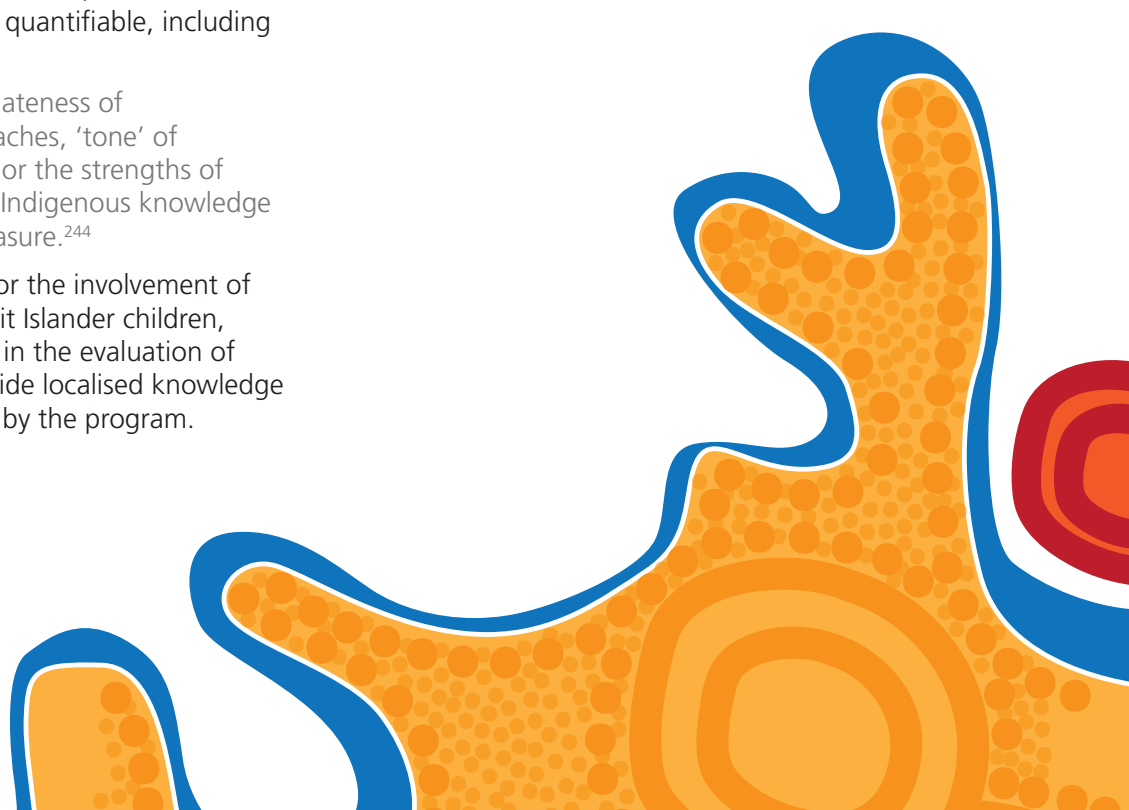
6. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors

The majority of authors writing about transition to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. This will inherently limit the quality and breadth of knowledge. Furthermore, future research needs to better incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methodologies,²⁴⁵ which entails reflecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, needs, interests within the research, and ensuring that the research results in direct and immediate benefits to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

7. General gaps

A further gap or weakness in the literature is an over reliance on US-focused studies. Although these can have some relevance, they draw from and reflect a very different cultural, social and political context to that in Australia.²⁴⁶

There is also a tendency within research to present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a homogenous group with homogenous needs and cultures.²⁴⁷





E.

CONCLUSION

Transition represents a significant opportunity through which to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's successful entry into formal schooling. Successful transitions have far-reaching consequences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including improved educational, health and future employment outcomes. The transition point also represents a critical time at which to foster the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families within both the school environment, and Australian society more broadly.

Evidence demonstrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families can face particular challenges through the transition process, largely due to higher levels of disadvantage, lower participation in early childhood services, and a lack of cultural competence within many mainstream schools.

Current understandings of effective school transitions conceptualise the process according to five key dimensions: ready schools, communities, families, early childhood services, and children. This is a useful framework although further interrogation of these principles is needed to understand how and whether they accord with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander notions of readiness.

What we do know is that key features across effective transitions programs include: high quality programs and experiences; meaningful and respectful partnerships between and participation of all stakeholders; a strengths-based approach that draws on the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities; flexibility within program approach and design; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and a culturally competent approach.

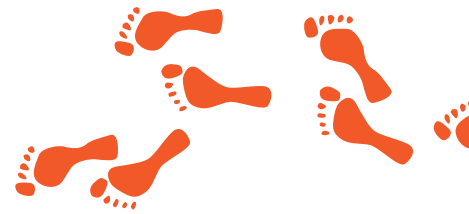
Identification of these key features provides an opportunity to evaluate the processes and outcomes of transition programs and to further determine the importance of these, or indeed additional, key features. This also provides an important opportunity to develop evidence based transition programs informed by these features, thereby strengthening transition processes and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These features could also provide a framework for

educators to reflect on their current programs and explore areas where improvements could be made.

Significant gaps still remain, however, in our understandings of what constitutes successful transitions to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. These centre around the following:

- the lack of input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families;
- the need for more sophisticated understandings of cultural competence within the transition process and schools themselves;
- inappropriate, deficit-focused assessment measures; and
- a lack of knowledge regarding the reasons for the success of certain programs.

In conclusion, until we begin to address these crucial gaps, and transform our knowledge on ready schools, communities, services, families and children into practical, successful programs, we risk leaving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families vulnerable to school transitions that are poorly supported, culturally inappropriate and/or non strengths-based. In doing so we limit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's chances of educational achievement and future success.



- 1 Carbines, Robert; Grieves, Vicki; Robb, Leone; Wyatt, Tim (2008). *National study into the successful transition of Indigenous children into schools: Project Report*. Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Canberra, 50; Dockett, Susan; Perry, Bob; Mason, Terry; Simpson, Tracey; Howard, Peter; Whitton, Diana; Gilbert, Shirley; Pearce, Sophia; Sanagavarapu, Prathyusha; Skattebol, Jen; Woodrow, Christine (2008). *Successful transition programs from prior-to-school to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: final report submitted to the Project Reference Group, 2007*. NSW Department of Education and Training; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. Victoria, 15
- 2 Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia. Canberra, 351; Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2011 Report*, Productivity Commission, 4.30 and 4.33; Perry, Bob; Howard, Peter; Skattebol, Jen; Dockett, Sue; Mason, Terry; Whitton, Diana; Gilbert, Shirley; Simpson, Tracey; Woodrow, Chris (2005). *Successful transition programs from prior-to-school to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: Methodological considerations*. University of Western Sydney; Australian Catholic University; Charles Sturt University, 2.
- 3 MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2001). *Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous Children Aged 0 to 8 Years*. Discussion Paper, 5; Warren, Elizabeth; Young, Janelle; deVries, Eva (2008). 'The impact of early numeracy engagement on four-year-old Indigenous students'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 33, Issue: 4. December 2008, 2; Dockett, Sue; Mason, Terry; Perry, Bob (2006). 'Successful transition to school for Australian Aboriginal children'. *Childhood Education*. Vol. 82, No. 3. Spring 2006, 139.
- 4 Taylor, Anthea Jo (2011). 'Coming, ready or not: Aboriginal children's transition to school in urban Australia and the policy push'. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. Vol. 19, No. 2. June 2011, 155.
- 5 Armstrong, Stephanie; Buckley, Sarah; Lonsdale, Michele; Milgate, Gina; Bennetts Kneebone, Laura; Cook, Louise; Skelton, Fiona (2012). *Starting School: A strengths-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Australian Council for Educational Research; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 11-17; Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143; Shepherd, Carrington; Walker, Roz (2008). *Engaging Indigenous families in preparing children for school*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth; Communities for Children (Program). Western Australia.
- 6 Shepherd and Walker *op. cit.*, 20.
- 7 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 142.
- 8 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 70.
- 9 Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 7.
- 10 Bronfenbrenner, Urie and Morris, Pamela A. (1998). The ecology of the development process. In W. Damon (Series Ed.) and R. Lerner (Vol. Ed). *Handbook of Child Psychology*, Vol 1, Theoretical models of child development, pp. 993-1028. John Wiley and Sons: New York.
- 11 Pianta, Robert C., Rimm-Kaufman, Sara E. & Cox, Martha E. (1999). Introduction: An ecological approach to kindergarten transition. In Robert C. Pianta & Martha J. Cox (Eds.), *The transition to kindergarten*, pp. 3-12. Paul H. Brookes: Baltimore, Maryland.
- 12 Bell-Booth, Rachel, Staton, Sally, Thorpe, Karen (2012). 'Getting There, Being There, Staying and Belonging: A Case Study of Two Indigenous Australian Children's Transition to School'. *Children and Society* (Early View), 2.
- 13 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 17.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Dockett, Susan; Perry, Bob; Kearney, Emma (2010). *School readiness: what does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* Closing the Gap Clearinghouse; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; Australian Institute of Family Studies. Canberra, ACT, 3.
- 16 Ibid, 11.
- 17 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 51.
- 18 Perry, Bob (2011). *Evaluation of the implementation of 'Foundations for Success - guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities'*: final report. Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education; Queensland Department of Education and Training. Brisbane, 56.
- 19 Bell-Booth et al, *op. cit.*, 2.
- 20 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 15.
- 21 Rhode Island KIDS COUNT (2005). *Getting Ready: Findings from the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative - A 17 State Partnership*. Providence, Rhode Island, 13.
- 22 McTurk, Nick; Nutton, Georgie; Lea, Tess; Robinson, Gary; Carapetis, Jonathan (2008). *The school readiness of Australian Indigenous children: a review of the literature*. Menzies School of Health Research; School for Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University, 23; McTurk, Nicholas; Lea, Tess; Robinson Gary; Nutton, Georgie; Carapetis, Jonathan R. (2011). 'Defining and assessing the school readiness of Indigenous Australian children'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 36, Issue: 1. Online annex. March 2011, 70; Carrington & Walker, *op. cit.*, 11.
- 23 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*
- 24 Ibid, 3.
- 25 Ibid, 7.
- 26 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 3.
- 27 Ibid, 36.
- 28 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 150; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*
- 29 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *op. cit.*, 2.16.
- 30 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 155.



- 31 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 32 Ibid, 16; Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 9.
- 33 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 21; Taylor, *op. cit.*, 155.
- 34 For more information on this see Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) (2011). *Growing up our way: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child rearing practices matrix*. Melbourne, 65-73.
- 35 Viadero, 1999 in Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 140.
- 36 Ramey & Ramey (1999) in Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 16.
- 37 Viadero, 1999 in Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 140.
- 38 Dockett et al (2006). *op. cit.*, 143.
- 39 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 50.
- 40 Ibid.
- 41 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 20.
- 42 Waltja Tujtangu Palyapayi Aboriginal Corporation 2001 in Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 47.
- 43 MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 27.
- 44 Viadero, 1999 in Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 63.
- 45 Dockett et al (2006), Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 140.
- 46 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 9.
- 47 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 48 Perry (2005), *op. cit.*
- 49 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 10.
- 50 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 51 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 59.
- 52 Colquhuon, Simon & Dockery, Michael Alfred (2012). *The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples*. CLMR Discussion Paper Series 2012/01. Curtin University, 12.
- 53 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FAHCSIA) (2012). *Footprints in time - the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children: key summary report from wave 3*. Canberra, ACT, 82.
- 54 Ibid, 84.
- 55 Colquhuon et al, *op. cit.*, 26.
- 56 Dockett et al (2006). *op. cit.*, 144.
- 57 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 148.
- 58 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 18.
- 59 Dockett (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 60 Thorpe, Karen; Vromans, Lyn; Bell-Booth, Rachel (2011). *Accessing kindergarten in Queensland: a report to the Queensland Office for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Queensland University of Technology; Office for Early Childhood Education and Care. Queensland, 34.
- 61 Ibid.
- 62 Clark, Kim D; Oosthuizen, Jacques; Beerenfels, Susan; Rowell, Anne-Marie C (2010). 'Making the best of the early years: the Tambellup way'. *Rural and Remote Health*. Vol. 10, Issue: 3. July/September 2010, 5.
- 63 West, Sue; Nolan, Andrea (2012). *Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School: Development of Framework and Tools*. Prepared for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, CCCH and Victoria University, 46.
- 64 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 11.
- 65 Ibid; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*; McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*; Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*
- 66 Fler, Marilyn (2004). 'The cultural construction of family involvement in early childhood education: some Indigenous Australian perspectives'. *Australian Educational Researcher*. Vol. 31, No. 3. December 2004, 61.
- 67 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 6; Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 6; Bell-Booth et al, *op. cit.*, 12.
- 68 Department of Education, Science and Technology (2005). *Teaching Reading: Report and Recommendations*. National Inquiry into the Teaching of Literacy. Canberra, 40.
- 69 Ibid.
- 70 Bell-Booth et al, *op. cit.*, 12.
- 71 Malatest, R. (2002). *Parent and education engagement partnership project: Discussion paper*. British Colombia Ministry of Education. Canada, 10-14.
- 72 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 23.
- 73 Ibid, 23.
- 74 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 37. Ibid.
- 75 Ibid, Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 37.
- 76 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 24.
- 77 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; see also Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 78 Fler, *op. cit.*, 60.
- 79 Ibid.
- 80 Fler & Williams-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 54.
- 81 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141.
- 82 Fler, *op. cit.*, 62.
- 83 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 9.
- 84 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141.
- 85 Fler, *op. cit.*, 62.
- 86 Ibid.
- 87 Ibid.
- 88 Ibid.
- 89 Fler & Williams-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 54.
- 90 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 5 & 10; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 91 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 149.
- 92 Dockett et al, *op. cit.*, 6.
- 93 Ibid.
- 94 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 27; Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Incorporated; Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; Victorian Aboriginal Child Association; Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (2004). *Aboriginal Best Start Status report*. Department of Human Services. Victoria, 10; Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141.
- 95 National Curriculum Services. *What Works. The Work Program: Condobolin Preschool Centre*. Commonwealth of Australia. Accessed 15/07/2013 at: http://www.whatworks.edu.au/4_4_3.htm.
- 96 Ibid, 141; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 6; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 20 & 48.
- 97 Ibid, 5.

- 98 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 99 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 48.
- 100 Hudsmith, Sandra (1992). 'Culturally responsive pedagogy in urban classrooms'. *The Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol. 20, No. 3., 9.
- 101 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 155.
- 102 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 57.
- 103 Fleer, *op. cit.*, 61.
- 104 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71.
- 105 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 90.
- 106 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 148.
- 107 Fleer and Williams-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 54.
- 108 Ibid, 62; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 9; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 109 Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 54.
- 110 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 21; Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 111 Fleer, *op. cit.*, 59.
- 112 Dockett et al, (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 113 Viadero, 1999 in Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 140.
- 114 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 77.
- 115 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 116 ArmstrongDockett et al, (2010), *op. cit.*, 30-3110.
- 117 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 10 & 20.
- 118 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 74.
- 119 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 149.
- 120 Zubrick, Stephen; Silburn, Sven; De Maio, John A.; Shepherd, Carrington; Griffin, J. A.; Dalby, R. B.; Mitrou, Francis G.; Lawrence, David; Hayward, Colleen; Pearson, Glenn; Milroy, J.; Cox, Adele (2006). *The Western Australian Aboriginal child health survey. Vol. 3, Improving the educational experiences of Aboriginal children and young people*. Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Curtin University of Technology. Western Australia, 507.
- 121 Warren et al, *op. cit.*, 3.
- 122 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 150.
- 123 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 10.
- 124 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 149.
- 125 Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31.
- 126 Ibid; Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 127 Ibid; Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31.
- 128 Ibid.
- 129 Ibid.
- 130 Ibid 21 & 81; Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 131 MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 4; see also Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31.
- 132 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 133 Ibid.
- 134 Colquhuon & Dockery, *op. cit.*, 25.
- 135 Fleer, *op. cit.*, 59.
- 136 Bell-Booth et al, *op. cit.*, 12.
- 137 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 149.
- 138 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 7; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 139 Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31.
- 140 Taylor et al, *op. cit.*, 155.
- 141 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 22.
- 142 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 5 & 10; McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 5.
- 143 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 149; Fleer & Williams-Kennedy, *op. cit.*, 53; Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141.
- 144 Ibid, 142; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 5; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 71; Bell-Booth et al, *op. cit.*, 13; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 41;
- 145 Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 32.
- 146 Ibid, 22.
- 147 Purdie et al, 2000, 46 in McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 6.
- 148 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 17; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 7 & 11.
- 149 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 72.
- 150 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 7.
- 151 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 7.
- 152 Kagan, Sharon & Rigby, Elizabeth (2003). *Improving the readiness of children for school: recommendations for state policy. A discussion paper for the policy matters project*. Center for the Study of Social Policy, Washington.
- 153 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 7.
- 154 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 72.
- 155 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 11.
- 156 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 7.
- 157 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 72.
- 158 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 159 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 72.
- 160 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 37-8.
- 161 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 11.
- 162 National Curriculum Services (2013). *Improved transition – improved outcomes*. What Works. The Works Program: Core Issues 12, 12.
- 163 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 9.
- 164 Ibid, 34; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 70.
- 165 FaCSIA 2006, in *ibid*.
- 166 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 167 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 143.
- 168 Ibid, 20.
- 169 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 7.
- 170 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 20.
- 171 Malin, Merridy, Maidment, Debra (2003). 'Education, Indigenous survival and well-being: emerging ideas and programs', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*. Vol. 32, 90.
- 172 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 116.
- 173 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 72; McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 36.
- 174 Ibid, 3.
- 175 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 21; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 8 and 46.
- 176 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 71.
- 177 Shepherd & Walker, *op. cit.*, 28.
- 178 Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Commonwealth Government, 16.
- 179 DEEWR (2009), *op. cit.*, 16.
- 180 Ibid.
- 181 MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 11.
- 182 Ibid, 25. For more on this see SNAICC, *op. cit.*, 65-73.
- 183 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 70.
- 184 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 4.
- 185 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 25; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*

- 186 Ibid, 71.
- 187 Ibid, 97.
- 188 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 8.
- 189 Ibid, 8; Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 72 & 101.
- 190 Ibid, 72; Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 8.
- 191 Ibid, 8.
- 192 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 69.
- 193 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 4.
- 194 Farrar, Estelle; Goldfield, Sharon; Moore, Tim (2007). *School Readiness*. Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), The Royal Children's Hospital, Murdoch Children's Research Institute for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). Victoria, 4; Dockett, Sue and Perry, Bob (2009). 'Readiness for School: A relational construct'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2009, 21.
- 195 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 196 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 73; Dockett, Sue and Perry, Bruce (2001). 'Starting School: Effective Transitions'. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*. Vol. 3, Issue 2, 9; Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 97-8.
- 197 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 150.
- 198 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 5.
- 199 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 153.
- 200 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 97.
- 201 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 148; McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 73.
- 202 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 11.
- 203 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 73.
- 204 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 154.
- 205 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 10.
- 206 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 148.
- 207 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 74; Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 5; Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 208 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 12 & 36.
- 209 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 143.
- 210 Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*, 31.
- 211 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 4.
- 212 Ibid, 4.
- 213 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 73.
- 214 Ibid, 73.
- 215 Taylor, *op. cit.*, 152.
- 216 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 74.
- 217 Hill & Loudon, 1999, 18 in Ibid.
- 218 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141; Armstrong et al, *op. cit.*
- 219 Ibid, 30.
- 220 Ibid.
- 221 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 141.
- 222 Colquhuon et al, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 223 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 12; McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 22; MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 26.
- 224 Ibid.
- 225 Ibid.
- 226 Ibid.
- 227 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 1.
- 228 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 12.
- 229 Ibid.
- 230 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 1.
- 231 Dockett et al (2006), *op. cit.*, 170.
- 232 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 98.
- 233 Ibid, 59.
- 234 Dockett et al (2008), *op. cit.*
- 235 Ibid, 6-7.
- 236 Carbines et al, *op. cit.*, 10.
- 237 Ibid, 62.
- 238 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 36.
- 239 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 70.
- 240 MCEETYA, *op. cit.*, 27.
- 241 McTurk et al (2008), *op. cit.*, 36-37.
- 242 McTurk et al (2011), *op. cit.*, 75.
- 243 West & Nolan, *op. cit.*, 21.
- 244 Dockett et al (2010), *op. cit.*, 17.
- 245 Ibid, 18.
- 246 Ibid, 17.
- 247 Ibid.





REFERENCE LIST

- Armstrong, Stephanie; Buckley, Sarah; Lonsdale, Michele; Milgate, Gina; Bennetts Kneebone, Laura; Cook, Louise; Skelton, Fiona (2012). *Starting School: A strengths-based approach towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children*. Australian Council for Educational Research; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.
- Bell-Booth, Rachel, Staton, Sally, Thorpe, Karen (2012). 'Getting There, Being There, Staying and Belonging: A Case Study of Two Indigenous Australian Children's Transition to School'. *Children and Society* (Early View).
- Biddle, Nicholas (2007). 'Indigenous Australians and preschool education: who is attending?'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 32, No. 3. September 2007: 9-16.
- Bond, Chelsea (2009). 'Starting at strengths: an Indigenous early years intervention'. *Medical Journal of Australia*. Vol. 191, Issue: 3. August 2009: 175-177.
- Carbines, Robert; Grieves, Vicki; Robb, Leone; Wyatt, Tim (2008). *National study into the successful transition of Indigenous children into schools: Project Report*. Report to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations. Canberra.
- Clark, Kim D; Oosthuizen, Jacques; Beerenfels, Susan; Rowell, Anne-Marie C (2010). 'Making the best of the early years: the Tambellup way'. *Rural and Remote Health*. Vol. 10, Issue: 3. July/September 2010.
- Colquhoun, Simon & Dockery, Michael Alfred (2012). *The link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal peoples*. CLMR Discussion Paper Series 2012/01. Curtin University.
- Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2009). *Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Commonwealth Government, 16.
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2009). *Footprints in time - the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children: key summary report from wave 1*. Commonwealth Government.
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2011). *Footprints in time - the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children: key summary report from wave 2*. Commonwealth Government.
- Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (2012). *Footprints in time - the Longitudinal Study of Indigenous Children: key summary report from wave 3*. Commonwealth Government.
- Department of Human Services (2005). *Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in kindergarten*. Victoria.
- Dockett, Sue and Perry, Bruce (2001). 'Starting School: Effective Transitions'. *Early Childhood Research and Practice*. Vol. 3, Issue 2.
- Dockett, Sue and Perry, Bob (2009). 'Readiness for School: A relational construct'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 34, No. 1, March 2009.
- Dockett, Sue; Mason, Terry; Perry, Bob (2006). 'Successful transition to school for Australian Aboriginal children'. *Childhood Education*. Vol. 82, No. 3. Spring 2006: 139-144.
- Dockett, Susan; Perry, Bob; Kearney, Emma (2010). *School readiness: what does it mean for Indigenous children, families, schools and communities?* Closing the Gap Clearinghouse; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; Australian Institute of Family Studies. Canberra, ACT.
- Dockett, Susan; Perry, Bob; Mason, Terry; Simpson, Tracey; Howard, Peter; Whitton, Diana; Gilbert, Shirley; Pearce, Sophia; Sanagavarapu, Prathyusha; Skattebol, Jen; Woodrow, Christine (2008). *Successful transition programs from prior-to-school to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: final report submitted to the Project Reference Group, 2007*. NSW Department of Education and Training; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment and Youth Affairs. Victoria.
- Elliot, Alison (2011). 'Belonging in remote communities'. *Every Child*. Vol. 17, No. 2: 10-11.
- Farrar, Estelle; Goldfield, Sharon; Moore, Tim (2007). *School Readiness*. Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH), The Royal Children's Hospital, Murdoch Children's Research Institute for the Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). Victoria.
- Fleer, Marilyn (2004). 'The cultural construction of family involvement in early childhood education: some Indigenous Australian perspectives'. *Australian Educational Researcher*. Vol. 31, No. 3. December 2004: 51-68.
- Fleer, Marilyn; Williams-Kennedy, Denise (2005). 'Looking in and not seeing yourself mirrored back: investigations of some Indigenous family views on education'. In *Curriculum controversies: point and counterpoint 1980-2005* edited by C Marsh. ACT: 432-437.
- Fluckiger, Beverley, Diamond, Pat, Jones, Will (2012). 'Yarning space: leading literacy learning through family-school partnerships'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*; Vol. 37, Issue: 3; Sep 2012: 53-59.
- Hudsmith, Sandra (1992). 'Culturally responsive pedagogy in urban classrooms'. *The Aboriginal Child at School*, Vol. 20, No. 3.
- Jackiewicz, Stephanie; Saggars, Sherry; Frances, Kate (2011). 'Equity of access: requirements of Indigenous families and communities to ensure equitable access to government-approved childcare settings in Australia'. *Australasian*

Journal of Early Childhood. Vol. 36, No. 3, Online Annex. September 2001: 100-108.

Malin, Merridy, Maidment, Debra (2003). 'Education, Indigenous survival and well-being: emerging ideas and programs', *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*. Vol 32.

Mann, Deb; Knight, Samantha; Thomson, Jo (2011). Aboriginal access to preschool: what attracts and retains *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in preschools? A small qualitative and quantitative study of inner Sydney mainstream preschools*. SDN Children's Services, Ngara Nanga Mai Aboriginal Unit. NSW.

MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education (2001). *Effective Learning Issues for Indigenous Children Aged 0 to 8 Years*. Discussion Paper.

McTurk, Nicholas; Lea, Tess; Robinson Gary; Nutton, Georgie; Carapetis, Jonathan R. (2011). 'Defining and assessing the school readiness of Indigenous Australian children'. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 36, Issue: 1. Online annex. March 2011: 69-76.

McTurk, Nick; Nutton, Georgie; Lea, Tess; Robinson, Gary; Carapetis, Jonathan (2008). *The school readiness of Australian Indigenous children: a review of the literature*. Menzies School of Health Research; School for Social and Policy Research, Charles Darwin University.

Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (2011). *Universal Access to early childhood education for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy*. Canberra.

National Curriculum Services (2013). *What Works. The Works Program: Core Issues 12 Improved transition – improved outcomes*. Melbourne.

National Curriculum Services. *What Works. The Work Program: Condobolin Preschool Centre*. Commonwealth of Australia. Accessed 15/07/2013 at: http://www.whatworks.edu.au/4_4_3.htm.

Perry, Bob (2011). *Evaluation of the implementation of 'Foundations for Success - guidelines for an early learning program in Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities': final report*. Research Institute for Professional Practice, Learning and Education; Queensland Department of Education and Training. Brisbane.

Perry, Bob; Howard, Peter; Skattebol, Jen; Dockett, Sue; Mason, Terry; Whitton, Diana; Gilbert, Shirley; Simpson, Tracey; Woodrow, Chris (2005). *Successful transition programs from prior-to-school to school for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children: Methodological considerations*. University of Western Sydney; Australian Catholic University; Charles Sturt University.

Shepherd, Carrington; Walker, Roz (2008). *Engaging Indigenous families in preparing children for school*. Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth; Communities for Children (Program). Western Australia.

Sims, Margaret (2011). 'Early childhood and education services for Indigenous children prior to starting school'. Closing the Gap Clearinghouse (Australia); Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; Australian Institute of Family Studies. Canberra, ACT.

Taylor, Anthea Jo (2011). 'Coming, ready or not: Aboriginal children's transition to school in urban Australia and the policy push'. *International Journal of Early Years Education*. Vol. 19, No. 2. June 2011: 145-161.

Thorpe, Karen; Vromans, Lyn; Bell-Booth, Rachel (2011). *Accessing kindergarten in Queensland: a report to the Queensland Office for Early Childhood Education and Care*. Queensland University of Technology; Office for Early Childhood Education and Care. Queensland.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Incorporated; Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation; Victorian Aboriginal Child Association; Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (2004). *Aboriginal Best Start Status report*. Department of Human Services. Victoria.

Warren, Elizabeth; Young, Janelle; deVries, Eva (2008). 'The impact of early numeracy engagement on four-year-old Indigenous students'. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*. Vol. 33, Issue: 4. December 2008: 2-8.

West, Sue; Nolan, Andrea (2012). *Outcomes and Indicators of a Positive Start to School: Development of Framework and Tools*. Prepared for the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, CCCH and Victoria University.

Zubrick, Stephen; Silburn, Sven; De Maio, John A.; Shepherd, Carrington; Griffin, J. A.; Dalby, R. B.; Mitrou, Francis G.; Lawrence, David; Hayward, Colleen; Pearson, Glenn; Milroy, J.; Cox, Adele (2006). *The Western Australian Aboriginal child health survey. Vol. 3, Improving the educational experiences of Aboriginal children and young people*. Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Curtin University of Technology. Western Australia.



NOTES

[illegible]

A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body
that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander children and families.



Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd, North Fitzroy Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.org.au | Phone: (03) 9489 8099



Coming Together: The journey towards effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

June 2012

IKANBALA.



SNAICC

Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

SNAICC acknowledges the significant time and expertise that service integration leaders have contributed through their participation in interviews that inform this report. SNAICC appreciates their support.

SNAICC also thanks the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs for the funding support to conduct this research.

Cover design artwork by Richard McLean Ikanbala

Researched and written by:

John Burton, Policy Officer, SNAICC

SNAICC

.....
Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.org.au
Phone: (03) 9489 8099

A strong voice for our children and families

.....
SNAICC is the national non-government peak body
that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander children and their families.

Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	2
2. Methodology	4
3. The context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres	5
4. The lens of genuine and respectful partnerships	6
5. The lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community control.....	7
6. Alignment with the literature.....	10
7. Integration in practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.....	14
7.1 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach.....	14
7.2 Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government.....	23
7.3 Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	32
7.4 Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.	41
8. Building blocks for partnerships for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	50
9. Conclusion	52
10. Summary of Recommendations	53
Reference List	57

1. Introduction

Building from the recent SNAICC literature review on *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*,¹ this paper applies an initial understanding of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to current experiences in integrated service design, development and delivery. It draws significantly on the knowledge and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery and integration leaders. In this way, the paper provides a uniquely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on what is necessary for integration that leads to high quality service, and contributes to wellbeing and positive development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

This paper is grounded in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community contexts and the practical needs of communities to address the challenges and disadvantage that their peoples experience. Specifically, it focuses on the integration processes occurring in the development of the 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established under the *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. These Centres were proposed within a framework of management, governance and service systems integration,² and provide a solid context to view and envision aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Whilst service integration aspects described in the paper and accompanying recommendations have broader implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery, they are of particular relevance to the development and operation of the Centres.

Common issues, challenges, and practice ideas from the Centres are presented to inform understanding and open discussion about effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This paper is a starting point and should be read as such, recognising that the Centres are newly developing, this is a complex and new issue, and that there is a limited body of evidence to inform effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. SNAICC invites participation of all stakeholders in ongoing efforts to define and deepen common understanding of what is required for effective service integration in these contexts. SNAICC looks forward to ongoing future collaboration with the Centres in this regard to progress the ideas presented in this paper. The paper also acknowledges that there can be no single model of service integration, as local design to respond to local need is a central tenet of integrated service development. However, common issues experienced and fundamental principles for service development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families are ultimately informative of broader structural supports required, as well as providing practical ideas for individual service design.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are targeted to support children's development in the early years of life. A strong body of evidence indicates that later developmental outcomes and social functioning in adulthood are strongly linked to experiences in the early years, and that investments in preventative early

¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

² Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

years programmes have the greatest positive impact over-time and are most cost-effective.³ Service integration seeks to place the child in the context of family and community, ensuring that early years services are connected and collaborate with the range of family and community support services that contribute to a safe, positive and supportive developmental environment for children. It requires a broad service design focus that goes beyond traditional models of early childhood education and care to new ways of collaborative working between the range of health and family support services that contribute to holistic child and family wellbeing.

The aspects of effective service integration that this paper describes are supportive of and informed by broader government frameworks that recognise the importance and value of partnerships for integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They provide guidance for implementation of the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children* in its strategy to 'implement an integrated approach to service design and delivery across the lifecycle and spectrum of need,'⁴ and reinforce its recognition that, 'in order to provide culturally appropriate responses, strategies developed under the National Framework need to be based on partnerships between Indigenous families and communities, and between Indigenous agencies, mainstream service providers and governments.'⁵ The *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)* service delivery principles for services and programs for Indigenous Australians are a specific and significant informant of integration aspects.⁶ Its seven core principles of priority, Indigenous engagement, sustainability, access, integration and accountability, are considered throughout this paper.

Two significant lenses are applied to the analysis of service integration: the lens of genuine and respectful partnerships; and the lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community control. Through these lenses SNAICC identifies building blocks for the development of partnerships for effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These are detailed in relation to each aspect of service integration. The building blocks reflect varied models and ideas for achieving integration in different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts, and are presented as ideas to inform ongoing discussion of what is needed to support and achieve effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

³ Mustard (2005) and Shonkoff & Phillips (2000) in Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1), 1; Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 9; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010); Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1).

⁴ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf

2. Methodology

This paper draws on four key research processes or papers to describe aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The two separate research papers below should be referred to for a broader understanding of the evidence base that informs this paper.

1. A comprehensive review of the literature on integrated child and family service delivery, including a particular focus on approaches to integrating services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This review draws significantly on the evaluation of leading Australian integration initiatives.
SNAICC (2012) Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and Families. Melbourne.
2. Case-study based research which reviews the principles and practices that enable genuine partnership relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream service providers and government. This research is highly relevant to the integration approach, recognising that partnership development is a core aspect of effective service integration.
SNAICC (2012) Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs. Melbourne.
3. Focus interviews with leaders in service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to further interrogate aspects identified in the literature in the context of current Australian integration initiatives. The leaders selected were engaged in the development of the 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres established under *the National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Leaders were selected to represent on-the-ground realities in the development of five different Children and Family Centres. These included centres in three different Australian states and in urban, regional and remote service development contexts. A discussion paper based on the SNAICC literature review was developed and provided to participants to guide discussions.
4. Perspectives shared and expressed by leaders in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and other expert contributors to the *National Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum* held in Melbourne on 31 May 2012. These were captured through participation and recording by SNAICC researchers at the conference and notes made available by conference organisers.

The methodology focuses on identifying, within each of these sources, the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations on effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This recognises the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the design and delivery of integrated services and supports their right to self-determination. The need for an approach grounded in self-determination is detailed in section 5 below and reinforced throughout the paper.

3. The context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres

The 38 new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are a key initiative of all Australian Governments to achieve service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The Centres provide an opportunity to implement the *NIRA* service delivery principles for services and programs to Indigenous Australians, including the integration principle. This principle calls for greater levels of collaboration between all levels of government and between services in developing responses that are sensitive to local contexts.⁷ The initiative was specifically identified as a priority action under the *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, which described the overarching vision for integrating services within the Centres:

‘The Children and Family Centres will provide a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs, and include child care, early learning and parent and family support services. The operations of the Children and Family Centre will be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems. Community engagement with the Children and Family Centres is integral to their successful implementation.’⁸

The *National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children* adopts a public health model and aims to integrate services ‘across the lifecycle and spectrum of need.’⁹ It seeks to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect through a primary focus on preventative supports for all children and families.¹⁰ This approach is based on the assumption that ‘by providing the right services at the right time vulnerable families can be supported, child abuse and neglect can be prevented, and the effects of trauma and harm can be reduced.’¹¹ *The Framework* identifies the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as a major initiative to expand service access and a key strategy to achieve outcome 5, that ‘Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and communities.’¹²

As a highly significant and targeted initiative to address disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through integrated service delivery, these new Centres provide a solid context to view and envision aspects of effective integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They also present as a critical context to ensure that the significant investment of funds, and efforts by government and communities, to achieve service integration, lead to the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families over time.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres are all in early stages of service development, with only three centres having commenced operating out of purpose built premises as of June 2012, and a number of services having established initial

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁹ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*. 18. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf

¹⁰ Ibid. 12.

¹¹ Ibid. 17.

¹² Ibid.

operations in temporary locations. With individual state and territory governments taking responsibility for the rollout of the Centres, significant diversity in the service frameworks, governance structures, and implementation timelines have emerged. That diversity is reflected throughout this paper. Table 1 below provides an overview of Centre locations.

Table 1 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre Locations

State/territory	Centre locations	
Australian Capital Territory	1. West Belconnen	
New South Wales	2. Campbelltown	7. Brewarrina
	3. Blacktown	8. Gunnedah
	4. Blacktown (Mt Druitt)	9. Lightning Ridge
	5. Ballina	10. Nowra (Shoalhaven)
	6. Toronto	
Northern Territory	11. Yuendumu	14. Palmerston
	12. Maningrida	15. Ngukurr
	13. Gunbalanya	
Queensland	16. Mornington Island	21. Ipswich
	17. Doomadgee	22. Mackay
	18. Mount Isa	23. Rockhampton
	19. Mareeba	24. Marsden/Logan
	20. Cairns	25. Palm Island
South Australia	26. Ceduna	28. Christies
	27. Whyalla	Beach/Noarlunga
		29. Pukatja
Tasmania	30. Geeveston	31. Bridgewater
Victoria	32. Whittlesea	33. Bairnsdale
Western Australia	34. Halls Creek	37. Roebourne
	35. Fitzroy Crossing	38. Swan Region
	36. Kununurra	

4. The lens of genuine and respectful partnerships

The analysis of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children draws significantly on a partnership framework. Unsurprisingly, as integration is defined as the endpoint on a continuum of increasing collaboration,¹³ partnerships are integral to any integration initiative. They are a cross-cutting consideration as well as a distinct aspect of service integration requiring specific attention.

The literature on integrated service delivery identifies that effective integration requires collaboration and partnerships at different levels including whole of government, regional

¹³ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). 3; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 2; Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March. 132; Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 57.

and local service development, management and coordination.¹⁴ This paper focuses particularly on regional and local level partnerships, while addressing the frameworks and structural support required from higher levels of government to enable those partnerships.

The key relationships most strongly identified from the literature and by service integration leaders as requiring attention for effective integration are:

1. Partnerships between service providers with responsibility for managing or coordinating an integrated service and the government funding body. Depending on local circumstances this may include or extend to partnerships with local government or non-government organisations in temporary auspice roles for a new service.
2. Partnerships between local service providers and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.
3. Partnerships between different local service providers, either in consortiums or networks for the development, management and coordination of integrated centres or systems; and as agencies working together in the delivery of an integrated service.

This paper interrogates the challenges in fostering, developing and maintaining these partnership relationships throughout the process of integration and in ongoing integrated service delivery. The direct relationship between government funding bodies and communities also impacts integration processes, especially in the early stages of community consultation to define service specifications prior to tender to a local service provider. However, integration leaders more commonly describe this relationship in terms of its impact on the other three relationships described above, and hence it is analysed through that impact, rather than directly.

The partnership framework used to analyse these relationships is based on the principles for the development of respectful and genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, mainstream service providers and government identified in previous SNAICC research.¹⁵ These principles are described in the specific focus on partnerships as a core aspect of service integration in section 7.2 below. By applying this framework to the understanding of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, it is possible to identify concrete and practical stages in the development of partnerships that support the integration process. These stages are detailed in the 'partnership building blocks' tables in section 7 and collated in the table in section 8 that tracks partnership development across the processes of integrated service design, development, management, operation, and long-term planning.

5. The lens of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community control

Throughout this paper there is a focus on the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community participation, building community capacity for leadership and governance, and establishing community-control of integrated services, either initially or in

¹⁴ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17, 15-16.

¹⁵ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 19.

line with local capacity development. This issue is addressed specifically here because it is consistent with the original concept of the Children and Family Centres and because of its significance to ensuring that integrated services are accessible, appropriate and effective in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community-control of integrated services is one of the fundamental aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.¹⁶

SNAICC has noted with concern a lack of clear and consistent federal direction in the support and establishment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled governance structures for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. The priority to address this issue is informed by the principle of self-determination, government policy frameworks and national and international best practice.

By virtue of their right to self-determination, article 3 of the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 2007 (UNDRIP)*, to which Australia is a signatory, prescribes that, 'Indigenous peoples have the right to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.'¹⁷ The *UNDRIP* contains more than 20 provisions affirming Indigenous peoples' right to participate in public decision-making that impacts Indigenous peoples, and a recent report of the Expert Mechanism on the Right of Indigenous Peoples concluded that Indigenous peoples 'have the right to make independent decisions in all matters relating to their internal and local affairs, and to effectively influence external decision-making affecting them if they choose to participate in such processes.'¹⁸ Having regard to the significant focus on providing early childhood education and care services within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres, the specific rights in article 14 of the *UNDRIP* also apply: 'Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions, providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning.'¹⁹

The *Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989 (CRC)* provides further guidance on the requirement for Indigenous participation in decision-making that impacts Indigenous children's rights.²⁰ The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child described in its general comment 11 that the principle of the best interests of the child in article 3 of the *CRC* should be considered in relation to collective cultural rights of Indigenous peoples.²¹ As a result the Committee concluded that, 'As regards legislation, policies and programmes that

¹⁶ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

¹⁷ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007), Article 3.

¹⁸ *Final Report of the study of indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making*, Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 17 August 2011, A/HRC/18/42, Retrieved 15 June 2012 from:

http://www.google.com.au/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=a%2Fhrc%2F18%2F42&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CB4QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww2.ohchr.org%2Fenglish%2Fbodies%2Fhrcouncil%2Fdocs%2F18session%2FA-HRC-18-42_en.pdf&ei=WYbqTu2jOoGtiQePzPWJBw&usg=AFQjCNE0XmIjTieJSwwNeuRJxi74qvTIw&sig2=BFLj563Ik-6Fa0HodcQF0w&cad=rja. 23.

¹⁹ *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, G.A. Res. 61/295, U.N. Doc. A/RES/61/295 (2007), Article 14.

²⁰ *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, G.A. Res. 44/25, U.N. Doc. A/RES/44/25 (1989)

²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 11, Indigenous Children and their Rights under the Convention*, 2009, CRC/C/GC/11, 12 February 2009, 31.

affect indigenous children in general, the indigenous community should be consulted and given an opportunity to participate in the process on how the best interests of indigenous children in general can be decided in a culturally sensitive way. Such consultations should, to the extent possible, include meaningful participation of indigenous children.’²² Given the priority for addressing broader health and wellbeing of children through integrated services, the Committees comments on Indigenous children’s rights to health are also relevant. The Committee concluded that in achieving ease of access to health care services for Indigenous children, health services ‘should to the extent possible be community based and planned and administered in cooperation with the peoples concerned.’

The relevance of self-determination to service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is further reinforced by strong international evidence that the best outcomes in community well-being and development for Indigenous peoples are achieved where those peoples have control over their own lives and are empowered to respond to and address the problems facing their own communities.²³ Numerous reports and inquiries in Australia have consistently confirmed a lack of robust community governance and meaningful Indigenous community participation as major contributors to past failures of Government policy and highlighted the need to build capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled children and family services.²⁴ A recent report of the Australian National Audit Office further highlighted that building the role and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is not only important for effective service delivery, but an important policy objective in its own right in so far as it promotes local governance, leadership and economic participation, building social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁵

It is important to note that in this context community-control does not mean entirely separate or isolated service delivery by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This paper highlights the critical role of government and culturally competent mainstream service providers in service delivery and service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This role requires the development of respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and the priority for community-control described here interacts strongly with the partnership lens described in section 4 above. There is no universal definition of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service in Australian public policy. However, the definition of a community-controlled health service developed by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) provides clear guidance:

²² Ibid.

²³ Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Retrieved 15 July 2012 from: <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview>

²⁴ See for example: NSW Ombudsman (2011) *Addressing Indigenous Disadvantage: the need to do things differently*. Sydney, NSW Ombudsman, 4; R Wild and P Anderson (2007) *Little Children are Sacred*, Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Northern Territory Government. 142-143; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing.

²⁵ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing. 17.

'An Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service is:

- An incorporated Aboriginal organisation
- Initiated by a local Aboriginal community
- Based in a local Aboriginal community
- Governed by an Aboriginal body which is elected by the local Aboriginal community
- Delivering a holistic and culturally appropriate health service to the Community which controls it.²⁶

Two integration leaders provide useful descriptions of what community-control means in their context:

'When we talk community-control we're not trying to say we want it and we don't want to share it. We want self-determination. If we're truly going to be well people we have to be self-determining. Everybody needs that agency and we don't have it.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled service provider

*'[They] should be the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business... We choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do... the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to [them] when they're ready for that.'*²⁷

Mainstream service provider

SNAICC notes positively that a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres have been tendered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, or have a clearly identified future goal to transition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community management. Many centres are also significantly informed and directed by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference groups. Some centres further have a designated role for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation in the delivery of the early childhood education and care component of service delivery. National leadership and commitment across all governments is required to ensure that building capacity for and enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance for the Centres is pursued consistently. With adequate support, resourcing and the development of long-term partnerships for the continued success of these Centres, they have the potential to become genuine sites for self-determination, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are empowered to support and improve outcomes for their own children and families.

6. Alignment with the literature

SNAICC has identified, based primarily on a review of the literature and refined through the focus interviews, the following core aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families:

²⁶ National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), Retrieved 14 June 2012 from: <http://www.naccho.org.au/definitions/communitycont.html>

²⁷ Refers specifically to the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre in: SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. Appendix A. 99.

1. An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach.
2. Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.
3. Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
4. Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

The matrix on the following pages shows the alignment between these core aspects of effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and core general aspects of effective integrated services for children and families identified in the SNAICC literature review.²⁸ These core aspects are further elaborated in section 7 below.

²⁸ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

Table 2 – Matrix: Aligning core general aspects of service integration from the literature with core aspects of effective integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

General Integration Context Specific Aspects	<i>Shared Vision</i>	<i>Community-based and owned design and delivery</i>	<i>Assessment and consideration of community strengths, needs and service gaps</i>	<i>Leadership and facilitation</i>	<i>Genuine partnerships</i>
<i>An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach</i>	Genuine consultation to identify local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations. Flexible frameworks and service contracts to enable local service design that reflects local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations.	Clearly identified and valued roles in service design and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations. Adequate and genuine, ongoing community consultation, and input into service development. Flexible government frameworks enable innovative community-based service design.	Service integration actively considers and incorporates existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, skills and knowledge in service design and development. Adequate time for genuine community consultation to identify community needs, capacity, priorities and service gaps.	Clearly identified and valued leadership roles in service governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, including in local service coordination committees and governance bodies of integrated service centres.	Clearly identified and valued roles in service design, delivery and governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, including in local service coordination committees and governance bodies of integrated service centres. Recognition of existing community capacity, cultural knowledge and strengths by government and mainstream service providers.
<i>Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities</i>	Shared aim to improve long-term wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives in service partnerships. Adequate time for relationship building to build common understanding between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, mainstream service providers and government.	Openness to working differently, recognising that mainstream approaches are frequently not the most effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. Commitment to self-determination from all parties involved in service development and delivery. Trust in local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop and deliver services for their peoples.	Range of services work together to respond holistically to community needs, and evolve as required. Partnerships seek to address service duplication, and coordinate to develop seamless access and referral pathways. Through partnerships, service integration compliments and builds capacity for existing quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.	Adequately resourced and funded coordination and facilitation roles support process elements integral to partnership development. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations have leading roles in facilitating and coordinating service design and delivery partnerships.	Long-term relationships based on trust are fostered. All partners show respect for cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country. All partners demonstrate commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

General Integration Context Specific Aspects	<i>Shared Vision</i>	<i>Community-based and owned design and delivery</i>	<i>Assessment and consideration of community strengths, needs and service gaps</i>	<i>Leadership and facilitation</i>	<i>Genuine partnerships</i>
<i>Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families</i>	Shared aim to provide holistic support that addresses the specific physical, social, emotional and cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Flexible government frameworks enable vision tailored to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and priorities.	Adequate and effective consultation and community-based governance promote community ownership and acceptance. This contributes to increased engagement of families. Access to services through trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is maintained and their role and community engagement expertise is valued.	Service design considers and addresses local service access barriers. Cultural competence for staff and culturally appropriate service approaches inform service and workforce development. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and skills development is a priority.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in service design contributes to appropriately targeted and culturally appropriate service development. Elders and community leaders promote broad community engagement with integrated service centres. Whole of community representation in governance and workforce represent a commitment to neutral, whole of community services.	Valued service delivery roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations contribute to culturally appropriate services. Partnerships contribute to mutual capacity building for culturally appropriate, targeted and quality service provision by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream service providers.
<i>Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities</i>	Aim to develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity. All partners in integrated service development have and demonstrate a long-term commitment to improving long-term wellbeing outcomes for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.	Adequate and ongoing consultation promotes lasting community ownership of services. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in governance promotes long-term commitment to community wellbeing. Planning for sustainable funding and long-term land tenure ensures ongoing community ownership, and enables long-term community planning.	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity development needs are included in service design. Training and workforce development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is central.	Service integration builds local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity, contributing to local governance, leadership and economic participation. There is a specific focus on building skills for community members to serve on the boards of management of integrated services. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in governance promotes long-term commitment to community wellbeing.	Long-term relationships based on trust promote self-determination. Partnerships contribute to mutual capacity building for culturally appropriate and quality service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Mainstream organisations and government pursue supported handover of service leadership and control to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

7. Integration in practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

This section unpacks what service integration means and requires for quality and accessible service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It addresses each of the four core aspects of service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families that are identified in section 6 above. It provides:

- An explanation of what effective integration requires within each core aspect.
- Identification of partnership building blocks for effective integration that are arrived at by applying the partnership lens described in section 4 above to each core aspect.
- Practice examples that are drawn primarily from the experiences and perspectives of integration leaders involved in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. These are not all practices that have been implemented fully, but incorporate the vision of integration leaders in describing what is required for effective integration in their communities.
- Significant challenges in achieving effective integration, with a particular focus on challenges experienced in the early development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

There is significant overlap in the practices and partnership building blocks that support achievement of each of the integration aspects described in this section. This is not unexpected or undesirable as many effective practices in service integration can contribute to multiple service development objectives.

Concluding each section an analysis examines key issues emerging and the broader structural response and support required from government bodies with responsibility for implementing service integration initiatives. Recommendations address particularly measures that can support the current and future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as effective integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Unless otherwise referenced, quotes included in this section were provided by service integration leaders who participated in the focus interviews.

7.1 An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach actively considers existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services, skills and knowledge in the design of integrated services. Adequate time is allocated to consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to ensure that local needs, capacity, priorities and service gaps are identified. Consultation is clearly defined, with clear process, roles and responsibilities, to ensure that consultation is genuine, responsive to community needs and aspirations and includes all relevant stakeholders.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations have clearly identified, valued and leading roles in service design, delivery and governance, including in local service

coordination committees and the governance bodies of integrated service centres. Government frameworks and service contracts are flexible to enable locally driven service design that is responsive to local needs and reflects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priorities and aspirations. Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are consulted and included in integration processes and the establishment of new integrated service centres.

The Australian Human Rights Commission has identified key principles for effective and genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As consultation is the bedrock of a community strengths-based approach to the design, development and delivery of integrated services, these principles are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3 – Principles for effective and genuine consultation²⁹

Initial considerations: enter in good faith with a view to long-term working relationships; recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities; be aware that consultation is time and resource intensive; be aware of and address existing misinformation and misunderstandings; recognise, understand, acknowledge and respond sensitively to existing alienation from government and government processes.

Effective engagement: involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the outset; acknowledge historical involvement of participants with the issues; ensure effected communities control the timeframe; include all relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, interests and organisations; provide a mechanism to obtain agreement with communities over the process and desired outcome of any proposed measure; understand and respect local dispute resolution and decision-making processes; mutually agreed process utilising local knowledge is necessary for sustainable outcomes and participants must be informed of how their input will be included in decision-making; ensure consultation is structured to achieve quality input, address barriers to participation, and build skills and understanding for participants; protect privacy and confidentiality; and agree with communities on how feedback will be provided and communities kept informed.

Information and transparency: be clear about outcomes sought, risks, costs, benefits and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of the proposed measure; be transparent and have clear parameters, avoiding creating unrealistic community expectations; notice of measures should be given sufficiently in advance for the community to reach informed consent or arrive at considered points of difference; provide full information regarding the parameters of the consultation including what options are being considered.

Implementation, monitoring and evaluation: provide feedback as agreed; explain likely timeframes for implementation; accurately collect and record data during consultations; consider specific, timebound and verifiable benchmarks and indicators to measure progress; notify community when outcomes are announced; evaluate the quality and effectiveness of consultation; appoint an independent observer; establish processes for review of decision-making; publish, evaluate and continually improve

²⁹ Summarised from: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

consultation processes; be approachable, contactable and meet commitments; remember that consent is not valid if obtained through coercion or manipulation and requires that communities are provided with all relevant information.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to interrogate all aspects of genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community consultation. For a fuller understanding of a principled approach, reference should be had to the comprehensive description in Appendix 3 of the *Native Title Report 2009*.³⁰ The broad scope of these principles is indicative of the significant time and effort required to undertake genuine and effective consultation for service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

³⁰ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

Partnership building blocks

Table 4 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based service integration. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: support for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and workforce development; inclusion and capacity building for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services; and defining roles and responsibilities for undertaking genuine consultation.

Table 4 - Partnership building blocks: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
- Government tender processes for contracts to manage integrated services reflect the importance of local and trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service leadership and delivery. - Initial government consultations are aligned with accepted principles for effective and genuine consultation,³¹ and ensure that initial service specifications enable service providers to respond to community needs, priorities and expectations. - Service providers are included in planning, conducting and responding to ongoing community consultation, recognising that they have responsibility for management, development and delivery of the service. Funders and auspice organisations do not conduct separate consultation processes that may create community expectation in conflict	- Ongoing genuine consultation by the service provider through community reference groups enables ongoing community participation in the design and delivery of services, including through meaningful representative decision-making roles. - Integrated service providers have local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of governance to ensure that local needs, priorities and aspirations inform ongoing development and operations. In this way the service provider is an integral part of and directed by the community. The service provider and community are inherently connected, rather than distinct stakeholders - Service providers develop local employment and workforce development strategies to engage and build upon existing community strengths, knowledge and skills.	- Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services have identified and valued roles within integrated service systems and centres. Funded integrated service providers develop respectful partnerships with these existing services with a focus on building their capacity and role in integrated service delivery. - Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled services lead integration of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, with mainstream services walking alongside to support the needs and aspirations of the organisation and community. - New integrated service centres work in partnership with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to complement their programs, and to support

³¹ See Table 3 above.

with the role of the service provider and respect their role to manage governance responsibilities.		their growth and development.
---	--	-------------------------------

Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 5 below that contribute to an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach to service integration. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 5 - Practice examples: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based approach

Broad community consultation Setting up a reference panel of community members so that input is not just from organisations, and <i>‘we try to keep our feet on the ground with what the average mum or dad or carer in the community is able to express and drive the direction of the centre’</i> .	Building on existing local service capacity Existing community-controlled early childhood services move their operations into a new integrated service centre and are provided with support to build on their strengths and increase their capacity. Alternatively, new service centres work in partnership to complement strengths of existing early childhood service providers (including Multi-functional Aboriginal Children’s Services)	Valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, skills, and community connections Supporting employment and development of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through local hiring policies, training, mentoring and skills transfer: <i>‘In terms of the children and family centre we’ll always employ and train up if we have to, to employ local Aboriginal people.’</i>	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-control of service design and delivery Integrated service centres are managed and lead by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations in respectful partnership with mainstream service providers, government, and other local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.
---	--	--	---

Local service provider perspectives A community reference panel is made up of a balance of service providers and other local community people to ensure that the expectations of individual community members are balanced with realities of service delivery constraints and responsibilities. This does not displace the need for a strong independent voice, genuine consultation and decision-making roles for community members, and community-controlled service providers.	Whole of community ownership Whole of community ownership is promoted, rather than ownership by a single organisation. A new service centre is viewed by the whole community as an opportunity to bring existing services together and to build on existing service capacity to address identified gaps. The centre is viewed and used as a community resource for a variety of community events and meetings.	Range of services to address needs and service gaps The range of service focus areas and service partnerships are based on community identified needs and service gaps. Examples of service types considered important for some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include: maternal and child health, including a focus on pregnant women; speech; hearing; child behaviour; disability; nutrition; social support; child learning and care; family violence; and drug and alcohol programs.	Training and workforce development hubs New integrated centres focus on providing a training and workforce development site and resource for the whole community. This focus addresses workforce capacity gaps for all existing community services.
Clear roles and responsibilities for consultation processes Ongoing community consultation processes are clearly defined and conducted in partnership between funding bodies and service providers. The role of community in informing service design and development is defined in relation to the role of the service provider in delivering services and responding to community needs and expectations.	Community vision established through a community reference group Community reference groups develop a clear vision for the future development of an integrated centre, reflecting the needs and priorities of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the roles and responsibilities of local service providers.		

Significant challenges

The following challenges for realising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths-based integration were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- Where an integrated centre is directly operated or auspiced by a government or mainstream agency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities may not receive appropriate recognition and acknowledgement for taking leading roles in service development and community engagement.
'Where is the acknowledgement that Aboriginal people did this. This has become the meeting place for the community and it wasn't the government who got people here and got this up and running.'

This issue can be exacerbated where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities do not have organisational control of and land tenure for a service centre and where there is no future plan to enable this. It contributes to concerns that a centre may not have or maintain a focus on the unique service and community development needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples over the long-term.

- Problems arise where a new integrated service centre is established without proper assessment of its impact on existing service centres. This has been a significant concern in the establishment of the new Children and Family Centres, where some have been viewed as a threat to existing Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and an initial failure on the part of government to recognise and build on the existing strengths of these services. While some Centres have made positive progress in establishing partnerships and ensuring services complement and build capacity for MACS services, a failure to include them or consider their role in the initial plan for and development of the new Centres remains a concern. The relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and MACS require significant further attention.
'The way government has set us up with the MACS it looks like we're the big kid on the street who's going to squash all the MACS. I don't want that. We need to work in partnership with them. The ways we're working are not new ways, they're the MACS ways.'
- Significant issues arise in community consultation processes when there is a lack of clearly defined roles for the different primary actors, namely, funding bodies, service providers leading or facilitating service integration, and local communities. The expectations of community need to be balanced with the responsibilities and limitations of service delivery organisations through consultation that is conducted by them or in partnership with the funding body. Community consultation processes conducted by funding bodies that do not include service providers can undermine their capacity to meet community expectations, which may be unrealistic.
'From that time on there has been extensive consultation about almost anything and everything, to the point where sometimes it feels like you can't move...The boundaries are not clear. In any consultation process there needs to be some

understanding up front about what's possible and what's not possible and what's consultation and what's information.'

- In some communities there is a shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with adequate skills and qualifications to fill the necessary roles within an integrated service. While local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have strengths in cultural knowledge, community connection and awareness of community needs, they may lack the technical skills, or in some cases, basic literacy skills needed to undertake various roles in child and family service provision. The absence of adequate community workforce development or existing strategies to achieve this is a challenge that especially confronts remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Community expectations for immediate local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment can conflict with the need for employment of professionals from outside the community to ensure workers are adequately qualified in the short-term. An approach that brings in outside professionals needs to be supported by a local workforce development strategy, including training and mentoring for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and skills transfer from outside professionals.

'By the end of the three years we would like to see the project staffed by Aboriginal people who are either local or prepared to be local and also skilling up those people in the meantime. We are creating the employment pathways and the training and mentoring that will ensure that at the end of that period there will be people in place who do have the necessary qualifications and skills.'

Conclusion and Recommendations

Foundational relationships between service providers, government funders, auspice organisations and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations present a recurring challenge identified by integration leaders in the development of integrated services for children and families. Two key aspects impact an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths based approach: the nature, extent and effectiveness of community consultation undertaken by funders, auspice bodies and service providers; and the partnership, and definition of roles and responsibilities, for planning, conducting and responding to consultation between those parties. Attention is needed to ensure that consultation is aligned with principles of effective and genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and that stakeholder partnerships are established to support their implementation.

R1 The principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission³² is included within all future service agreements for integrated service design, development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Service contracts clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including government funding bodies, in the consultation process.

R2 All government funding bodies for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres take measures to ensure ongoing consultation for design,

³² Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

development and delivery is aligned with the principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission.³³

Integration leaders identify where existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services have been given little consideration in the initial placement and frameworks for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. Significant efforts by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres to build partnerships with existing services and ensure that new Centres complement and contribute to the development and capacity of existing services has been a positive development in some communities. Attention is needed to these relationships to ensure the 'big brother' effect of new and strongly resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres does not displace, but rather builds on and complements the strengths of existing services. Promising approaches to these relationships include:

- utilising new centres as training and development sites that increase overall early childhood workforce capacity for the benefit of all community ECEC services.
- partnering with existing ECEC services to move or extend services to a new centre, where this is appropriate for the goals and geographical focus of the service; and
- long-term planning to build capacity and handover control of an integrated service centre to an existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled provider.

R3 State governments include in future service contracts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres requirements to develop partnerships with a view to complementing, strengthening and building capacity of existing community-controlled ECEC services.

R4 In the review of the budget-based funding (BBF) model, the Australian Government strongly considers the relationship between new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and existing BBF services, and ensures equity of funding for continued survival and growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled ECEC services.

Pursuing local employment strategies remains a challenge in communities where local employment is hampered by the lack of formal qualifications held by people in the community. This also creates additional challenges of having to attract and accommodate outside professionals. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres have experienced significant challenges achieving this in remote communities where there are housing shortages. Service integration leaders commonly identify that local workforce development is key to ensuring that integrated services draw on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths of cultural knowledge and understanding and in caring for their own children and families, by up-skilling local people in key child and family service qualification areas.

Such an approach is consistent with that recommended by the Productivity Commission in its 2011 report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*. The report identified the variety of challenges that ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience in the recruitment and retention of qualified staff.³⁴ It recognised the need for

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia, 356-358.

‘high levels of cultural competency’, ‘special skills and qualities to work with disadvantaged children’, and local language skills in some remote locations.³⁵ The report concluded for these reasons that, ‘increased employment of Indigenous workers is a critical factor in the delivery of services for Indigenous children.’³⁶

R5 That the Australian Government, together with state and territory governments take immediate steps to implement Recommendation 14.4 of the Productivity Commission report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*:
‘As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce.’

R6 That new integrated service sites for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including the new Children and Family Centres, be funded and utilised for development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service local workforce capacity through strategies including provision of onsite training, partnerships with education and training institutes and the provision of technology-based learning environments for remote and distance learning.

7.2 Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

Service integration aims to bring together different service types and service delivery agencies to enable children and families to access a range of services that respond holistically to their needs. Achieving this level of coordination requires increasing levels of inter-agency and inter-disciplinary collaboration, which relies on the development of effective partnerships. Genuine partnerships that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities require attention to the principles that underpin respectful partnership relationships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts, including:³⁷

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

³⁵ Ibid, 359.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 19.

Partnerships that enable effective coordination of services for integrated delivery require: adequate time for relationship development; joint service planning and development; inter-agency information sharing and support; and the development of coordinated referral systems. Flexible government frameworks and funding arrangements that provide time and space for these processes to be developed in partnership are critical. In particular, service integration can benefit from funded partnership facilitation and coordination roles. Promising approaches have included NGO facilitators acting as intermediaries between smaller service providers and government funders, and independent project officers employed by integrated service centres or systems to support partnership processes. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts, facilitators require a high degree of cultural competence and understanding of the partnership principles described above.

Partnership building blocks

Table 6 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of genuine partnership development between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government, that contribute to effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: support and resourcing for process elements of partnership development; inclusion of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in partnerships for integration; processes that support ongoing community participation in service development; and respectful relationships that contribute to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.

Table 6 - Partnership building blocks: Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
• Tender processes that enable service development and delivery by non-local and/or non-Indigenous service providers include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnerships with local community-controlled organisations with a view to capacity development and long-term control for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. • Service contracts clearly define roles and responsibilities in service design and development to avoid conflict between roles of funding bodies, auspice organisations and service providers. • Funding bodies recognise the importance of funding and enabling partnership development processes at the local level, which can be time and resource intensive.	• Integrated services take measures to ensure that they are neutral sites for service provision to the whole community, rather than reflecting or continuing existing community divisions. Measures to achieve this include those relating to representation on boards of governance, transparent employment and workforce development strategies, independence of integration managers, coordinators and facilitators, and inclusive and transparent community consultation processes. • Integrated service organisations are directed by the priorities and aspirations of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community through broadly representative Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of management.	• Appropriate facilitation and coordination roles are established and undertaken by lead agencies to support and enable partnership processes. • Strong participation in local service provider networks (eg. early childhood, family support, and child and family health networks) contributes to relationship development and shared planning for collaborative work. • Service providers negotiate and develop agreements (formal and informal) for new ways of working together within an integrated service centre or system. Agreements address collaboration in areas such as: referral systems, sharing space and resources, integrated staff teams; and client access and engagement strategies. • Mainstream service providers participating in

Participation in service provider partnerships in funded, incentivised and facilitated to ensure that services can and do engage with the processes of relationship development required for effective service integration. • Tender processes and service contracts require high standards of cultural competence for lead agencies and integration facilitators. They require understanding of principles for genuine and respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts. • Government funding bodies develop and provide incentives for a range of service providers to participate in collaboration for service integration.	• Integrated service organisations establish community reference groups to provide ongoing input into the development and delivery of integrated services.	integrated service centres establish genuine and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in pursuit of mutual capacity benefits for service delivery to the community. Mainstream providers recognise the important role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in contributing to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and walk alongside them to support their role in the community.
---	--	--

Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 7 below that contribute to the development of genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government for service integration. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 7 – Practice examples: Genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, and mainstream services and government

Opening up partnership possibilities A centre manager invites local service organisations to visit the site and talk about possibilities of working from a shared site.	Promoting broad use of an integrated service centre Allowing local services to use or hire parts of an integrated service centre to run trainings so that they become comfortable and familiar with the venue.	Capacity building for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services Mainstream partner organisations provide support for existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child care services to build capacity in key identified gap areas, eg. in early childhood qualifications and workforce development.	Capacity building for transfer of resources and control to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services Partnering with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services (eg. MACS centres) with a view to building their capacity for integrated service delivery so that they could take over the running of the centre in the future.
Centre manager as integration coordinator / facilitator The role of an integrated centre manager is to coordinate existing services so that they work differently together: <i>'We don't just want to move deckchairs on the titanic, we would like to see an expansion of services or an improvement on how they're done. Otherwise the hospital would just send their allied staff down here; we'd end up with the same allied health service being offered but no net gain to the community.'</i>	New service centre as host/facilitator for service networks A new integrated service centre hosts and/or facilitates local service networks, eg. early learning, family support and child and family health networks, and encourages them to consider possibilities for working together in the centre. The centre manager listens to what these existing networks know is needed for children and families in the community and brings new resources for integration around them to support them in working together.	Cultural awareness and understanding as a base for partnerships Common cultural awareness training for services working in an integrated centre ensures a level of common ground in terms of cultural competence and provides an important base for respectful partnerships: <i>'For medical staff employed by department of health or other organisations, or anyone else who comes on site to offer programs, it would be good to know that they have had the opportunity and have been exposed to that cultural awareness training...we can remove any blockages to engaging with Aboriginal staff so bridging that gap.'</i>	Attention to relationships that build on the strengths of existing services New integrated services work with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services, to ensure they complement, support and build up valued community child care services, rather than duplicating or displacing them. <i>'They've been able to see it as and we've been able to make it an extension of resources for them. Being able to provide programmes and look at programs they haven't been able to look at because of a lack of skilled staff.'</i>

Commitment to work together leaving behind past differences Looking forward and celebrating successes together in a new integrated centre rather than focussing on past turf wars, with no individual organisation taking credit for what happens in the new centre.	Cultural competence for service providers and staff Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have control over who comes into and works in an integrated centre, to ensure that the community is comfortable with them. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations provide cultural awareness training and apply cultural competence standards for service providers using an integrated centre.	Reduced administrative burden through shared resources and spaces Reducing administrative burden for service providers provides an incentive for them to relocate or extend services to a new centre. This is done, for example, by providing appropriate facilities, set-up, pack-up, basic food and reducing transport provision requirements through service delivery in a centralised site that community members regularly access.	Local governance and relationships with local community and services Board members are local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with strong local community and service provider connections and so are able to play a strong role in facilitating local service partnerships.
Clear agreements define roles and responsibilities Service contracts and formal agreements for integrated service delivery clearly delineate roles and responsibilities in service design, development and delivery. <i>‘One of the things we’re struggling with is that the funding body has been incredibly vague about it all...The bottom line of all of that is it impedes the capacity of the organisation to deliver an integrated service and work well with the community.’</i>	An integrated centre as a site, catalyst and facilitator of local partnerships Relationships between agencies for the development of a new integrated centre have a carry-over effect in building service coordination and relationships throughout the community. As a result of collaboration for development of an integrated centre, services take initiative to develop stronger alliances, partnerships and formal agreements in all aspects of their work. The centre is seen as a site and catalyst for partnership development and actively supports partnerships throughout the community.	Project officer support for partnership facilitation Centres commonly identify a lack of focus and support for processes of partnership development and the need to dedicate resources and time to building collaborative relationships between service providers. <i>‘The family connector is a community person who knows how to work with the community, but project management is a different skillset that they lack and that’s so crucial...A project officer could support negotiation between the service providers in developing the programs.’</i>	Accommodation facilities enable engagement by visiting specialists One Centre has undertaken construction of specialist accommodation through using a portion of its centre construction budget. This has a key role in attracting specialist services to regional and remote communities with accommodation shortages. <i>‘We’re in the process of purchasing a duplex which has been a drawcard for the specialists because there are huge accommodation issues here’</i>

Significant challenges

The following challenges for realising genuine partnerships for integration were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- ‘Turf wars’ can be a barrier to integrated service partnerships as organisations seek to protect their individual sources of funding and roles in the community. Integration leaders recognise fears that sharing resources may lead to losing funding, or that the contributions of individual services to collaborative efforts may be under-valued or under-recognised, and individual organisations will be unable to report adequately to funders.
- Integration leaders commonly identify that a lack of support and resources for the development of family service partnerships is resulting in limiting the service development focus of some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres to more traditional models of early childhood education and care. Some Centres lack a clear and strongly resourced role to facilitate and build local partnership to ensure a range of services collaborate and respond holistically to child and family needs.
‘The manager is concentrating on building those partnerships, but meanwhile the centre is falling apart because you’re trying to manage your workers too, including very strong dynamics and personalities in a small community where everyone knows everyone’s history and it becomes very difficult.’
- In remote communities that do not have regular allied health services it is difficult to maintain momentum in terms of developing partnerships and new ways of working when services and specialists only visit, for example, every 2-4 weeks. One approach has been to encourage more regular visits by service providers that can be motivated by increased capacity to engage families because of the facilities of a new integrated centre that the community is comfortable attending. This can be particularly effective for service providers that are accustomed to poor attendance at appointments and frustrated by an inability to engage with families.
- Existing workload demands do not necessarily enable organisations and professionals to participate in partnership processes necessary for effective service integration. Unless participation in partnership building activities is funded, incentivised and facilitated, new integrated services can struggle to engage the professionals and services in the community that are needed to enable integration.
‘Everyone already has their existing workload and is already very busy and so to draw them into considering new opportunities or different ways of doing things there’s always a human factor involved when people are already busy and they don’t go looking for additional workload.’
- Where funding bodies and local service providers do not work in partnership in their relationship with communities, service providers can feel ‘wedged’ between the funder and the community, unable to meet community expectations created by a

funder, or unable to meet service contract requirements while responding effectively to community needs and expectations.

'A point to make about this is that the regional funding body are actually implementing a program that has been set up in a way that makes it incredibly difficult for the service provider. It's not difficult for the community or the funding body, because it's all care and no responsibility. But from a service provider's perspective, a small Aboriginal organisation, trying to do the right thing and put particular governance structures in place and administrative systems in place and do it all properly from the beginning, and fighting a battle about, no, we just want the program offered tomorrow.'

- Where mainstream non-government or government service providers are funded for the coordination and/or delivery of integrated services, genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities are dependent on the commitment and cultural competence of those organisations. In the absence of clear guidelines or contract requirements for their inclusion in integrated services, the important roles of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in service design, development and delivery may go unrealised. This threatens the appropriateness and effectiveness of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and can alienate elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The initial partnership between the service provider, lead agency or facilitator of an integrated service and the government funding body is critical to effective service integration, recognising that this relationship will impact significantly on all other relationships. Integration leaders identify a number of significant points of challenge in these relationships including: direct relationships between the funder and community contributing to unrealistic expectations of the provider; unrealistic timeframes for service development reducing the capacity of service providers to meet contract requirements and/or undertake adequate relationship building and consultation with the community and other service providers; vague service contracts and service development frameworks creating uncertainty in provider planning and requiring adjustment when funders 'change the goal posts'; uncertainty about future funding, proposed funding models and long-term support not enabling the service provider to plan long-term and gain community trust.

While many of these challenges are addressed in relation to the other integration aspects in this paper, they highlight more generally the need for clear definition of roles and responsibilities in the partnership between the funder and service provider throughout the process of integration. This definition of roles must be addressed strongly in tender processes and service contracts, but also fostered and maintained through ongoing partnership development and exchange of relevant information. This is not to suggest the imposition of inflexible frameworks for service development, but rather that where role boundaries are blurred, the capacity of local service providers to facilitate flexible local service design is reduced, as they can find themselves wedged between the expectations of government and the expectations of community without adequate input into the processes and contract requirements that create and define those expectations. A partnership within which the funding body empowers a community service provider, or integration 'lead agency' to undertake local design and development of integration initiatives, through a well resourced and clearly defined role to do so, is aligned with good practice 'place-based'

service integration approaches identified in the SNAICC literature review. The critical aspect of realistic timeframe development must take account of local realities that impact on timeframes. These include the significant amount of time required to develop trust with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and the specific logistical challenges in rural and remote locations.

R7 Tender processes and service contracts provide clear and flexible frameworks for integrated service delivery and clearly define stakeholder roles for consultation, design, development and delivery of integrated services. Service contracts provide both scope and requirement to define these relationships further according to local needs and circumstances, and to develop timeframes that are realistic for service development in each local context.

Role definition and scope for staff with leadership responsibility for the development of integrated services emerges as a significant issue that relates more fundamentally to the resourcing and processes required to undertake effective service integration. In the context of the Children and Family Centres this is highlighted clearly in the role of the centre manager which has emerged at some sites, with broad ranging responsibility encompassing, for example, oversight of centre construction, maintenance and ongoing use, early childhood education and care service management, and workforce development, as well as having responsibility for leading the approach to integration and facilitating the necessary partnerships between local child and family service providers. This multiple function leadership role can result in stretching capacity and an insufficient focus on partnerships for effective service integration. This was apparent amongst integration leaders who, despite being optimistic about the prospects for local partnership development, either expressed that this was work they needed 'to find the time for' or bring a greater focus to, or spoke more significantly about the centre building development and early childhood services than the broader relationships needed for child and family service integration. A number of integration leaders specifically identified the need for project officer support to facilitate collaboration between service providers. Some also described that insufficient resourcing for developing family service relationship was shifting or limiting the service development focus to early childhood education and care, rather than integrated and holistic service provision.

From SNAICC's perspective this lack of attention to partnership processes needed to enable an integrated approach is one of the most significant gaps in the frameworks and service contracts that are driving the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. The SNAICC literature review,³⁸ as well as the previous SNAICC policy review of respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts,³⁹ have identified some leading evidence-based approaches to service coordination and facilitation in these contexts. These include: the employment of a project officer within an integrated service centre or system to facilitate and support partnership processes; non-government 'lead agencies' with strong community connections and acceptance acting as intermediaries between government and smaller or local services; strongly funded roles within lead agencies for service integration initiatives to lead service coordination and

³⁸ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

³⁹ SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 41-49, 74-76.

facilitation; funded facilitation roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead approaches to service partnerships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families; and high standards of cultural competence and awareness of respectful partnership principles for organisations and individuals in facilitating roles. Taking account of these promising practices, SNAICC makes the following recommendations for partnership facilitation to provide an adequate platform for local service partnership development for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

R8 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments directs specific funding for a high level project officer position within each Children and Family Centre to support and facilitate partnership development, management and ongoing evaluation for the delivery of integrated child and family services within the centres.

and;

R9 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments funds and supports the employment of an integrated service delivery partnership facilitator in each state or territory to support partnership development within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. This role should be positioned within and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies in the family support, child welfare and/or health field, with a funded national support and resourcing role provided by SNAICC. The role should provide intensive support for initial partnership development over 2 years, with ongoing national oversight provided by SNAICC beyond this period.

7.3 Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Service design, including, but not limited to physical design, must establish service entry and access points that take account of the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes consideration of issues such as poverty, geographical location and remoteness, culturally appropriate service provision and service mistrust that has emerged from histories of mistreatment by government and mainstream service providers. Promising service design practices that provides accessible entry points to integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families include: providing soft entry points in informal, familiar and non-threatening environments; outreach to families to build initial trust and encourage participation; providing transport to sites where integrated services are provided; operating out of multiple sites, especially in remote areas with spread-out populations; and maintaining traditional service entry points through established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that families know and trust.

The important role that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations play in service delivery that is culturally appropriate, safe, and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families must be recognised. Ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are provided with a choice of accessing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and culturally appropriate mainstream services requires significant investment in supporting and building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as well as cultural competence development for mainstream service providers. A genuine partnership

approach, as described above, has the potential to support both these outcomes while increasing collaboration between agencies for holistic and integrated service provision.

Recognising the significant disadvantage that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience, service approaches must further address the need to respond to immediate and pressing needs. Families experiencing poverty and crisis may not be in a position to prioritise early childhood education and care, and holistic responses to family support needs are essential if an integrated approach to early childhood education and care is to engage these families.

Partnership building blocks

Table 8 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect the targeting of integrated services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: establishing high standards for cultural competence in service delivery; valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and skills for culturally appropriate service design and delivery; and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and leadership in appropriate targeting of services to respond to community needs and priorities.

Table 8 – Partnership building blocks: Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
• Funding bodies include local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers and community in the process of building design for an integrated service centre to ensure that it is a culturally appropriate, welcoming and safe space for the community, and an effective space for use by local service delivery agencies. • Service contracts for management of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families include high cultural competence standards. • Service contracts require the development of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement strategies, including through respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. • The strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait	• Ongoing community consultation conducted by the service provider ensures that services remains relevant and responsive to community needs and aspirations. A permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference group has genuine input into service development. • Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of management for integrated centres and systems provide an avenue for ongoing community input into service development to ensure the service is relevant and appropriately targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. • Elders and community members provide input and support for cultural awareness training programs for non-local and mainstream service providers and staff. • Participation of mainstream service providers	• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over who delivers services within an integrated centre to ensure high standards of cultural competence and that the community is comfortable with service providers and staff. • Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are engaged to provide local cultural awareness training for all service providers engaged in an integrated service centre or system. • Mainstream service agencies engage in ongoing processes of cultural competence development in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to ensure that their practice is appropriate, safe and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Islander peoples and organisations in culturally competent service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are recognised as key criteria in the consideration and award of tenders for integrated services. As a result, there is a focus on selection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, or consortiums that include them significantly and pursue local capacity building for the transfer of service leadership and control to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.	in partnerships for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service integration contributes to broader organisational cultural competence and community acceptance for mainstream providers. These capacity increases enable mainstream service providers to engage appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members outside of targeted integration sites.	• Integrated service providers actively seek out and establish service partnerships with a range of local service providers that have a role in responding to priority needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including, for example, housing, health, welfare, education, family support and child protection service providers. • All service providers establish protocols and collaborative working methods to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations to facilitate and support families to access other necessary mainstream services outside of integrated centres.
---	---	--

Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 9 below that contribute to targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 9 – Practice examples: Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Addressing practical service use barriers Providing an informal crèche service on site so that caring for children is not a barrier to parents accessing health and other support services, or to parents accompanying individual children from large families to appointments.	Providing informal environments for relationship building and primary service delivery Organising family fun days at an integrated service site, so that service professionals can interact with families in an informal environment eg. community health services conducting nutritional cooking classes.	Creating culturally safe, comfortable and welcoming physical spaces <i>'The feedback coming back from the medical people was that they didn't just want consultation rooms looking the same as the hospital, they've asked me for lounge suites which I've got on order, bean bags, cushions, toys, we want to look for music and paintings to hang on the wall and things like that to make it a comfortable place to come.'</i>	Family engagement provides incentive for agencies to offer services at an integrated centre Mainstream service providers are incentivised to make use of and participate in a new service centre because it is designed to be a comfortable and welcoming place and overcomes challenges they have previously had engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, for example, at medical facilities.
Creating culturally safe, comfortable and welcoming physical spaces Developing integrated service centres with outdoor spaces that people are comfortable spending time in and where professionals can interact with families in informal outdoor environments.	A more suitable space for allied health workers visiting remote communities A family friendly centre with ample space for professionals to operate provides a much more suitable place for engaging families, rather than allied health workers being 'jammed for space' at a hospital that many families won't go to. This also encourages allied health workers to visit remote communities more regularly.	Spaces that break down connections between medical services and child protection intervention fears Not making consulting rooms in an integrated centre look like medical facilities, so that they are not associated with common fears that attending medical facilities will lead to children being taken away.	Informal trust and relationship building encourages access Informal interactions between professionals and families at the centre builds trust and encourages attendance at future appointments whether they be in the centre or elsewhere.

Developing cultural competency Common cultural awareness training for services working in an integrated centre contributes to a shared commitment to developing cultural competency. Culturally appropriate services are more successful in engaging families and achieving positive outcomes.	Practical facilities for families Offering practical facilities for families that they may not have at home to encourage access and use, at the same time as responding to practical family needs, eg. laundry facilities.	Common ground for the whole community Establishing a centre as ‘neutral turf’ for rival groups and ensuring that they are equally represented in the make-up of the centre so that it becomes common ground for pursuing community wellbeing.	Community owns and uses the space and feels comfortable there An integrated service centre is used as a community meeting place used by the whole community for different group meetings and events. People are comfortable accessing the centre because they feel that it is ‘their place.’
Creating culturally appropriate spaces that are designed to meet the needs of the community Local community members inform the building design for an integrated centre so that it is laid out to be an inviting and welcoming place for community members to come to, with spaces that are effective for meeting community needs.	Providing transport assistance Providing a bus service in regional or remote locations can assist to ensure families from outlying areas can get to the site of an integrated centre. In one urban community providing transport for children is seen to discourage parent engagement. The requirement for transport provision is based strongly on local circumstances and needs in terms of existing transport infrastructure. Integrated sites also create opportunities to share transport resources between services.	Family connector roles Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with strong community connection and trust are employed to work one-on-one with families to facilitate their engagement with an integrated centre and support their connection with mainstream services in the community. This role provides a resource to mainstream service providers assisting them to address service access barriers.	Recognising where access gains are not service duplication. A Centre manager was challenged that bringing child health workers into the Centre was duplicating a service that already had premises to operate from. The manager asserted that gains in access for community members clearly built on service delivery capacity: <i>‘They were doing the immunisation at the hospital, the community wasn’t accessing it, so this is an opportunity to access those families. To me, I saw that as building on and not duplicating.’</i>
Using an integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service centre as a stepping stone to mainstream community services and training programs. One Centre is working with a local TAFE college to develop a workforce re-entry training program as an add-on to their young Mum’s group. The Centre seeks to empower the women to access further opportunities in the community that they wouldn’t have previously. The TAFE college works with the Centre to ensure that the training is appropriate for the women. <i>‘If the girls feel happy here, then they’re quite happy to bring the course to us. But for me, I’d like to see those girls step out into the community and feel confident about accessing mainstream services and that’s what it’s all about.’</i>		Ensuring service providers and professionals are acceptable to the community Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over standards of cultural competence and community acceptability for working in an integrated service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. <i>‘They were running a Triple P program when I arrived here, and knowing that it was part of our project brief, I enrolled in it to identify whether that presenter was going to be appropriate or not for the community...it was about a lot of conversation, finding out if people knew her, had dealt with her before, how she is perceived in the community... We will use a similar process for others running programs in the Centre.’</i>	

Centre based primary service provision enables relationship development for referral to specialised services Conducting health checks in comfortable and informal Centre-based environments can build relationships between professionals and families to encourage attendance at appointments to address issues within mainstream and specialised services at health facilities outside of an integrated Centre.	Holistic approaches ensure follow-up support for families with identified needs Responding to multiple family needs within a single integrated service creates over-site and accountability to ensure family needs are followed-up rather than families having one-off appointments with individual providers. <i>'It won't just be that our mob go and access the service, and off they go, but the Centre will be ensuring that they get follow up.'</i>		
--	--	--	--

Significant Challenges

The following challenges for developing targeted services that promote family access and engagement were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- The absence of guaranteed and ongoing funding for new integrated centres creates pressure to pursue self-sustainability. Some leaders in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres identify that a self-sustaining funding model for integrated service delivery at the Centres is unachievable while maintaining costs at a level that will encourage and enable access to ECEC services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This creates concern that Centres will increasingly need to accommodate higher fee paying families and lose their focus on targeted service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This may have further impacts on engagement of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, for example, community groups being unable to use the centre for meetings and events because of the need to charge usage fees, reducing community ownership of and engagement with the centre.
- Setting up new informal interaction environments between service professionals and families creates challenges for reporting requirements of these services, which are based on formal consultations. Integration leaders identify a need for new ways of working in integrated service centres to be recognised within the operating frameworks and funding agreements for a wide range of child and family service providers.
- A lack of qualified local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff creates an immediate challenge for employing local staff with local cultural knowledge and skills that are important to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Workforce development is a necessary focus for centres, including providing training and support to develop existing staff and community members. Services commonly recognise the need to employ outside the community for quality in the beginning while seeking to develop local skills and qualifications for longer-term local employment. Ensuring staff from outside the community have or develop the necessary cultural competence to form trusting relationships with families and local staff is a further challenge.
- Fears within the community that interaction with medical services may lead to children being taken away require significant attention to making sure families feel safe and comfortable in an integrated centre, rather than feeling threatened by the involvement of health services. These fears can also emerge in the relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and non-Indigenous service providers and government, based on histories of mistreatment and negative experiences, where the community perceives that the centre is not an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled space. Significant time and effort is required to build trust between mainstream service providers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The SNAICC literature review strongly identifies the importance of appropriately targeted services to enable access, engagement and quality service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, alongside the importance of choice for families between accessing quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and quality and culturally competent mainstream services.⁴⁰ Significant capacity gaps and inadequate investment in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled and focussed service sectors inform the priority focus required for development of targeted approaches.

The importance of the new Children and Family Centres as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targeted services to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is indicated by their inclusion as a priority initiative within government strategies for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including within the *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development* and to support key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focussed objectives within the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children*. A significant concern amongst integration leaders is that challenges in establishing a sustainable service model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who experience poverty and are unable to meet high service costs, will threaten a sustained focus on delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the Centres. This concern is addressed more fully in relation to sustainability aspects of integrated service development in section 7.4 below.

Recognising the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations in delivering services that are culturally appropriate, welcoming, safe and appropriately targeted to support their own communities, integration processes require a focus on the inclusion and leadership of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the design, development and delivery of integrated services. Promising approaches to ensuring this level of participation include: the award of tenders for integrated service development to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with capacity to manage and implement an integrated approach; short-term time-limited auspice arrangements whereby a mainstream service or non-local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation supports the early development of an integrated service, capacity growth for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation, and hands over service control in line with capacity growth; and partnerships and consortiums that include local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in a leading role, or build their capacity to lead in the future. The involvement of mainstream service providers in respectful partnerships for service integration can further have significant impacts on their own capacity development in areas of cultural competence, community trust and acceptance, and understanding needs and priorities of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

R10 In the development of new integrated services targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, priority is given in the tender process to the selection of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with adequate organisational capacity to manage the service. Where current local capacity is inadequate, priority is given to consortiums that include respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support their growth and development. The award of integrated service contracts to non-Indigenous and non-

⁴⁰ SNAICC. (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne. 43-47.

local service providers includes time-limited requirements to develop local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and transfer service leadership and control in line with capacity growth.

It is important to recognise that in any fully integrated child and family service site or system, practical considerations dictate that it is not possible for all necessary services to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers, or for all staff within an integrated service site or system to be local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is thus a significant need to develop the capacity of mainstream service providers and non-Indigenous or non-local staff to work in culturally competent ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. It is important to note that this is not an alternate approach to local capacity development, which must occur concurrently in order to achieve other important goals and aspects of service integration described in this paper. Further, recognising that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choose not to use targeted services, mainstream providers have potential, through their engagement in targeted service integration, to develop organisation-wide cultural competence and community acceptance that increases their capacity to deliver services to the community outside of targeted sites.

R11 High standards of cultural competence are included within service contracts for organisations for the delivery or coordination of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.⁴¹ These standards include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnership relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

R12 Funding for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families includes provision for cultural awareness training for mainstream, non-Indigenous and non-local professionals to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are endorsed by the local community to provide such training.

7.4 Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Sustainable service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families requires long-term and sustainable investment. There is a danger that short-term approaches will add to mistrust built through the many failed and unfinished programs and undelivered promises to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The significant time required for genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities means that programmes cannot be rushed into place and program development and setup should take considerable time. This recognises that long-term change requires long-term commitment from all stakeholders, and that this can only be achieved where programs are supported and owned by local communities.

For sustainable change, there is a need to build local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisational capacity, contributing to local governance, leadership and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Within a

⁴¹ For a full review of relevant cultural competence standards, refer to: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne; SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne.

framework of place-based service design and development, this approach has the potential to contribute to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, enabling communities to freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.

However, to achieve this potential, planning for sustainable funding and security of land tenure must be addressed to ensure services are directed by the community for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on an ongoing basis, and not vulnerable to changes in government and policy directions. Community ownership ensures that people with a long-term stake in the wellbeing of the community drive the commitment to sustainable outcomes. Long-term security and stability empowers and enables the community to undertake long-term planning for improving child and family wellbeing. To promote community ownership and sustainable outcomes, government and mainstream organisations pursue the handover of service control to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations while supporting organisational and community capacity development for integrated service delivery.

Partnership building blocks

Table 10 below applies a partnership analysis to describe important aspects of partnerships that reflect a commitment to sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. Core issues emerging from this analysis include the need for: long-term modelling and support for achieving financial sustainability; achieving capacity and systems for good governance and financial management; maintaining a long-term focus on local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community wellbeing; and building local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community capacity to facilitate sustainable community ownership and leadership of integrated services.

Table 10 – Partnership building blocks: Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Service provider / funder / auspice / government	Service provider / community	Between service providers
• Funders negotiate with service providers to ensure realistic service development timeframes based on local contexts to ensure a new integrated service centre can consult adequately and develop relationships to build community trust and ownership. Realistic timeframes allow service development promises to the community to be kept by service providers. • Funding bodies develop long-term models for service sustainability in partnership with local service-providers, taking account of local needs and the specific challenges and costs of integrated service delivery targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. • Funding bodies make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery. Government is up-	• Government and service providers undertake genuine and ongoing community consultation to develop trust and ensure continuing community input, and ownership of integrated services. • Community leaders support the development of new integrated centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community land, and encourage whole of community participation and engagement for their success. • Community reference groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of governance ensure ongoing input into integrated services by local people with long-term commitment to local community wellbeing and development. • Service providers ensure that a centre remains open to use by community groups and people, enabling the local Aboriginal and	• Mainstream agencies walk alongside, support and contribute to capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to build local leadership and transfer resources and integrated service management responsibilities to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. • All service providers undertake joint visioning and detailed planning for collaboration, shared roles, referral systems and new ways of working in an integrated service or centre. The development of genuine and formalised partnerships represents a commitment to working together differently rather than simply sharing a work site. • Partnerships between service delivery agencies are long-term and ongoing, rather than only for time-limited projects and activities. Agreements are formalised to

front and transparent about future funding arrangements. • Service providers pursue good governance and financial management to make the best and sustainable use of government funding. • In initial scoping and tender processes for the building of new integrated centres, funding bodies prioritise building new centres on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. • Government hands over control of government land to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to use long-term for the development and delivery of integrated services.	Torres Strait Islander community to develop a strong sense that an integrated service centre is 'their place.' • Service providers maintain a service model that provides service to a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that the centre is recognised and trusted as a specific, targeted and ongoing service for the benefit of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. • Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres.	ensure partnerships are integrated into organisational structures and culture and continue when there are changes in staff or leadership.
--	--	--

Practice examples

Integration leaders working in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres have described the practices in Table 11 below that contribute to sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities. These practices are based on what is currently happening in the development of the Centres and/or the vision of integration leaders around what is required.

Table 11 – Practice examples: Sustainable service delivery that impacts on long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

Promoting free or low-cost use of facilities rather than excluding those that cannot pay Focus on promoting community use of and engagement with a centre, rather than applying usage fees that discourage community use, engagement and ownership (based on trust that government funding will be renewed and a lack of pressure to become self-sustainable in a short time-period).	Creating an integrated training hub to build local workforce capacity Using an integrated service centre as a training centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and service staff members. Encouraging trainers to travel to regional areas to use the centre facilities. This enables local staff to become qualified while not having to leave the community and take time out of work and family life. Providing technology resources for training over the internet and by video link-up.	Long-term agreements and land tenure Long-term leases and long-term agreements to ensure that a centre is controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to deliver services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families contribute to stability and self-determination. This enables long-term planning for long-term improvements in child and family wellbeing. In this way, government demonstrates trust that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will make good of an integrated service centre for the good of their children and families.	Good governance and financial management Integrated centres focus on the establishment of good governance and financial management that contributes to ongoing stability and self-sustainability in the long-term. <i>'Although they [governance and financial management] are not the glamorous parts of this whole process, they are the parts that will in fact bring all this undone if they're not done properly.'</i>
--	--	--	--

Long-term planning in partnership between all stakeholders Long-term planning for the future happens between all parties engaged with the centre, including funders, service providers, service delivery partners and community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in establishing a long-term vision and planning for its achievement. <i>‘One thing that is integral to my understanding of sustainability is that we have at the very outset realistic expectations about what is achievable in the short term and then clear steps and pathways to long-term sustainability.’</i>	Planning for integrated ways of working, not just ad-hoc single site service delivery Planning recognises that strong agreements and processes need to be established for working in new and integrated ways. In this way a long-term change to service delivery can be achieved for the community rather than an ad-hoc coming together of services.	Adequate time and funding for establishment with self-sustainability as a long-term goal Recognition from funding bodies that self-sustainability is a longer-term goal, taking particular account of the extensive time needed for genuine community consultation and service development, as well as logistical challenges in early development. Realistic service establishment timeframes are negotiated with local communities and service providers, taking account of the time needed for genuine consultation, as well as the logistical challenges for remote services.	Government service contracts clearly define roles, responsibilities and program goals. Clear guidelines and expectations are provided to inform the approach to integration for service providers and communities. These are flexible frameworks, but nonetheless clearly define roles, responsibilities and program goals. <i>‘There are several models of what the new way of doing things is and no one knows which one is being implemented... at the moment there is certainly a difference between the way that the federal government and this state government wants to operate. So the expectations there are already blurred.’</i>
Mainstream agencies support capacity and transfer service control Mainstream service providers work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to support their development and negotiate detailed and time-limited plans for transfer of service management and control to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. <i>‘[they] should be the lead and dominant decision maker about Aboriginal business...We choose to walk alongside whenever and wherever we can to support their capacity to do what they need to do...the ideal for us at the end of the day is that the whole program area moves to [them] when they’re ready for that.’⁴²</i>		Integrated service centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land Integrated centres are built on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community organisations, or land is handed back to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for use for integrated child and family services.	Governance training for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Training is provided by government and/or auspice organisations for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to develop necessary skills for serving on the boards of management for new integrated service centres.

⁴² Refers specifically to the development of the Bairnsdale Aboriginal Children and Family Centre in: SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. Appendix A. 99.

Significant challenges

The following challenges for developing sustainable integrated services were primarily identified by service integration leaders in the focus interviews and/or at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. Challenges vary considerably between the different Centres. Those represented here are commonly identified challenges with potential relevance to multiple Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre development contexts.

- In the case of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres there is a lack of guaranteed government service funding beyond 2014, as well as an absence of clear information about what funding model is envisioned for the Centres beyond the current funding period. This impacts significantly on the capacity of services to engage in long-term planning and contributes to fears that targeted service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families will not be sustained, due to pressures to generate income. Where integrated service providers act immediately to generate income, community trust can be threatened, as one integration leader describes:
'My concern was because there is no guarantee of funding after 2014 I had to pursue a fee for service by organizations using the premises. That was like a bucket of cold water over everyone's head and they just sort of turned away in disgust and said no, why would we bother? So we backtracked really fast on that... and in consultation with senior government bureaucrats I was saying, what is the likelihood that we can apply for funding and at least get even a reduced subsidy in three years and the general response was no one really expects...[the Centre]...to be self supporting financially by the end of that time and that took the pressure off me to head toward that outcome and I was pleased then to go back to organizations and go, look, don't worry about fee for service, don't worry about anything at all just come and make use of the property and lets start making some good things happen.'
- Within some communities, the absence of a clear plan for sustainability, alongside an absence of service ownership and security of land tenure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities contributes to a common concern that services may fail to address community needs in the long-term. Some integration leaders fear that the services are being set-up to fail and that when they do, blame will be placed on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and services may transition to mainstream managements and delivery as a result. The absence of long-term commitments, secure funding and secure agreements to the contrary contribute to a lack of trust by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities that new integrated services will be supported by government to be sustainable.
'We have a good partnership with the people that we know, but just because we have that doesn't mean it's a structural change and that it's long term and sustainable. They're good people, but we're on good will. We get what we want as long as we agree with them, and as soon as we don't agree with them we don't get what we want. That's what we don't want anymore.'
'Feeling stressed. Very stressed. The viability and the ongoing commitment. Where does it go to?...It worries me. I feel that this is the last opportunity for us to get our business right. Because if this fails I think it'll be back to the old ways. Being controlled.'

- Unrealistic timeframes for initial consultation, service design and development, and building construction, mean that service providers cannot meet contract requirements while responding to the needs and expectations of the community. This leads to pressure to find interim services and establish interim operations in the short-term which detracts from the 'real work' of developing a quality service for the long-term benefit of the community, and establishing the necessary community trust and ownership. As unspent funding does not carry-over, this contributes to shortfalls and lesser funding as consultation and service development delay construction, recruitment and operation.

Conclusion and Recommendations

As was learnt in the evaluation of the Communities for Children initiative, a four-year funding period is insufficient to undertake effective consultation and develop trusting relationships to achieve integrated service delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴³ A short funding period and lack of information and certainty about future funding hinders the development of integrated services, long-term relationships, and establishing trust in the community. A lack of effective sustainability planning and guaranteed security threatens the current and future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres.

The concern about funding sustainability beyond 2014 was amongst the most commonly and strongly raised issues by service integration leaders both in focus interviews and at the *Aboriginal Children and Family Centres Leaders Forum*. For the vast majority of centres that are in only early stages of service development and/or building construction, the entire and remaining funding period is very short. Many service providers have had as little as 2-3 years of guaranteed funding from the time services were tendered, despite strong evidence that this period is grossly inadequate for the development of new integrated initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.⁴⁴ This creates immediate developmental challenges as Centres are unable to adequately plan for the future, and confidently develop long-term service partnerships.

R13 The Australian Government in cooperation with state governments undertakes financial modelling to determine how Centres can operate financially, while maintaining a focus on service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families for at least the next 20 years. The Government shares modelling openly, develops a plan to support sustainable service delivery, and negotiates with individual Centres around how local circumstances impact the funding model.

R14 The Australian Government, as a matter of urgency, makes a significant financial commitment to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres beyond 2014, to allay immediate and ongoing stability concerns that are restricting Centre development and future planning.

R15 That in implementing recommendations 13 and 14 above, proper regard is had to both the funding model for early childhood education and care services, as well as adequate funding to support the processes of partnership development for

⁴³ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 8.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

collaboration in the delivery of family support services, and the need to implement recommendations 8 and 9 above.

A significant number of Centres have made important early progress towards supporting long-term community ownership and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Promising practices have included: tendering of services to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with capacity to lead and manage service integration; temporary auspice arrangements supporting the establishment of new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations; tender to partnerships and consortiums with a clear plan for mainstream partners to build local capacity and transfer services to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander management; and identified roles within an integrated Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in early childhood education and care, with a plan for increasing their capacity for integrated service management. However, not all governments and all regions have a clearly identified commitment to developing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership for the Centres. Recognising the importance local leadership in building community capacity, and contributing to self-determination and social capital for communities, a more consistent approach is required.

R16 That the next service contracts for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include specific requirements for funded services to develop capacity building strategies for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership of the Centre, including a plan to transfer responsibility for management of all Centres to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with capacity development.

8. Building blocks for partnerships for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Table 12 below brings together the analysis of partnerships for effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It tracks partnerships for integration across processes of early service design and development; ongoing operation and management; and outcomes and long-term planning. The weighting of partnership building blocks to early design and development reflects the importance of this stage both for the current early development phase of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and in general as the foundation for effective integration.

Table 12 – Building blocks for partnerships for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

	Service provider / funder / auspice / government partnerships		Service provider / community partnerships		Between service provider partnerships		
EARLY SERVICE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT <i>Including: tender process; service design; establishing governance structures; building design and construction; initial partnership development</i>	Tender processes prioritise inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in service design, development, delivery.	Service contracts require mainstream agencies to develop respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.	Realistic service development timeframes tailored to local contexts enable service providers to meet contract requirements and maintain community trust by meeting community expectations that timeframes create.	Service contracts require mainstream services to develop genuine and respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisation for service design and development.	Service contracts clearly define roles in community consultation, service design and development, to avoid conflict in roles of funding bodies, auspice organisations and service providers.	Participation in service provider partnerships is funded and facilitated to ensure services can and do engage with processes of relationship development required for integration, for example, through the development of project officer roles to support partnership processes.	Tender processes include high standards of cultural competence for integration lead agencies and facilitators, including understanding of principles for genuine and respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community service contexts.
	Government and service providers undertake genuine consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, allowing adequate time to identify community needs and priorities.	Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment priority and workforce development strategies create opportunities for community development and community participation in service delivery.	Integrated services take measures to ensure that they are established and maintained as neutral sites for service provision to the whole community, rather than reflecting or continuing existing community divisions.	Funding bodies include local communities in the process of building design for an integrated centre to ensure that it is a culturally appropriate, welcoming and safe space for the community, and effective for use by local service providers.			
	New integrated centres work in partnership with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to include, complement and build on their skills and knowledge, rather than duplicating or replacing.	Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services have leading roles in service design and development in partnership with other local service providers.	New Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are supported by mainstream service providers to develop capacity and lead new integrated services.	Relevant local service providers participate in local reference groups that are broadly representative of the community and inform service design and development.	Lead agencies for integration initiative prioritise facilitation and coordination of service partnerships in service design. Service providers negotiate and develop agreements (formal and informal) for new ways of working together within an integrated service.	Strong participation in local service provider networks (eg. early childhood, family support, and child and family health networks) contributes to relationship development and shared planning for collaborative work.	Integrated service providers actively seek out and establish service partnerships with a range of local service providers that have a role in responding to priority needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
SERVICE OPERATION AND MANAGEMENT <i>Including: ongoing service development & management; ongoing partnerships & community engagement; service delivery; client access and engagement.</i>	Service providers participate in the design and conduct of ongoing community consultations in partnership with funding bodies. Genuine consultation balances community expectations and service provider responsibilities.	Ongoing funded partnership facilitation roles ensure continuing attention to and management of the relationships required for effective integration.	Service contracts for management of integrated services require high standards of cultural competence and the development of detailed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement strategies				

	Service staffing by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members contributes to appropriateness and community support and acceptance.	Boards of governance made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members ensure that local needs, priorities and aspirations inform ongoing development and operations.	Permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference groups have genuine input into service development ensuring relevance to community needs and aspirations.	Elders and community members provide input and support for cultural awareness training programs for non-local and mainstream service providers and staff.			
	Existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services have clearly identified and valued roles in a new integrated centre or system, in partnership with other local service providers.	Mainstream service providers establish and maintain long-term and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and walk alongside them to support their role in the community.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities have control over who delivers services within an integrated centre to ensure that the community is comfortable with service providers and staff.	Mainstream services engage in ongoing processes of cultural competence development in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure that their practice is appropriate, safe and effective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families			
OUTCOMES, LONG-TERM PLANNING AND SUSTAINABILITY <i>Including: sustainable funding models; building community and service capacity; land tenure; formal agreements; evaluation</i>	Genuine community consultation, and realistic service development timeframes that enable service providers to meet community expectations contribute to community trust and ownership of integrated services	Funding bodies develop long-term models for service sustainability in partnership with local service-providers, taking account of local needs and the specific challenges and costs of integrated service delivery targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Funding bodies make long-term commitments to providing secure and adequate funding for quality service delivery. Government is up-front and transparent about future funding arrangements	Service providers pursue good governance and financial management to make the best and sustainable use of government funding.	In initial scoping and tender processes for the building of new integrated centres, funding bodies prioritise building new centres on land owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.	Government hands over control of government land to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to use long-term for the development and delivery of integrated services.	
	Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres.	Participation of mainstream service providers in partnerships for targeted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service integration contributes to broader organisational cultural competence and community acceptance for mainstream providers, increasing capacity to engage families.	Community leaders support the development of new integrated centres on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community land, and encourage whole of community participation and engagement for their success.	Community reference groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community boards of governance ensure ongoing input into integrated services by local people with long-term commitment to local community well-being and development.	Service providers ensure that a centre remains open to use by community groups and people, enabling the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to develop a strong sense that an integrated service centre is 'their place.'	Service providers maintain a service model that provides service to a majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that the centre is recognised and trusted as a specific, targeted and ongoing service for the benefit of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.	
	Mainstream service providers plan to build local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and handover leadership and control of targeted services to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander boards of management.	Service providers facilitate governance training for community members to develop skills for serving on boards of management for integrated service centres.	All service providers undertake joint visioning and detailed planning for collaboration, shared roles, referral systems and new ways of working in an integrated service or centre. Long-term partnerships for integrated service delivery are formalised.				

9. Conclusion

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centre service development leaders commonly identify that the new Centres are viewed positively by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They are seen as a significant opportunity to: increase coordination of services; increase relevant, effective and quality service provision; promote greater access to services; build local organisation and workforce capacity; and improve the lives of children and families in the communities. While most remain optimistic that they can achieve these goals, significant challenges have met the early development of the Centres. These challenges could be addressed, in part, through better understanding of and commitment to effective service integration by all partners.

The experiences shared by integration leaders highlight that the new Centres are strongly engaged in developing and implementing strategies that promote each of the four core aspects of service integration addressed. Indeed, many have taken great strides towards effective integration through innovative and principled practice. The practice examples for pursuing effective integration present as a patchwork of different strategies in different contexts. Though this creates challenges from a policy development perspective, the patchwork itself is neither surprising nor undesirable as new integrated ways of working develop locally to respond to local needs. This occurs as integration frameworks and theory interact with on-the-ground realities in individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It is well recognised that a one size fits all approach cannot be employed in integration initiatives.

This paper has introduced some key initial learnings from these processes. SNAICC considers that points of commonality and challenges in service development and delivery practice are informative at this set up phase for all stakeholders. This enables us to learn from local issues about what further is needed in the structural architecture, government frameworks, funding models and practical support for the development of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Most significantly these learnings point to the importance of **genuine and respectful partnerships in the foundational relationships for the development of integrated service centres between government funding bodies and local service providers**. Reflection on experiences shared by Centre leaders highlights that it is the absence of important partnership principles at work in those relationships that is presenting the greatest challenges for effective service integration thus far. This is represented for example by:

- a lack of funding security and adequate modelling for financial sustainability beyond 2014 that threatens community-trust, and disempowers service providers in planning for pursuing long-term community wellbeing;
- inadequate funding and resourcing for service partnership development processes that restricts the development of local service partnerships required for services that are integrated to respond holistically to child and family needs;
- a lack of clarity for some Centres around roles and responsibilities in service development that undermines service provider roles in developing trusting relationships with communities and other providers.

Another core issue that has emerged through this research is the need for a **consistent, required and ongoing focus within the Centres on the development of genuine and respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations**. This is essential to promote community ownership and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as to draw and build upon existing community strengths for quality and culturally appropriate integrated service delivery.

For the long-term and sustainable change in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities sought through the Federal Government initiative to establish the Children and Family Centres, service integration must pursue broader goals of community capacity building and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A primary focus on harnessing or developing local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community governance is a necessary aspect to achieve this goal. There is a clear requirement for:

- a principled alignment of consultation processes with recognised principles for genuine and effective consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- consistent commitment to building local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, governance and workforce capacity for integrated services;
- recognition and inclusion of pre-existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers in the design and delivery of new integrated services.

The promising practices and challenges described in this paper present ideas for consideration and further development by integration leaders and organisations engaged in the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. They are a starting point for a continued process of learning about and developing good practice in service integration adapted to diverse local contexts.

The challenges identified do, however, call for a more immediate government response to ensure important structural supports are put in place so that the foundations of the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres support processes for effective and sustainable integration. Recommendations for addressing priority structural support and resourcing needs are included throughout the paper and collated in section 10 below.

This is a critical moment to ensure adequate support and sustainable resourcing for the future development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres as integrated services. Continued commitment from all stakeholders can ensure that they realise their potential to become and remain effective integrated children and family services, providing quality and accessible services that meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

10. Summary of Recommendations

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community strengths-based approach.

R1 The principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission⁴⁵ is included within all future service

⁴⁵ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.

agreements for integrated service design, development and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Service contracts clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders, including government funding bodies, in the consultation process.

R2 All government funding bodies for the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family centres take measures to ensure ongoing consultation for design, development and delivery is aligned with the principled framework for effective and genuine consultation described by the Australian Human Rights Commission.⁴⁶

R3 State governments include in future service contracts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres requirements to develop partnerships with a view to complementing, strengthening and building capacity of existing community-controlled ECEC services.

R4 In the review of the budget-based funding (BBF) model, the Australian Government strongly considers the relationship between new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres and existing BBF services, and ensures equity of funding for continued survival and growth of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled ECEC services.

R5 That the Australian Government, together with state and territory governments take immediate steps to implement Recommendation 14.4 of the Productivity Commission report on the *Early Childhood Development Workforce*:
'As part of the broader Early Years Development Workforce Strategy agreed by COAG, governments should work together to develop a coordinated workforce strategy that builds on workforce plans in each jurisdiction, so that priority is given to placing suitably qualified staff in Indigenous-focused services. This should include a specific plan to build the Indigenous ECEC workforce.'

R6 That new integrated service sites for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including the new Children and Family Centres, be funded and utilised for development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service local workforce capacity through strategies including provision of onsite training, partnerships with education and training institutes and the provision of technology-based learning environments for remote and distance learning.

Genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

R7 Tender processes and service contracts provide clear and flexible frameworks for integrated service delivery and clearly define stakeholder roles for consultation, design, development and delivery of integrated services. Service contracts provide both scope and requirement to define these relationships further according to local needs and circumstances, and to develop timeframes that are realistic for service development in each local context.

R8 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments directs specific funding for a high level project officer position within

⁴⁶ Ibid.

each Children and Family Centre to support and facilitate partnership development, management and ongoing evaluation for the delivery of integrated child and family services within the centres.

R9 That the Australian Government in partnership with state and territory governments funds and supports the employment of an integrated service delivery partnership facilitator in each state or territory to support partnership development within all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres. This role should be positioned within and supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies in the family support, child welfare and/or health field, with a funded national support and resourcing role provided by SNAICC. The role should provide intensive support for initial partnership development over 2 years, with ongoing national oversight provided by SNAICC beyond this period.

Targeting services to promote access for and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

R10 In the development of new integrated services targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, priority is given in the tender process to the selection of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with adequate organisational capacity to manage the service. Where current local capacity is inadequate, priority is given to consortiums that include respectful partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support their growth and development. The award of integrated service contracts to non-Indigenous and non-local service providers includes time-limited requirements to develop local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capacity and transfer service leadership and control in line with capacity growth.

R11 High standards of cultural competence are included within service contracts for organisations for the delivery or coordination of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.⁴⁷ These standards include specific requirements for the development of genuine and respectful partnership relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

R12 Funding for integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families includes provision for cultural awareness training for mainstream, non-Indigenous and non-local professionals to be provided by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are endorsed by the local community to provide such training.

Sustainable service delivery that impacts long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.

R13 The Australian Government in cooperation with state governments undertakes financial modelling to determine how Centres can operate financially, while maintaining a focus on service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families for at least the next 20 years. The Government shares modelling

⁴⁷ For a full review of relevant cultural competence standards, refer to: Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne; SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne.

openly, develops a plan to support sustainable service delivery, and negotiates with individual Centres around how local circumstances impact the funding model.

R14 The Australian Government, as a matter of urgency, makes a significant financial commitment to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres beyond 2014, to allay immediate and ongoing stability concerns that are restricting Centre development and future planning.

R15 That in implementing recommendations 13 and 14 above, proper regard is had to both the funding model for early childhood education and care services, as well as adequate funding to support the processes of partnership development for collaboration in the delivery of family support services, and the need to implement recommendations 8 and 9 above.

R16 That the next service contracts for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Family Centres include specific requirements for funded services to develop capacity building strategies for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance and leadership of the Centre, including a plan to transfer responsibility for management of all Centres to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with capacity development.

Reference List

- Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner (2009) *Native title report 2009*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Sydney. Appendix 3.
- Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY).
- Committee on the Rights of the Child, *General Comment No. 11, Indigenous Children and their Rights under the Convention*, 2009, CRC/C/GC/11, 12 February 2009.
- Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf
- Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf
- Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 8.
- Harvard Project on American Indian Economic Development, Retrieved 15 July 2012 from: <http://hpaied.org/about-hpaied/overview>
- Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31.
- Human Rights Council (2011) *Final Report of the study of indigenous peoples and the right to participate in decision-making*, Report of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, A/HRC/18/42, 17 August 2011.
- Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet.
- Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 2.

Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010);

NSW Ombudsman (2011) *Addressing Indigenous Disadvantage: the need to do things differently*. Sydney, NSW Ombudsman.

Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst.

Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March. 132

Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1).

Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2012). *Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*. Melbourne.

SNAICC. (2012). *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Melbourne. 19.

SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne.

Wild, R. and Anderson, P. (2007) *Little Children are Sacred*, Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Northern Territory Government.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne.



Integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

March 2012

IKANBALA.



SNAICC

Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

*SNAICC thanks the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and
Indigenous Affairs for the funding support to conduct this research.*

Researched and written by:

John Burton, Policy Officer, SNAICC

SNAICC

Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.org.au
Phone: (03) 9489 8099

A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body
that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander children and families.

Table of Contents

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. WHAT IS INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?	5
2.1 CONCEPTIONS OF INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY	5
2.2 THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE INTEGRATION.....	10
2.3 ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVE INTEGRATED CHILD AND FAMILY SERVICE PROVISION	13
3. THE AUSTRALIAN POLICY CONTEXT FOR INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.	17
4. SIGNIFICANT AUSTRALIAN INITIATIVES.....	19
4.1 COMMUNITIES FOR CHILDREN.....	20
4.2 INTEGRATED FAMILY SERVICES (IFS) AND CHILD FIRST (VICTORIA)	23
4.3 MULTIFUNCTIONAL ABORIGINAL CHILDREN’S SERVICES (MACS)	25
5. INTERROGATING GOOD PRACTICE IN APPROACHES TO INTEGRATED SERVICE DELIVERY FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.....	27
5.1 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ENGAGEMENT IN INTEGRATED SERVICE DESIGN AND DELIVERY.....	27
5.2 PARTNERSHIPS FOR SERVICE INTEGRATION	34
5.3 COORDINATION AND FACILITATION OF INTEGRATED SERVICES FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.....	38
5.4 IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATING TO ACCESS AND ENTRY POINTS TO INTEGRATED SERVICE SYSTEMS FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CHILDREN AND FAMILIES.....	41
5.5 UNIVERSAL AND ABORIGINAL-TARGETED SERVICE PROVISION	43
5.6 SUSTAINABILITY OF INTEGRATION INITIATIVES IN ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SERVICE CONTEXTS.....	47
6. CONCLUSION	50
REFERENCE LIST	53

1. Introduction

There has been significant focus recently on the importance of integrated service delivery for access, outreach, and improving outcomes for vulnerable children and families. Integrated service delivery is embedded in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, which draws on a prior Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) publication¹ to advance that:

‘Early childhood experts advocate integrated delivery of services, including antenatal services, child and maternal health services, parenting and family support services, and early learning and child care, as the best delivery platform to ensure families actually receive the support they need.’²

Integrated service delivery is also a major element of COAG’s *Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*,³ and *Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*.⁴ The latter document specifies that one of the key strategies under outcome 2 (‘Children and families access adequate support to promote safety and intervene early’) is to ‘Implement an integrated approach to service design, planning and delivery for children and families across the lifecycle and spectrum of need.’⁵

Integrated service delivery models have been developed and are being trialled and implemented in Australia. While SNAICC participated in the original drive for integrated service delivery, there has been little Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective on the evolution of the models of integrated service delivery and the extent to which they respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. This is a critical issue to ensure effective outreach for vulnerable families and a shift in implementation systems and practice towards a more preventative approach to child protection and family support.

¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC) and Department of Child and Family Studies Swinburne University. (2004). *Indigenous Parenting Project: Main Report*, July.

² Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2008). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development. National Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the State and Territory Governments regarding Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Retrieved on 25 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-10-02/docs/indigenous_early_childhood_NPA.pdf, p. 4.

³ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Investing in the Early Years—A National Early Childhood Development Strategy*, 2 July. Retrieved on 25 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/national_ECD_strategy.pdf.

⁴ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 25 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf.

⁵ Ibid. 18.

This paper reviews the literature on integrated service delivery models for children and families, first defining the concept of integrated service delivery and highlighting its importance for child and family service provision. It describes the Australian policy context, then specifically interrogates approaches to integration that are critical to effective service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, drawing strongly on evaluation of leading Australian initiatives in child and family service integration. The review presents a summary of promising approaches that are important to inform the design of integrated service systems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts. It highlights the critical importance of building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations (ACCOS) and implementing approaches that are targeted to support their participation in integrated systems.

2. What is integrated service delivery and why is it important?

To understand the importance of integrated service delivery in responding to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, it is first important to define the concept and review knowledge of its contribution to effective service provision.

2.1 Conceptions of Integrated Service Delivery

By its nature, integrated service delivery is a complex and diverse concept, taking on different meanings and realities in the variety of service sector contexts and local service environments in and across which integrated systems operate. Whalley describes integrated children's services as necessarily complex to respond to needs in 'a complex, changing and often chaotic world.'⁶ Integration is both systems and relationship based, and to be effective requires collaborative efforts at the whole-of-government systems level, in regional-planning structures, as well as in service management and direct service delivery partnerships.⁷

Definitions of integration in the child and family service sector literature commonly describe full service integration as the endpoint on a continuum of intra-agency, inter-agency and/or inter-disciplinary collaboration.⁸ Along this

⁶ Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 13

⁷ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 15

⁸ Ibid. 17; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). 3; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 2; Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March.

continuum, the journey towards integration involves increasing levels of cooperation, coordination, information exchange, joint planning, responsibility and accountability, and the development of formal partnership structures.⁹ As services are increasingly integrated, service autonomy decreases and services adopt shared goals and targets; shared systems of management and governance; and pool funding.¹⁰ Full integration is characterised by the merging of previously independent entities into a single 'integrated entity.'¹¹

With a focus on improving access to a range of family supports, integrated services are commonly described as centred around the child and their family,¹² with services organising to respond to needs in specific family and community contexts.¹³ In this way, integrated systems pursue positive outcomes for children and families as a goal rather than service outputs,¹⁴ and typically seek to intervene early, prevent family breakdown and promote well-being.¹⁵ Moore and Skinner highlight the importance of service delivery that is both integrated and tiered, based on a public health model,¹⁶ a key approach adopted in Australian policy and described further in section 3 below.

While acknowledging the vital importance of national and whole-of-government approaches to enabling integration, this review focuses primarily on regional and local service development, management, coordination and partnership levels of integration. At these levels the literature highlights the importance of local community context and 'place-based' realities to the development of integrated service systems.¹⁷ A focus on particular areas and neighbourhoods is supported by research that identifies strong links between neighbourhood

132; Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 57.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 53; Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 55-69. 57.

¹¹ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY). 3; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 2.

¹² Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services. 19; Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March, 133.

¹³ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 53.

¹⁴ Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 65; ¹⁴ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 53.

¹⁵ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 7.

¹⁶ Ibid. 15-16.

¹⁷ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 53.

characteristics and health and well-being outcomes, recognising the importance of local service availability, social cohesion and developing social capital.¹⁸ Brechman-Toussaint and Kogler refer to an evaluation of the Extended Schools initiative in the UK, noting that 'the most successful outcomes appeared to be related to a gradual shaping of service provision to reflect the needs of the local community.'¹⁹ Effective integration has been described as working from the starting point of family and community strengths,²⁰ and drawing on that base with a focus on community participation and leadership in the design and delivery of services based on community-identified needs.²¹ Integration calls for collaboration, not just between service providers, but also between service providers and community, in a way that builds capacity for and empowers community members to bring about positive change.²² Alcock describes this as a middle way between top-down and bottom-up policy development that asserts a commitment to family and community participation with the aim being 'to change structural conditions...by activating agents to be participants in the process of change.'²³ As Whalley describes, 'children, parents and staff need to believe that they can change difficult situations and make things happen in their communities. A central concern...is to develop a sense of agency, which reflects self-esteem and self confidence.'²⁴ However, Alcock notes with caution that if participation is to genuinely contribute to empowerment it must go beyond a procedural 'seat at the table' to be 'the acquisition of power over the decisions made.'²⁵

¹⁸ Edwards, B. et al. (2009). *Stronger Families in Australia study: the impact of Communities for Children*, Occasional Paper No 25, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 3.

¹⁹ Ofsted 2006 in Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY). 21.

²⁰ Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March. 133.

²¹ Cortis, N. (2008). Evaluating Area-based Interventions: The Case of 'Communities for Children'. *Children and Society*, 22, 112-123. 114; Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1). 90; Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2), 12; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 42; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010); Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 32; Western Australian Integrated Service Department (2009) in Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 9-10.

²² Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 12; Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1), 87-96. 90.

²³ Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1), 87-96. 90.

²⁴ Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 12.

²⁵ Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1). 91.

Increasing access for children and families is a central driving philosophy of service integration, based on the notion that integrated systems have the potential to respond more holistically to child and family needs by combating service fragmentation and making a range of child and family service readily available.²⁶ Holistic responses are facilitated both by single integrated services, as well as cooperative activities and coordinated referral systems between providers that link families to a range of supports from a single point of access to the service system.²⁷ An important point of clarification, not always addressed in the literature, is that while integrated systems seek to ensure access to multiple services through single access points, they are most accessible where there are multiple entry points into the integrated service system, with 'no wrong doors.'²⁸ These entry points should seek to engage families based on: needs at different points throughout the life cycle; practical and geographical access considerations; and with a focus on early engagement of families through primary service provision that is universally available and attractive to families, for example, early childhood education and care.²⁹ In this way, services which are universally available and commonly accessed serve as 'hooks', drawing families into the service system and 'laddering' them to additional supports and activities as wanted and required.³⁰ Cultural appropriateness of service system entry points is a significant issue in enabling access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is addressed in section 5.5 below.³¹

An appreciation of the need for multiple entry points is critical to the physical design of integrated service delivery systems and sites. Integrated services are commonly described as either physically co-located (sometimes called 'on-stop-shops') or virtual networks characterised by close working relationships and

²⁶ Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2), 31-32; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 4, 10-11; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 6; Valentine, K. et al. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3.

²⁷ Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY). 2; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 53.

²⁸ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9; see also: Daniel, B. (2004). An overview of the Scottish multidisciplinary child protection review. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9. 255.

²⁹ Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2). 41.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ see generally: Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper.

referral pathways between different services and service sites.³² Co-located centres, while providing advantages for service interaction and single-site access to a range of services for families,³³ can also create access challenges when services are brought together in a location that families cannot easily reach.³⁴ These challenges are exacerbated in regional, rural and remote locations with spread-out populations.³⁵ Creativity is required in the design of services in these areas to ensure that access to integrated services is widely available. Press et al suggest the idea of a 'hybrid' model of service integration that combines aspects of co-location with virtual service networks.³⁶ Outreach to vulnerable families to engage them where they are, at home, and outside of integrated service centres is also recognised as vital to connecting families to services.³⁷

Integrated child and family services have sometimes been conceived of as having the goal of universal, 'whole-of-population' service provision.³⁸ As Moore and Skinner describe, 'There are good grounds, both empirical and theoretical, for adopting a universal approach to service provision, strengthening the range of universal services and providing additional services in response-based fashion (according to emerging needs rather than risks).'³⁹ Leigh, however, recognises that the reality of complex and diverse needs means that it is not possible to integrate all services for all people, and that prioritisation of need and targeted groups is necessary for integrated service systems development.⁴⁰ While Rogers and Moore contend that 'adaptation should be possible to meet additional or specialist needs from within a universal system,'⁴¹ their analysis does not address the reality that targeting services in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait

³² Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17.

³³ Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 10; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17.

³⁴ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 17.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 6.

³⁷ Tunstill, J., Blewett, J., and Meadows, P. (2009). *Evaluating the delivery by Action for Children, of targeted family support*, Synergy Research & Consulting Ltd. 12; Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services. 27; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 21-22; M Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9.

³⁸ See generally: Moore, T.G. (2008). *Rethinking universal and targeted services*, Centre for Community Child Health.

³⁹ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 8.

⁴⁰ Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 24-25.

⁴¹ Rogers, R., and Moore, T. (2003). *The Early Years Project: Refocusing community based services for young children and families: A Literature Review*, Centre for Community Child Health and Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. 8.

Islander context is not only about responding to poverty and disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but also about ensuring that important aspects of culturally appropriate service provision and community-control are considered and included in service design and development.⁴² These important issues are addressed in further detail in section 5.5 below. In the absence of this analysis, there remains the risk that the universal and inclusive service provision that Moore advocates⁴³ could be implemented in a manner that is exclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs and aspirations, creating barriers to service access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and frustrating the concurrent goal of culturally accessible service systems that he identifies.⁴⁴

2.2 The importance of child and family service integration

While the literature has significantly addressed the theoretical importance of service integration, few accounts draw on outcomes-based evaluation. Both establishing the means of evaluating integration and collecting evidence of the links between integration and child and family development and well-being outcomes requires further attention. Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj-Blatchford identify that there is a long way to go in developing evidence-based understanding of effective service integration, and that there is currently a lack of consensus about what the indicators of success are.⁴⁵ Moore and Skinner proffer that the direct outcome foci of integrated service delivery are ‘access to a full range of services’ and ‘prompt responses to child and family problems’,⁴⁶ rather than well-being outcomes which, despite being consequential, are longer-term and difficult to link directly to service integration.⁴⁷ Measuring outcomes is further hampered by the diversity of approaches, acknowledging that this diversity is desirable;⁴⁸ there is no ‘one-size fits all’ approach, and the importance of community context remains paramount as described in section 2.1 above.⁴⁹

⁴² For discussion of the link between culturally appropriate service provision and access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). ‘Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services’. Policy paper.

⁴³ Moore, T.G. (2008). *Rethinking universal and targeted services*, Centre for Community Child Health. 7-8.

⁴⁴ Ibid. 12;

⁴⁵ Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services. 30-31.

⁴⁶ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 6.

⁴⁷ Valentine, K., Katz, I., and Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 6-7.

⁴⁸ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 8.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Many argue that the complexity of child and family needs requires a complexity of response.⁵⁰ As Valentine et al describe, “‘joined up problems’ require ‘joined up solutions’.”⁵¹ Some contend that the complexity of needs is increasing in line with ‘rapid societal change’ that is contributing to worsening developmental outcomes.⁵² Worsening outcomes are commonly linked to problems of service fragmentation, and a service system that is hard for families to access and navigate.⁵³ Fragmentation increases the risk that families who need support will ‘fall through the cracks,’ not receiving the right supports at the right time. Service integration is conceptualised as the antithesis of fragmentation, enabling cohesion and continuity, or what is sometimes referred to as ‘seamless’ and/or holistic service provision.⁵⁴ Rogers and Moore refer to the analysis of Harbin and West who identified that ‘in general, the more comprehensive and cohesive the system, the better the results for children and families.’⁵⁵ Integration can reduce duplication, such that families are not faced with undergoing multiple assessments and telling their story repeatedly in order to access support.⁵⁶ Press et al describe that integrated services also promote both horizontal and vertical continuity allowing movement across services at one point in time, and appropriate service responses over time.⁵⁷ Citing Corter et al they describe that ‘continuity can mean fewer transitions for the child, more recognition of the

⁵⁰ Valentine, K., Katz, I., and Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 1.

⁵¹ Valentine, K., Katz, I., and Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3.

⁵² Moore, T.G. (2008). *Rethinking universal and targeted services*, Centre for Community Child Health. 2; see also Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 4-5.

⁵³ Brechman-Toussaint and Kogler, 2010, 2; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 1 & 4.

⁵⁴ Valentine, K., Katz, I., and Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3; see also: Cortis, N. (2008). Evaluating Area-based Interventions: The Case of ‘Communities for Children’. *Children and Society*, 22. 114; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY). 2.

⁵⁵ Harbin and West (1998) in Rogers, R., and Moore, T. (2003). *The Early Years Project: Refocusing community based services for young children and families: A Literature Review*, Centre for Community Child Health and Royal Children’s Hospital, Melbourne. 7.

⁵⁶ Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY). 2; Cortis, N. (2008). Evaluating Area-based Interventions: The Case of ‘Communities for Children’. *Children and Society*, 22. 114

⁵⁷ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 10.

child's individual needs, better and more consistent programming, and more consistent expectations and support from adults.'⁵⁸

Service integration is considered critical to enabling access for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged members of society.⁵⁹ Siraj-Blatchford and Siraj Blatchford cite a study by Egeland and Bosquet which shows 'that interventions with high-risk families are more successful when they address not only the parent-child relationship, but also the other problems parents face, such as poverty, unemployment, poor housing and substance abuse.'⁶⁰ Moore and Skinner identify that characteristics of vulnerable groups including a lack of social networks, confidence, and familiarity with system culture and language; and multiple problems requiring assistance from multiple sources, mean that they are more negatively affected by service fragmentation.⁶¹ This reality can exacerbate existing inequalities, and is of particular significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who experience significantly lower health and well-being outcomes than the general population in Australia.⁶² Within the Canadian context, Ball highlights that in remote and regional areas with large Indigenous populations, high turnover of staff impacts on service memory and continuity of care for children and families who experience long-term and multi-generational disadvantages.⁶³ However, where services work in an integrated way, 'the knowledge of needs, goal and service history of children and families is retained and passed along within a community-based family support team, leading to continuous and better coordinated services.'⁶⁴ Integration within individual services, such that they operate more holistically, is also considered crucial in rural and remote locations due to the small number of available service providers.⁶⁵ Many existing integration initiatives are targeted in areas of high disadvantage, as measures directed to address existing inequalities and close the gap in developmental and well-being outcomes.⁶⁶

This review primarily addresses integration of child and family services, noting particularly the strong focus in the literature on integrated models of early

⁵⁸ Corter et al, 2008 in Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 10.

⁵⁹ Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2). 31; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 6.

⁶⁰ Egeland and Bosquet, 2001 in Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services. 33.

⁶¹ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 6.

⁶² See: Steering Review for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2011*. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁶³ Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2). 32.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).13.

⁶⁶ See for example: the Communities for Children initiative.

childhood education and care service delivery. Strong links have been identified between support and intervention in early childhood and later developmental outcomes,⁶⁷ leading many authors to highlight early childhood as a key site for service integration with the greatest positive impact over-time.⁶⁸ This approach also reflects the focus on public-health model interventions which seek to intervene early and prevent family deterioration, with early childhood education and care considered a 'non-stigmatised entry point into other support services' with 'capacity to provide support...early in the life course.'⁶⁹ Flaxman et al note that:

'This is particularly important among Indigenous people, since many Indigenous families and children are largely disengaged from the service network. In many cases, a family's engagement with a child care service is the only connection they have to service networks and for this reason, referrals between early childhood service providers and other support services are crucial.'⁷⁰

Economic analysis reveals the possibility of significant return on early years investment, and that a scale of investment weighted to the early years is most effective.⁷¹ Also, integration measures are considered essential to address fragmentation in early years service provision that exists as a result of the lack of a universal early childhood education and care system.⁷²

2.3 Aspects of effective integrated child and family service provision

Despite the only recently emerging evidence base on outcomes achieved through integration, a preliminary understanding of 'what works' based on recent implementation and evaluation of integrated child and family service approaches is available. Significant aspects of integrated service delivery commonly identified in the literature are described in table 1 below. It is beyond the scope

⁶⁷ Mustard (2005) and Shonkoff & Phillips (2000) in Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1), 1; Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 9.

⁶⁸ Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet. 9; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010); Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1).

⁶⁹ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 11.

⁷⁰ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).13.

⁷¹ Cunha, F. and Heckman, J. (2006). *Investing in our Young People*. Funded by the National Institute of Health, the Committee for Economic Development, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Partnership for America's Economic Success. 69.

⁷² Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010).

of this review to provide a full description of detailed aspects of integration which are many and varied, and those described below are broader components with many sub-components requiring consideration in the design and delivery of integrated services.

Table 1 – Aspects of Effective Integration of Child and Family Services

Integration Aspect	Description
Shared vision	Organisations and professionals clearly identify and work towards a shared vision based on positive outcomes for children and families. Commitment to this shared vision manifests in a sharing of organisational and professional strengths and resources to enable the pursuit of shared goals. A shared vision provides the platform for shared responsibility and accountability. ⁷³
Community-based and owned design and delivery	Broad and flexible government frameworks support and enable the development of flexible and innovative community-based responses to locally identified needs. ⁷⁴ Families and communities participate in design, delivery and evaluation of integrated services. Governance structures enable participation for local organisations, their staff and the broader community, promoting broadly shared ownership of initiatives. ⁷⁵ Community development approaches contribute to empower communities and build social capital. ⁷⁶

⁷³ Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). 83; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 31; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9.

⁷⁴ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 4, 29; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9-11.

⁷⁵ Cortis, N. (2008). Evaluating Area-based Interventions: The Case of 'Communities for Children'. *Children and Society*, 22. 114; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 4, 42; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9-11; Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle. 31; Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 12.

⁷⁶ Rogers, R., and Moore, T. (2003). *The Early Years Project: Refocusing community based services for young children and families: A Literature Review*, Centre for Community Child Health and Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne. 9.

Assessment of community strengths, needs, and service gaps (asset mapping)	Existing community services, strengths, and needs are mapped and taken account of in the development of integration initiatives that draw on local strengths and address gaps in local service delivery and capacity. Broad community and stakeholder participation in asset mapping processes contributes to understanding of and responsiveness of integrated services to local needs. ⁷⁷
Leadership and facilitation	Leadership is a pivotal factor in facilitating integration and 'requires sophisticated skills in managing change, building sustainable change in daily practice, and progress toward long term goals.' ⁷⁸ One leader may be instrumental, but promoting shared leadership is critical. ⁷⁹ In particular, integration initiatives can benefit greatly from identified and funded facilitation and coordination roles that can support and enable the processes required for partnership development and integration. ⁸⁰ As Press et al describe, 'progress toward integration was considerably enhanced when funding was available to employ a coordinator for the integrated service, and impeded when such positions were cut back.' ⁸¹
Genuine partnerships	Partnership relationships between agencies, professionals, government and community underpin effective service integration. Partnership encompasses the complex relational process that seeks to build trust and understanding while addressing challenging issues, such as power imbalance and reconciling complex differences of cultural, personal and professional perspectives. Attention to the time and processes required for building strong relationships is critical to any endeavour that seeks to increase collaboration. ⁸²

⁷⁷ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).39-40; Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARACY). 83.

⁷⁸ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 44.

⁷⁹ Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 10; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 44.

⁸⁰ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 44; KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 32; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9.

⁸¹ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 44.

⁸² Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 63-64; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong,

Design for optimal access for and engagement of children and families	Increased service access for and engagement of children and families are recognised as key goals of service integration initiatives, ⁸³ and measures to promote these goals are critical components of integrated services. Important service design aspects that impact accessibility include: location and transport availability; ⁸⁴ cultural safety and appropriateness; ⁸⁵ multiple service system entry points with 'no wrong doors'; ⁸⁶ availability and accessibility of information about services; ⁸⁷ and coordinated referral pathways for seamless transitions, and holistic and prompt responses to family needs. ⁸⁸
---	---

Genuine local partnerships are widely recognised as a core aspect and enabling factor for effective integrated service delivery, and it is therefore worthwhile examining the concept in more depth. As Alcock notes, the policy drive towards partnerships for integrated service delivery has not fully engaged with 'the complex contextual problems of turning the good ideals of partnership into good practice in the real world,' and governments face the continuing challenge of

S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 24; Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne.

⁸³ Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2), 31-32; Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 10-11; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 6; Valentine, K. et al. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3.

⁸⁴ Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 10; Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9.

⁸⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 10-11. Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper. 10-12.

⁸⁶ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 9; see also: Daniel, B. (2004). An overview of the Scottish multidisciplinary child protection review. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9. 255; Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper. 10-11.

⁸⁷ Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 8.

⁸⁸ Valentine, K. et al. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 3; Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2), 42.

‘moving beyond the rhetoric of joining-up.’⁸⁹ SNAICC has recently researched principles and practices that underpin genuine partnership development in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts, and these approaches are considered in section 5.2 below.⁹⁰ Principles of partnership development identified by SNAICC through case study based research are broadly reflective of the aspects of effective service integration detailed in the literature, reflecting the reality that genuine partnership relationships are required to enable integration, which, as described above, is both a systems and a strongly relational endeavour. Partnership principles identified by SNAICC that apply within and beyond Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts include: commitment to developing long-term sustainable relationships based on trust; an aim to improve long-term wellbeing outcomes for children and families; shared responsibility and accountability for shared objectives and activities; respect for local knowledge, skills and leadership; value for process elements as vital to partnership development; addressing unequal relationships and structures; and an openness to working differently.⁹¹

3. The Australian policy context for integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The Council of Australian Governments’ (COAG) *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA)*, details the broad commitment and targets that Australian Governments have undertaken to work towards the goal of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.⁹² Access to early childhood services is a priority of the *NIRA* and the importance of integrating services to achieve *NIRA* goals is strongly recognised. Integration is one of six principles that underpin the approach to service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and is detailed in schedule D of the *NIRA*:

‘Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels, their agencies and funded service providers to effectively coordinate programs and services. In particular attention is to be given to: (a) articulating responsibilities between all levels of government; (b) identifying and addressing gaps and overlaps in the continuum of service delivery; (c) ensuring services and programs are provided in an integrated and collaborative manner both between all levels of governments and between services; (d) ensuring services and programs do not set incentives that negatively affect outcomes of other programs and services; and (e) recognising that a centrally agreed

⁸⁹ Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1). 89.

⁹⁰ See: Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne.

⁹¹ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne. 6.

⁹² Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

strategic focus should not inhibit service delivery responses that are sensitive to local contexts.’⁹³

This principle, together with others identified in the *NIRA* provide a solid framework and starting point for interrogating the approach to integration in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery contexts. These principles are considered throughout the following sections.

Applying this approach more specifically to the child and family service sector, The National Framework for Protecting Australia’s children adopts a public health model and aims to integrate services ‘across the lifecycle and spectrum of need.’⁹⁴ This approach seeks to reduce the incidence of child abuse and neglect through a primary focus on preventative supports for all children and families,⁹⁵ based on the assumption that ‘by providing the right services at the right time vulnerable families can be supported, child abuse and neglect can be prevented, and the effects of trauma and harm can be reduced.’⁹⁶

A major initiative aimed at promoting the goal that ‘Indigenous children are supported and safe in their families and community,’ and implementing a strategy of expanding service access, is the establishment of 38 Indigenous Child and Family centres.⁹⁷ The intention for these centres to be sites for integrated early years service delivery is described in the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) *National partnership agreement for Indigenous early childhood development*:

‘The Children and Family Centres will provide a dynamic mix of services, responsive to community needs, and include child care, early learning and parent and family support services. The operations of the Children and Family Centre will be underpinned by integration of their management, governance and service systems. Community engagement with the Children and Family Centres is integral to their successful implementation.’⁹⁸

Notions of community engagement, participation, and leadership in design and delivery abound in Australian government policy frameworks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service delivery and service integration.⁹⁹

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Ibid. 18.

⁹⁵ Ibid. 12.

⁹⁶ Ibid. 17.

⁹⁷ Ibid. 17; The number of Child and Family Centres being established has increased from the minimum of 35 identified in the Framework, to 38 Centres that have either commenced operation or are under development.

⁹⁸ Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

⁹⁹ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf; Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone’s Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-

The principles detailed in the *NIRA* form the bedrock of the Australian Government commitment to effective service integration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This commitment shows in principle potential for realising important aspects of the right to self-determination of Australia's Indigenous peoples.¹⁰⁰ However, the failure to effectively implement this commitment means that there has been limited success in empowering and building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to participate and lead integrated service delivery, as is explored in the remainder of this literature review.

4. Significant Australian initiatives

As noted above, there is a dearth of evidence in relation to the impacts of service integration on child and family service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, two significant government child and family service initiatives with integration elements have been evaluated, and can shed light on aspects of integration relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery. These are the FaHCSIA funded Communities for Children (CfC) initiative and the Child FIRST (Child and Family Information, Referral and Support Teams) and Integrated Family Services (IFS) initiative of the Victorian Department of Human Services (DHS). This review draws significantly on the evaluation of these two initiatives as key evidence to inform the agenda for service integration of services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care sector, Multi-functional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) have been recognised as a leading model in integrated and holistic family service provision and are also described below.

One of the challenges of this literature review is not to conflate 'service delivery' with 'integrated service delivery' when considering evaluation materials from these particular Australian initiatives. It is important to recognise that while these initiatives have pursued significant levels of integration, they are not examples of service integration per se. As systems and models they envisage varying levels and types of integration; they provide some scope for localised design of integration approaches; and importantly they vary in the level of integration within different service sites. Ultimately, the distinction is difficult to maintain and to some extent unclear as outcomes are dependent on the quality, availability and accessibility of service provision, which may result from

[30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf](#); Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁰⁰ The right to self-determination is defined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples as a right by virtue of which Indigenous peoples 'freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.' Australia endorsed the Declaration in 2009; *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, GA Res 61/295, UN Doc A/RES/61/295 (2007)

integration elements and many other aspects, with the direct links being challenging to establish and measure.¹⁰¹

4.1 Communities for Children

The Communities for Children initiative was part of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy (SFCS) 2004-2009 implemented by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), and now continues as part of the FaHCSIA Family Support Program. Materials considered in this review are primarily those that contributed to the comprehensive 2009 evaluation of the initiative and focus on the period of implementation prior to that review.

The Communities for Children initiative was targeted at integrating services to improve outcomes for disadvantaged children and families:

‘The CfC initiative aimed to support positive child development in disadvantaged areas through an effective, comprehensive and integrated system of early childhood services, and a focus on broad systems of relationships and networks in the whole community to improve community ‘child-friendliness’ (that is, community ‘embeddedness’ or social capital).’¹⁰²

The specific aims of the initiative were to:

- ‘Improve coordination of services for children 0 to 5 years and their families;
- Identify and provide services to address unmet needs;
- Build community capacity to engage in service delivery; and
- Improve the community context in which children grow up.’¹⁰³

Sites for Communities for Children were chosen taking into account considerations such as analyses of disadvantage (Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas), the number of children in the community, and the number of families receiving the Family Tax Benefit. Urban, regional and remote sites were targeted.¹⁰⁴ Generally CfC sites have a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children than in the general population, with 2006 figures

¹⁰¹ Valentine, K. et al. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November. 5; Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People’s Services. 27-31.

¹⁰² Edwards, B. et al. (2009). *Stronger Families in Australia study: the impact of Communities for Children*, Occasional Paper No 25, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), p. 29.

¹⁰³ Ibid. P. vii.

¹⁰⁴ Muir, K., Katz, I., Purcal, C., Patulny, R., Flaxman, S., Abelló, D., Cortis, N., Thomson, C., Oprea, I., Wise, S., Edwards, B., Gray, M., and Hayes, A. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), p. 44.

indicating that the proportion of Indigenous children aged 0-5 in the original 45 Communities for Children sites was 9.0%.¹⁰⁵

As Muir et al note,

‘The logic model of CfC indicated that outcomes for children and families depended not only on the number and type of services delivered in the community, but also on how services and activities were coordinated. A major aim of CfC therefore was to improve local service coordination and collaboration.’¹⁰⁶

Increased collaboration ‘was one of the most significant achievements of the initiative.’¹⁰⁷ Key factors in the success of the CfC program were that ‘families and children’s services working effectively as a system’ was stated as an explicit goal from inception of the initiative, targeted funding was provided to support and encourage collaborative activities, and Facilitating Partners played a committed role in utilising funding for this specific purpose.¹⁰⁸ Activities under this goal accounted for 9% of expenditure, but activities within other priority areas also had significant collaborative foci or components, and only 11% of activities had no partner involvement.¹⁰⁹ In most sites CfC was either the only collaborative service delivery program in the community or the only program with specific funding for integrated services.¹¹⁰ As Muir et al highlight, ‘Coupled with the place-based nature of the initiative, this meant that most Community Partners were willing to collaborate and to allow the Facilitating Partner to take the lead.’¹¹¹

In each site a non-government organisation acts as a Facilitating Partner and establishes a Communities for Children Committee. The Committee is made up of representatives from a broad range of stakeholders from the local community¹¹² and is responsible for deciding on a Strategic Plan that identifies strengths and

¹⁰⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services. Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA), p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ Muir, K., Katz, I., Purcal, C., Patulny, R., Flaxman, S., Abello, D., Cortis, N., Thomson, C., Oprea, I., Wise, S., Edwards, B., Gray, M., and Hayes, A. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).19

¹⁰⁷ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).14

¹⁰⁸ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).24

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2011). ‘Communities for Children’. Last modified 6 July. Retrieved on 23 January 2012 from <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/communitieschildren/Pages/default.aspx>.

assets, and the needs and service gaps of children in the community.¹¹³ The Facilitating Partner is then responsible for the overall management of the Communities for Children at that particular site, including funding allocation,¹¹⁴ and implementation and ongoing monitoring of the strategic plan.¹¹⁵ Facilitating Partners contract local service providers to be Community Partners to deliver specified activities.¹¹⁶

Key aspects of the CfC design include:

- A focus on community participation in the design and implementation. As Muir et al highlight, 'The structures embedded in CfC ensured consultations were conducted, and these consultations were a key strength of the initiative.'¹¹⁷
- A range of services, such as 'home visiting early learning and literacy programs, early development of social and communication skills, parenting and family support programs, child nutrition, and community events to celebrate the importance of children, families and the early years.'¹¹⁸

The *National Evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009* reported that 'CfC had small but positive effects on a number of outcomes for families, children and communities.'¹¹⁹ The positive effects include improvements in parenting, employment levels, participation in community service activities, social cohesion, and receptive vocabulary achievement and verbal ability.¹²⁰ The Communities for Children initiative did not appear to significantly improve the health of families.¹²¹

Muir et al note the success of partnerships in the Communities for Children initiative where 'between July 2006 and December 2007, 89% of CfC-funded activities were conducted in partnerships consisting of two or more organisations or groups.'¹²² Collaboration between staff from different services and coordination between services had also improved between 2006 and

¹¹³ Social Policy Research Centre. (2005). *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy: National Evaluation Framework*, for the Department of Family and Community Services, December, p. 6 n 2.

¹¹⁴ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2011). 'Communities for Children'. Last modified 6 July. Retrieved on 23 January 2012 from <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/communitieschildren/Pages/default.aspx>.

¹¹⁵ Social Policy Research Centre. (2005). *Stronger Families and Communities Strategy: National Evaluation Framework*, for the Department of Family and Community Services, December, p. 6 n 2.

¹¹⁶ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 4.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 40.

¹¹⁸ Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). (2011). 'Communities for Children'. Last modified 6 July. Retrieved on 23 January 2012 from <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/families/progserv/communitieschildren/Pages/default.aspx>.

¹¹⁹ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). P. x.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid. P. x-xi.

¹²² Ibid. P. ix.

4.2 Integrated Family Services (IFS) and Child FIRST (Victoria)

Child FIRST is a Victorian initiative implemented by the Department of Human Services (DHS). The initiative is part of an Integrated Family Services system and acts as an intake, referral and assessment service, providing links to other services. This initiative is particularly significant to this paper because of the ways in which partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) have been developed. The target group for Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services are children and young people and their families who are viewed as vulnerable or at risk of entering the Child Protection system.¹²⁴

According to the KPMG *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*:

‘This strategy focuses on redesigning the services system, integrating Family Services within sub-regional catchments, and providing (within each catchment) a visible point of contact, coordinated intake and prioritisation of client need.’¹²⁵

The objectives of Child FIRST and IFS are:

- ‘creation of a point of entry into a local service network which allows IFS services to receive referrals and undertake assessments in relation to vulnerable children and families
- provision of an integrated response, which identifies need, addresses risk and supports the changing needs of children, young people and families
- prioritisation and earlier intervention with the most vulnerable children and families, including where children have been exposed to multiple and co-occurring risks factors and/or cumulative harm.’¹²⁶

Each Child FIRST service sits within a Child and Family Service Alliance, which are established within each sub-region. The Alliances are comprised of representatives from Child FIRST, DHS (including Child Protection and Departmental staff), Integrated Family Services and ACCOs. The stated aim of the Alliances is to ‘generate shared responsibility for at-risk children and families within the catchment, and enable earlier intervention and diversion from Child Protection.’¹²⁷ The role of the Alliance is to manage the operational requirements of Child FIRST, to develop and implement catchment planning and to ‘coordinate local services and foster local networks with all relevant universal, secondary

¹²³ Ibid. 19-21.

¹²⁴ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 19.

¹²⁵ Ibid. 1.

¹²⁶ Ibid. 9

¹²⁷ Ibid. 1.

and specialist services.’¹²⁸ Such providers may include ‘family violence, drug and alcohol services, and mental health services.’¹²⁹

A central focus of Child FIRST is to increase the accessibility for and uptake of child and family services by Aboriginal families. To enable this, collaboration with and inclusion of ACCOs as active Alliance participants is a central strategy. Aboriginal organisations are ‘supported to take a lead in designing services and ensuring their cultural responsiveness to Aboriginal children and families.’¹³⁰ An enabling initiative adopted by some catchments is the employment of an Aboriginal Liaison Worker, a role which involves consultation and advice for all referrals of Aboriginal children and families, and also involves input into assessment, planning and intervention phases, and providing insight into other relevant areas.¹³¹

The KPMG *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report* found a number of benefits arising from the Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services. These included:

- The role of Child FIRST as ‘an effective platform for shared responsibility and integrated and coordinated service delivery.’¹³²
- Improved relationships between universal and secondary services, with ‘a stronger imperative to work collaboratively, so as to better support outcomes for clients.’¹³³
- Improved visibility of services, evidenced by increasing referrals from education, health, police, and other human services.
- Improved accessibility, with ‘substantially more families (including more Aboriginal families) receiving services.’¹³⁴
- ‘Greater evidence of coordinated intake, allocation, service delivery and demand management. This is offering significant benefits to families...(including) equity of access and better matching of services to families’ needs.’¹³⁵
- Earlier intervention resulting in less Child Protection involvement.¹³⁶

Vitaly, the 2011 evaluation report reveals that this approach to integration has shown success in promoting and developing partnerships and ‘more systematic connection between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations.’¹³⁷ The report describes:

‘The most significant change since the development of reforms has involved the formal engagement of ACCOs as Alliance partners...ACCOs

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 51.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 46.

¹³¹ Ibid. 49.

¹³² Ibid. 2.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Ibid. 46

are now more consistently involved in governance meetings, decision-making and planning for the needs of children and families...Where this works effectively, the outcome has been a more systematic connection between Aboriginal and mainstream organisations.’¹³⁸

Genuine partnership development between mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations is identified in this literature review and the KPMG evaluation report as a central critical factor for increasing service accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.¹³⁹ Therefore, the IFS and Child FIRST model is considered in this review as a leading practice model for service integration that considers and is responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

4.3 Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS)

One of the key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander integrated service models is the Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS). The MACS model was conceived in the early 1980s, with the initial aim being to provide an integrated approach to child development in order to improve the lives of disadvantaged Aboriginal children in a culturally relevant setting (as opposed to simply ‘child minding’).¹⁴⁰ One of the central principles behind the original MACS philosophy is that:

‘Aboriginal families should have access to a diverse range of multifunctional children’s services to meet their needs and those of their children. This must be achieved through the co-ordination of Government and non-Government services to maximise the use of resources and provide a range of Community-identified service options’¹⁴¹

The services provided varies depending on the context of each MACS:

‘MACS are not-for-profit community based services funded to meet the educational, social and developmental needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Long day care is provided...with each MACS providing at least one other form of childcare or activity, such as outside school hours care (OSHC), playgroups, nutrition programs and/or parenting programs based on local needs.’¹⁴²

However, whilst the initial design of MACS advanced an integrated service delivery model providing a range of programs to meet the range of early

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid.

¹⁴⁰ Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) National Policy May 1992 in Bond, D. (2000). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services National Report*. Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Inc. (SNAICC), December, Appendix A, p. 5.

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 13.

¹⁴² Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). (2010). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) and Crèches*. The Auditor-General Auditor Report No. 8 2010-11 Performance Audit, p. 9.

childhood development needs within communities, insubstantial funding over time has led to a paring back of programs,¹⁴³ and a subsequent lessened capacity to apply an integrated service delivery model. As a result, the majority of MACS now largely provide child care services only.

Insufficient evidence on the model to describe the contribution of MACS to effective integrated service delivery means that MACS will not be considered in detail in this literature review. Investment in MACS that enables them to implement a more integrated approach as described in this review is strongly recommended. Such investment is in line with the recommendation of two significant reviews of MACS and Indigenous ECEC service delivery.¹⁴⁴

In a 2011 report the Productivity Commission noted that:

‘Program funding for MACS is limited and decisions to offer funding are reviewed each year. Even where existing or new applicants meet the funding criteria, it is not guaranteed. Funding for MACS does not take into account changes in demand for services, with the result that the level of funding has been relatively stable over time.’¹⁴⁵

The Commission therefore suggests in Recommendation 14.3 that governments provide multiple-year funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific ECEC services.¹⁴⁶

In a similar vein, the Australian National Audit Office noted in 2008 that:

‘Increasing the [MACS] funding model to account for demographic changes and varying how the funding can be used would assist service providers in better meeting the childcare needs of Indigenous communities. To aid service providers in their longer term planning for childcare service delivery... DEEWR could also consider transitioning service providers from single to multi-year funding agreements.’¹⁴⁷

The ANAO therefore suggests in Recommendation No. 2, Paragraph 2.22 that DEEWR ‘reviews its funding model for MACS and crèches to provide more flexibility in its application.’¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011). *Submission on the Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft Research Report*, Productivity Commission. Melbourne. 16

¹⁴⁴ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Audit Report No. 8, 2010–11. Commonwealth of Australia.

¹⁴⁵ Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia. 352

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. 371

¹⁴⁷ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children’s Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Audit Report No. 8, 2010–11. Commonwealth of Australia. 16

¹⁴⁸ Ibid. 25

5. Interrogating good practice in approaches to integrated service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

This section interrogates perspectives on integrated service delivery for good practice in child and family service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The elements of integrated service delivery addressed in this section are drawn from those identified in section 2 above. Those selected are those identified as most important and most requiring analysis specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery contexts based on the literature and the available evaluations of leading initiatives. These are aspects to consider in design and delivery, rather than being prescriptive of an approach, recognising the strong emphasis in the literature on the importance of difference in integrated models to reflect local context and community consultation.¹⁴⁹

5.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement in integrated service design and delivery.

Relevant NIRA service delivery principles for services and programs for Indigenous Australians¹⁵⁰

D9 Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services. In particular, attention is to be given to:

- (a) recognising that strong relationships/partnerships between government, community and service providers increase the capacity to achieve identified outcomes and work towards building these relationships;
- (b) engaging and empowering Indigenous people who use Government services, and the broader Indigenous community in the design and delivery of programs and services as appropriate;
- (c) recognising local circumstances;
- (d) ensuring Indigenous representation is appropriate, having regard to local representation as required;
- (e) being transparent regarding the role and level of Indigenous engagement along a continuum from information sharing to decision-making; and
- (f) recognising Indigenous culture, language and identity.

D10 Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets...

- (a) (iii) including strategies that increase independence, empowerment and self management...

¹⁴⁹ Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst. 6; Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2). 10

¹⁵⁰ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

- (c) building the capacity of both Indigenous people and of services to meet the needs of Indigenous people, particularly:
 - (i) developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations...
 - (iv) ensuring that programs and services foster and do not erode capacity or capability of clients; and
 - (v) recognising when Indigenous delivery is an important contributor to outcomes (direct and indirect), and in those instances fostering opportunities for Indigenous service delivery.

D13 Accountability principle: Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation. In particular, attention is to be given to...(g) supporting the capacity of the Indigenous service sector and communities to play a role in delivering services and influencing service delivery systems/organisations to ensure their responsiveness, access and appropriateness to Indigenous people;

While aspirations for ‘engaging and empowering Indigenous people...in the design and delivery of programs and services’ are expressed in the *NIRA*,¹⁵¹ translating these goals in the context of integrated service development and delivery is a complex task. The literature highlights the dangers of integration initiatives that claim to employ a community-development approach but fail to put in place the structures and processes that genuinely engage and empower recipient communities.¹⁵² Without effective community engagement mechanisms, what are labelled and described as ‘bottom-up’ approaches may in reality be what Smyth describes as programs that are ‘state funded, controlled and regulated albeit within a discourse that celebrates local autonomy and other communitarian values.’¹⁵³ To enable genuine engagement there is a recognised need to draw and build on community strengths, harness existing capacity and build additional community capacity where it is required. Makuwira highlights that a principled approach to community capacity building will include elements such as community ownership of initiatives, broad-based participation in decision-making, locally driven agendas, long-term investment, and partnerships with stakeholders.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Smyth, J. (2009). Critically engaged community capacity building and the ‘community organizing’ approach in disadvantaged contexts. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50 (1), February. 11-12; Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1). 91; see also Makuwira, J. (2007). The Politics of Community Capacity-Building: Contestations, Contradictions, Tensions and Ambivalences in the Discourse in Indigenous Communities in Australia. *The Australian Journal of indigenous Education*, 36, 129- 136.

¹⁵³ Smyth, J. (2009). Critically engaged community capacity building and the ‘community organizing’ approach in disadvantaged contexts. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50 (1), February, 9-22. 11.

¹⁵⁴ Makuwira, J. (2007). The Politics of Community Capacity-Building: Contestations, Contradictions, Tensions and Ambivalences in the Discourse in Indigenous Communities in Australia. *The Australian Journal of indigenous Education*, 36. 130.

The *NIRA* engagement principle refers to a continuum of engagement from information sharing to decision-making.¹⁵⁵ We assert that, properly understood, and taking account of other relevant principles, this continuum of engagement can be detailed more broadly to include stages of information-sharing, consultation, participation, inclusion in governance structures, decision-making power, and leadership and control of service design and delivery. This continuum parallels and relates to the time-based continuum of service development and delivery, recognising that the level and quality of engagement will depend on its continuity, and requires community engagement at the start of a project and continuing engagement throughout the life of the project. It has been found that community engagement processes that do not go beyond information provision and advisory responsibility to include decision-making power for community members or local organisations have been ineffective.¹⁵⁶ This was apparent in the Communities for Children initiative in the case of local committees that were unable to influence decision-making.¹⁵⁷

The evaluation of Communities for Children highlights a number of important engagement processes that were employed, with a strong focus on ‘consultation and involvement’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members,¹⁵⁸ and advances towards community-based governance in some sites. A community-development approach was supported in CfC sites through community assets mapping, which assessed both children and family needs and current service provision at the beginning of the project. This approach showed success in enabling identification of, and shaping services around existing local community needs, capacity and apparent gaps.¹⁵⁹ Consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, community-leaders and service users was an important component of the CfC approach, and described as critical in sites with high proportions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁶⁰ Significant outcomes of community consultation included tailoring of approaches to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and context; obtaining community approval; increasing awareness of programs and ‘designing and developing programs appropriate to community needs.’¹⁶¹ However, the evaluation recognised that a significant amount of time was needed for effective

¹⁵⁵ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

¹⁵⁶ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 41-42.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 41-42.

¹⁵⁸ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 24

¹⁵⁹ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 39-40

¹⁶⁰ Ibid. 40.

¹⁶¹ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 7.

consultation to build trust and rapport with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Flaxman et al describe that 'a four-year funding period is insufficient for conducting widespread, time-intensive community consultation, which allows for input by a diversity of community members and establishes trust and community sanction for programs and services.'¹⁶² Insufficient time for community consultation had a negative impact on the ability of service providers to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.¹⁶³ Further, the need for ongoing consultation and involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is highlighted by the fact that some community members became 'frustrated, disillusioned and disengaged' when the focus shifted from consultation to program implementation.¹⁶⁴

The flexibility of service development and delivery through CfC is described as a key benefit, enabling innovation and collaboration at the local level.¹⁶⁵ This is described in the evaluation as a key factor that contributed to local control in developing services relevant to local contexts. As Flaxman et al describe, the model gave facilitating partners and community partners,

'greater control over what services were delivered and the manner in which this was done. They also saw a greater opportunity to negotiate more meaningfully with communities because they had a better understanding of the local context than did governments.'¹⁶⁶

In particular, the local CfC committees were seen as a key site for community-based decision-making power in service design and development that 'worked well and helped to empower community members.'¹⁶⁷ Muir et al describe that the committees were most effective when, 'there was a diversity of members, when meetings were regular, when meeting venues were accessible and appropriate, and when there was joint decision-making.'¹⁶⁸ Further benefits of the meeting structure included networking, relationship development and knowledge sharing.¹⁶⁹ However, challenges were sometimes experienced engaging 'representatives from disadvantaged populations', including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the committee structures and 'the formality and structure of meetings sometimes presented barriers for active participation.'¹⁷⁰

¹⁶² Ibid. 8.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 40.

¹⁶⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 7.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. 9.

¹⁶⁷ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 42.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid. 41.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid. 42.

The CfC evaluation reports do not reflect a specifically targeted engagement with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to recognise their role in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and build on their capacity for service delivery, though such an approach was and is undertaken in some sites, and indeed has been profiled in at least two CfC sites.¹⁷¹ The facilitating partner model, discussed in more detail in section 5.3 below, created space for facilitating partners to engage ACCOs as community partners in service development and delivery, and capacity benefits did flow to small, community-based service agencies as a result of ‘training, mentoring and support from the Facilitating Partner.’¹⁷² However, this depended on the approach of each facilitating partner, none of whom were ACCOs themselves. The model has lacked the kind of focussed approach to ‘building the capacity of both Indigenous people and of services to meet the needs of Indigenous people’ that is envisaged in the *NIRA* and reinforced as a priority in the recommendations of the recent ANAO report on *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*, which called on FaHCSIA to facilitate the development of a whole-of-government strategy for a long-term, integrated and consistent approach to capacity development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.¹⁷³

By contrast, the Child FIRST and IFS initiatives in Victoria have taken a more strategic approach to engaging with ACCOs as a means for effective involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to facilitate capacity building through the integration approach. Notably, however, many of these approaches were not necessarily envisaged in the system design, but appear to have evolved from Child and Family Service Alliance members who have recognised the benefits of ACCO involvement and/or through ACCOs asserting their role.¹⁷⁴ Strategies adopted by Alliances to support ACCO engagement are summarised in the table below which is extracted from the evaluation report:¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne. Appendix A, Case Studies 1 and 4.

¹⁷² Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 41.

¹⁷³ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing. 28.

¹⁷⁴ For further discussion of the evolution of ACCO involvement in Child and Family Service Alliances, refer to Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Appendix A, Case Study 7. Melbourne.

¹⁷⁵ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 47.

Table 2 – Strategies to support ACCO engagement in Child and Family Service Alliances

Strategy	Impact and benefit
Funding for ACCO participation in Alliance	Promotes goodwill, empowers fuller participation, ensures consistency of leadership, provides capacity for strategic input
Flexible arrangements, e.g. sharing of information where unable to attend governance meetings; hosting meetings on ACCO premises	Recognises capacity constraints Ensures meaningful input into planning, design and strategic management of Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services
Ensuring issues are considered from an ACCO perspective (including requirement for input to ratify decisions)	Ensures meaningful input into planning, desing, and strategic management of Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services
Joint capacity building, e.g. ACCOs receive support from mainstream organisations (including professional supervision by Family Services staff, and access to training and development), while concurrently ACCOs provide cultural consultation and advice	Ensures both mainstream organisations and ACCOs benefit from participation
Participation in local Indigenous network groups	Demonstrates a genuine commitment to understanding the culture, history and preferences of local Aboriginal peoples, and Aboriginal community welfare

Recognising the capacity constraints of ACCOs and smaller agencies, Alliances have developed mechanisms to support the engagement of smaller agencies, including structures for input on decision-making, rotation of meeting venues, and ‘valued, recognised and differentiated roles’ in service delivery.¹⁷⁶ One substantial engagement of ACCOs in the integration model is through secondary consultation and advice roles, including a funded role for an Aboriginal Liaison Worker from an ACCO within a number of Alliances, enabling ‘input during assessment, planning and intervention phases.’¹⁷⁷ This significant means of incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives within integrated systems is discussed further in section 5.6 below. Alliances which have been less successful in engaging ACCOs also highlight the importance of meaningful engagement strategies, as well as responses to the capacity constraints of ACCOs:

‘Some Aboriginal organisations reflected that while there are frequent Alliance meetings, issues for the Aboriginal community are rarely

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. 30.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid. 49.

discussed, few (if any) referrals were received from Child FIRST and there was a sense that they did not feel they had a valued and respected role in the Alliance. Further, support from the Alliance with managing demands is not as readily realised by the ACCOs as by other Alliance members, because the client base is different, often prefers support from an Aboriginal person, and ACCOs tend not to refuse service to a community member.¹⁷⁸

Within both Communities for Children and Child FIRST, the employment of staff with local community connections, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff was recognised as a strategy for increasing credibility for service providers and engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.¹⁷⁹ While this approach has been important and shown benefit for the community, the Child FIRST and IFS evaluation notes with caution that this may have the unintended consequence of reducing 'the already scarce pool of Aboriginal staff available to ACCOs.'¹⁸⁰ It is also no substitute for the benefits of collaboration with ACCOs that could contribute to continuous improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers in mainstream agencies.¹⁸¹

Promising approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement in integrated service development and delivery:

- Community assets mapping processes that contribute to enable services to be tailored to local community needs and capacity.
- Adequate time to consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, identify community needs and develop community-supported responses; and regular and ongoing consultation processes.
- Specific recognition of the role of ACCOs in carrying forward community needs and aspiration and leading design and delivery of responses
- Defined and funded roles for ACCOs within integrated systems, for example, cultural advice and support roles, family engagement roles and service delivery roles.
- Governance structures and processes that include strategies to support genuine participation in planning and decision-making by smaller agencies.
- Flexible funding and service requirements that allow for community-based needs identification and community-based design of service responses
- Local coordinating committees with decision-making power and broad stakeholder involvement
- Mutual capacity building, including mentoring and training of Aboriginal

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.48.

¹⁷⁹ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 16; KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 49.

¹⁸⁰ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 50.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

and Torres Strait Islander people for skills development and community leadership, and cultural competency development for mainstream agencies.

- Employment of local Aboriginal staff by mainstream agencies, recognising the dangers this poses for reducing the base of skilled workers that ACCOs can draw on, and that it does not substitute for collaboration with ACCOS and community-wide consultation.

5.2 Partnerships for service integration

Partnership is the central mantra of service integration, if not a well or easily defined concept, and is included or mentioned in nigh on every policy or discussion of the topic. The basic conception of integration as the joining up, and increasingly collaborative work of previously separate agencies, professionals, professional disciplines and community structures and membership invokes a complex web of relationships. Constant and ongoing attention is needed to the principles that underpin and practices that support genuine partnerships if these relationships that are integral to service integration are to be successful.

The Communities for Children initiative has been most notable for creating a flexible partnership platform, bringing organisations together and establishing inter-agency relationship where previously none existed and strengthening existing relationships.¹⁸² Flaxman et al note, in general, that partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities enhance service delivery.¹⁸³ The contribution of partnerships to outcomes is strongly recognised in the *NIRA* engagement principle: 'strong relationships/partnerships between government, community and service providers increase the capacity to achieve identified outcomes.'¹⁸⁴ The beneficial purposes of partnerships identified in the CfC evaluation reports include: stronger links to and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families;¹⁸⁵ increased resource and information sharing;¹⁸⁶ reduced service duplication;¹⁸⁷ capacity building for local organisations and communities;¹⁸⁸ identification of

¹⁸² Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 14.

¹⁸³ Ibid. 8.

¹⁸⁴ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

¹⁸⁵ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 23.

¹⁸⁶ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).14.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸⁸ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 23.

community needs;¹⁸⁹ and increased legitimacy for mainstream service providers in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.¹⁹⁰

This last benefit raises important questions about the nature and basis of legitimacy for mainstream services. We contend that genuine and sustainable legitimacy, rather than the short-term appearance of legitimacy, requires a long-term commitment to the community, and a commitment to cultural competence development by mainstream agencies and government in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. While capacity benefits for ACCOs are identified, not significantly addressed in the CfC evaluation studies are the concurrent capacity benefits for mainstream agencies. Further recognition is required of capacity and legitimacy benefits based on cultural competence that accrue in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, as well as the pre-requisite cultural competence requirements for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and communities that are recognised in leading cultural competence frameworks.¹⁹¹

The Child FIRST and IFS evaluation identifies that where partnerships are working well, mainstream agencies have ‘taken the time to understand the issues from an ACCO perspective’ and have ‘demonstrated commitment to understanding the culture, history and preferences of local Aboriginal peoples.’¹⁹² It recognises that strengthening the role of ACCOs in Alliances has contributed to mutual capacity building between ACCOs and mainstream agencies.¹⁹³ The importance of cultural competence as a component of integration initiatives is an area requiring significant further attention in the development and design of these initiatives, recognising the strong evidence base that identifies cultural competence as critical to enabling access to and engagement with services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.¹⁹⁴

The coming together of facilitating partners, community partners and communities to work together in innovative and community-based service development in CfC sites did not of itself create successful partnerships,¹⁹⁵ but funding to support this did provide opportunity. Where partnership development was successful, it fundamentally changed relationships, as Flaxman et al describe:

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid.

¹⁹¹ See SNAICC. (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne; Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne.

¹⁹² KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 48.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ See Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). ‘Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services’. Policy paper.

¹⁹⁵ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 23.

‘The coordination that occurred as a result of CfC changed the nature of relationships between the local and the fly-in/fly-out services from a ‘colonial’ to collaborative and supportive approach. As one CP [Community Partner] in a remote site said: [Now] they come out to [visit] us, saying ‘What do you need?’, rather than ‘Why aren’t you...?’¹⁹⁶

One of the most commonly identified ingredients to enable partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities in the CfC initiative was adequate time for building relationships of trust.¹⁹⁷ This led to the conclusion that the four year funding period was insufficient, that mainstream agencies need to be ‘in for the long haul’ and that there is a need for increased and focussed funding and resources to support the processes of relationship development which are time and resource intensive.¹⁹⁸ These processes are especially significant for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities given trust that has been damaged by historical practices of child removal and requires a slow process of rebuilding.¹⁹⁹ Further ingredients are not significantly addressed and greater attention is required to the factors influencing successful partnerships for integrated service delivery.

Recent SNAICC research provides a detailed description of the principles that underpin respectful partnerships between ACCOs, mainstream service providers and government and promising practices in enabling genuine partnership development. While the principles identified are repeated in the boxed text below, the paper, *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*,²⁰⁰ provides further detailed analysis of promising practices that are enabling the implementation of these principles in a number of case studies reviewed, including within a number of CfC enabled and/or supported partnerships.

¹⁹⁶ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 14.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid. 15; Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 31.

¹⁹⁸ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 23; Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).15.

¹⁹⁹ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 15; see also: National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. (1997). *Bringing them Home*. Commonwealth of Australia.

²⁰⁰ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne.

Principles underpinning genuine and respectful partnerships in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts:²⁰¹

1. Commitment to developing **long-term sustainable relationships** based on **trust**.
2. **Respect** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge, history, lived experience and connection to community and country.
3. Commitment to **self-determination** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aim to **improve long-term well-being outcomes** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities.
5. **Shared responsibility and accountability** for shared objectives and activities.
6. Valuing **process elements as integral** to support and enable partnership.
7. A commitment to **redressing structures, relationships and outcomes** that are unequal and/or discriminatory.
8. Openness to **working differently** with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recognising that the mainstream approaches are frequently not the most appropriate or effective.

This review identifies that Australian initiatives with strong service integration foci are yet to significantly engage with defining and supporting the aspects of genuine and effective partnerships between mainstream agencies, government, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities that are needed to promote access and engagement and quality of service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is an area requiring considerable attention. The boxed text below presents some identified promising approaches as a very limited list.

Promising approaches to partnership development for integration in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts:

- Flexible funding arrangements providing platforms for community-based partnership development and innovative partnership approaches to service design and delivery.
- Commitment from mainstream agencies and government to developing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities for mutual benefits including: mutual capacity development; genuine community legitimacy; and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- Attention to the cultural competence required both for partnership development and developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.
- Funded support for time and resource intensive processes of partnership relationship development.
- Longer-term funding to support the development of long-term

²⁰¹ Ibid. 6.

relationships committed to long-term community outcomes.

5.3 Coordination and facilitation of integrated services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families

The CfC evaluation studies reveal that increased coordination of services was a significant outcome of the initiative.²⁰² As Muir et al describe, 'the improvements in service coordination and collaboration were so marked that a number of stakeholders interviewed described the occurrence as a cultural change.'²⁰³ Changes in coordination have been linked to elements of the CfC model which were able to translate a willingness to work together into practice by providing 'a structure and support to strengthen pre-existing networks.'²⁰⁴ Numerous benefits of increased networking and coordination were identified through CfC, including: service increases through greater rollout of existing programs;²⁰⁵ capacity building through resource sharing and brokering;²⁰⁶ increased interagency support and referrals;²⁰⁷ breaking down silos in early years service provision;²⁰⁸ and minimising service duplication.²⁰⁹ Activities that were found to be most helpful in supporting these outcomes included 'joint planning, exchanging information and referrals.'²¹⁰ Asset mapping through the CfC committee that identified community capacity and needs also contributed significantly to ensure that agencies were complementing each other rather than competing.²¹¹ Notably there was an increase in referrals between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and mainstream services 'which meant mainstream services were able to work with some Indigenous families for the first time.'²¹² Though, referral alone was not enough to ensure take up of services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and service provider trust was key,²¹³ with partnerships being important to establishing that trust.²¹⁴

²⁰² Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 15

²⁰³ Ibid. 21

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 9

²⁰⁶ Ibid. 14

²⁰⁷ Ibid. 14

²⁰⁸ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 20

²⁰⁹ Ibid. 21

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Ibid. 24

²¹² Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 14

²¹³ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 15-16

The facilitating partner approach has been recognised as a key enabling factor for increased coordination of services through the CfC initiative.²¹⁵ The role of the facilitating partners was to 'act as brokers to engage the community in implementing the CfC.'²¹⁶ Facilitating partners acted as intermediaries between government and local NGOs, subcontracting local community partners to implement the activities.²¹⁷ The facilitating partner had lead responsibility for enabling the key aspects of the CfC model, including a role in, 'coordinating community consultations and service networking and collaboration.'²¹⁸ The model was perceived to have many benefits for enabling effective service coordination, which were linked to the role facilitating partners took in:

- establishing 'transparent and effective consultation and communication processes';²¹⁹
- initiating inter-agency training and facilitating learning networks and joint problem solving;²²⁰
- assisting services to implement formal collaboration processes;²²¹
- facilitating local control in service development and meaningful negotiation with communities based on the connection of facilitating partners to local communities and their understanding of local contexts;²²²
- brokering and providing skills and resources 'in a way that added to the shared capacity of organisations within their sites';²²³
- translating government business for CfC committees and community partners;²²⁴
- supporting outside organisations to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a result of their own established community connections.²²⁵

There were significant challenges both for facilitation and coordination of services in remote service sites, with Muir et al describing the model as 'expensive, cumbersome and burdensome in communities with very few

²¹⁴ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 14

²¹⁵ Ibid. 15.

²¹⁶ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 35

²¹⁷ Ibid. 36

²¹⁸ Ibid. 35

²¹⁹ Ibid. 20-21

²²⁰ Ibid. 24-25.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 9

²²³ Ibid. 15

²²⁴ Ibid. 15

²²⁵ Ibid. 35

services,' and suggesting a focus in these areas on 'building the capacity of local service provision and encouraging lower level coordination like referrals and information-sharing.'²²⁶ There were problems in areas where no local service providers had sufficient capacity to meet the criteria for the facilitating partner role and the selection of an outside agency hindered success.²²⁷ Suggested solutions to this problem that could be important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with low organisational service capacity include the funding of NGO consortiums in facilitating roles and the funding of larger NGOs to mentor smaller agencies.²²⁸

The Child FIRST and IFS approach has included, in some cases, a different type of facilitation role that has shown significant promise for promoting shared responsibility for and ownership of programs. A number of Alliances have allocated funds to the employment of an Alliance project officer who operates in an independent facilitation and support role.²²⁹ The evaluation report reveals 'critical capacity differences between those Alliances that have established project-officer support, and those that have not been afforded this benefit.'²³⁰ The project officer operates as a 'shared resource, effectively working for the Alliance as a whole.'²³¹ This role has had significant benefits for increasing the capacity of Alliances to develop partnerships between members, including increased capacity for 'catchment planning and data analysis' and 'strong support for key governance meetings.'²³² It has also assisted effective engagement of ACCOs within the Alliance structure in some Alliances.²³³ As an independent facilitator, this role has assisted to 'broker relationships and negotiate to achieve an outcome in the common interest.'²³⁴

While approaches to facilitation have shown promise for including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in integrated services and engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, there has been insufficient attention to the specific qualities and approaches needed to facilitate service coordination in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service context. This is clearly evident in the Child FIRST and IFS approach where structures for the inclusion and participation of ACCOs appear to have evolved inconsistently and independently of the service integration model, initiated by Alliance

²²⁶ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 25

²²⁷ Ibid. 37

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 36

²³⁰ Ibid.

²³¹ Ibid. 32

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne. 44-45.

²³⁴ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 32

members recognising the value of ACCO roles or ACCOs asserting their role.²³⁵ Attention is needed both to the selection criteria for and up-skilling of organisations and/or personnel in facilitating roles within integrated service initiatives. While FaHCSIA selection criteria for facilitating partners in CfC importantly promoted the selection of NGOs with strong local links and acceptance in the community,²³⁶ more specific requirements should recognise the cultural competence needed to engage effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, as well as the skills and capacity required to facilitate respectful partnerships between ACCOs, mainstream agencies and government. Initiatives require direct obligations for non-Indigenous agencies in facilitating partner or lead agency roles to enable and empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to 'play a role in delivering services and influencing service delivery systems/organisations to ensure their responsiveness, access and appropriateness to Indigenous people' as envisaged in the *NIRA* accountability principle.²³⁷

Promising approaches to coordination and facilitation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts.

- Independent facilitation roles, with skilled facilitators who have the capacity to broker relationships and negotiate outcomes in the common interest.
- Partnership and coordination facilitators who have a high level of cultural competence and knowledge of principles and practices for establishing genuine partnerships between mainstream agencies, government and ACCOs.
- NGO intermediaries ensure the relevance of service integration initiatives to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to participate in service integration.
- Tailored approaches to service coordination to meet the needs of remote communities with few services and low initial service capacity.

5.4 Important issues relating to access and entry points to integrated service systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

This section addresses a number of core aspects of integrated service system and service site design that are important to support access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Issues relating to the need for service

²³⁵ For further discussion of the evolution of ACCO involvement in Child and Family Service Alliances, refer to Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Appendix A, Case Study 7. Melbourne.

²³⁶ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 37

²³⁷ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

delivery to be culturally appropriate and targeted to enable access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are addressed more significantly in the following section.

'Soft' entry points are described as a key feature of CfC that enabled access for hard-to-reach families, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.²³⁸ This approach involved the provision of services in informal, familiar and non-threatening environments, with examples including: 'playgroups in parks, having health professionals attend playgroups, setting up community centres on public school grounds,'²³⁹ and 'the use of natural gathering places like parks and shopping centres.'²⁴⁰ Outreach approaches were considered important in CfC for the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, with a recognised need to 'go to' families, particularly to build initial trust.²⁴¹

Remoteness presented a significant challenge for physical access to services in CfC sites, with lack of transport to service sites a major barrier.²⁴² Garbers highlights strategies that were used to overcome the problem of remoteness in the establishment of integrated services through the Sure Start Local Program in the UK.²⁴³ In this context, problems were similarly related to the lack of 'a robust transport infrastructure and an accessible community centre.'²⁴⁴ Strategies included: providing transport to the sites where services were provided; and rather than concentrating services in one building, capitalising on any existing local buildings.²⁴⁵ This was a significant weakness of the CfC initiative within which no funding was provided for capital purchases such as vans and buses that may have assisted in overcoming transport problems.²⁴⁶

The Child FIRST and IFS initiative has taken a unique approach in promoting a single telephone number in each catchment area as the primary entry point to

²³⁸ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 12; Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).16; Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 18.

²³⁹ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 16.

²⁴⁰ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 18.

²⁴¹ Ibid. 19.

²⁴² Ibid. 24.

²⁴³ Garbers, C. et al. (2006). Facilitating access to services for children and families: lessons from Sure Start Local Programmes. *Child and Family Social Work*, 11, April. 293.

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 24.

the integrated service system, providing a gateway to connect service users with the most appropriate response.²⁴⁷ The evaluation notes positively that ‘the resultant impact of the establishment of a centralised entry point is to increase the capacity for service-system navigation, while reducing the level of case handling and the requirement for families to repeat their stories.’²⁴⁸ Concurrently, though to varying degrees, there has been a focus on maintaining connections to local service providers and communities, and maintaining access to pre-existing local entry points.²⁴⁹ This approach has been particularly important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who ‘are more likely to approach the local ACCO, as this is a service that they know and trust.’²⁵⁰

Promising approaches to designing integrated service system entry points.

- Establishing soft entry points to service systems in informal, familiar and non-threatening environments.
- Using outreach approaches to go to families and engage them where they are.
- Providing transport to facilitate access to integrated service sites, especially in remote locations.
- Establishing multi-venue integrated service systems that take advantage of existing local buildings, rather than establishing a single building for integrated service delivery in remote locations with accessibility issues.
- Centralised intake systems, that maintain multiple and localised entry points, including through ACCOs, and that include ACCOs in the intake and allocation processes.

5.5 Universal and Aboriginal-targeted service provision

As identified in section 2, some of the literature on integrated service delivery places a strong focus on universal and inclusive whole of population responses.²⁵¹ There is often a lack of clarity in the definition of and distinctions between universal and targeted service provision. ‘Universal’ commonly refers to services that are provided to all people, or alternatively to services that are open to all people to access. Cortis et al identify that the latter definition was that most commonly adopted in the CfC context.²⁵² Targeted services are commonly defined as services for a particular group of people, for example a particular cultural group, age group, or targeted client group.²⁵³ However, the term is also used to refer to specialist and intensive services.²⁵⁴ This review highlights the importance of services that are targeted for Aboriginal and Torres

²⁴⁷ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 57

²⁴⁸ Ibid.

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Ibid. 58

²⁵¹ See for example: Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010). 8.

²⁵² Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 36-37

²⁵³ Ibid.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

Strait Islander peoples as many specific and distinct cultural groups, with distinct support needs that require detailed consideration.

Cortis et al describe that there are strengths and weaknesses in both universal and targeted approaches: universal services may be less stigmatising, but can 'become colonised by particular group or cliques within the community, and can deter some hard-to-reach families from accessing those services;' targeted services focus on the needs of a particular group sending the message 'that the initiative cares about them and is willing to provide services tailored to meet their needs,' but may be more stigmatising and deter access.²⁵⁵ Also, in terms of specialist and intensive intervention, an important consideration in service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who experience significant levels of disadvantage, is that they may not be in a position to prioritise universal and preventative services where they are already in crisis, and 'if basic needs, such as stable, secure housing and adequate living conditions, are not met.'²⁵⁶ As Flaxman et al describe, 'If early intervention and prevention initiatives...are to be successful in communities under distress social issues must also be addressed.'²⁵⁷ There is a danger in integration that pursues a goal of universal and inclusive service delivery, without being adequately critical of how the approach may devalue or exclude important aspects of service provision for particular groups. This is a vital consideration in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts.

As is commonly identified and well accepted in the literature, the CfC evaluation studies found that access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is supported by service systems and providers that develop cultural competence and service delivery that is culturally appropriate.²⁵⁸ Flaxman et al describe that CfC evaluation participants generally agreed that 'Indigenous specific services offer Indigenous families a safe, comfortable, culturally appropriate environment that is easier to access and engage with.'²⁵⁹ At the same time Flaxman et al recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families are 'less likely to engage with a service that is not culturally tailored,' and that when mainstream agencies did not develop strategies to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their service use did not increase in line with increases in service provision.²⁶⁰ While noting that 'Indigenous families and children are generally more likely to access Indigenous-specific services

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

²⁵⁶ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 36.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 23; see also Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper.

²⁵⁹ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 11

²⁶⁰ Ibid. 10-11

than mainstream ones' the CfC evaluation also identified that for a variety of reasons, including stigma and family disputes, not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families chose to use these services.²⁶¹ The evaluation highlighted strongly the importance of choice for families between using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and mainstream services to increasing access.²⁶² As Muir et al describe:

The importance of multiple entry points - that is, both targeted and universal programs – should not be underestimated. Access to both service types will increase the likelihood of service use..., help ensure that families have equal access to a variety of services..., and assist in building social capital.²⁶³

These findings reinforce the important role of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and mainstream services in culturally safe and appropriate service delivery that SNAICC has regularly identified,²⁶⁴ and supports implementation of the *NIRA* principles that require attention to 'recognising Indigenous culture, language and identity' and to 'recognising when Indigenous delivery is an important contributor to outcomes (direct and indirect), and in those instances fostering opportunities for Indigenous service delivery.'²⁶⁵ In terms of the approach to integration, they indicate the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations participating in the development and delivery of initiatives that are appropriately targeted to enable access for and meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including roles in direct service delivery and supporting mainstream agencies to develop cultural competence. In SNAICC's view, the recognition that mainstream agencies and ACCOs both have an important role to play in service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires an increased, not reduced focus on investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, which are often at a position of disadvantage in relation to larger and financially stronger mainstream agencies. The recognised current dearth of capacity and inadequate investment in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations²⁶⁶ requires that building this capacity be a distinct and central focus of all child and family service integration initiatives.

²⁶¹ Ibid. 11

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 16

²⁶⁴ Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper. 2-3

²⁶⁵ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

²⁶⁶ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing; KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 48-49.

The Child FIRST and IFS initiative has provided some concrete measures to include ACCOs meaningfully in integrated service delivery, while concurrently contributing to the improvement of cultural competency for mainstream agencies. Three measures that have specifically contributed to appropriate targeting of service integration activities to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are:

1. Facilitating the inclusion and **genuine participation of ACCOs within Child and Family Service Alliances**, such that they have a role in decisions about the service development, allocation of cases and appropriate supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families who are referred into the system.²⁶⁷

Participation is supported through strategies such as those described in table 2 in section 5.1 above.

2. Ensuring identification and appropriate referral of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families entering the service system: **‘there is now a requirement for Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services to confirm each client’s cultural identity and offer Aboriginal families the choice of working with Aboriginal or mainstream organisations.’**²⁶⁸

3. The establishment of **Aboriginal Liaison Worker roles for staff of ACCOs to support mainstream agencies through secondary consultation and advice roles** where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families choose to work with mainstream agencies or where this was required because of ACCO capacity constraints.²⁶⁹ The evaluation report describes that, ‘in practice the role enables input during assessment, planning and intervention phases, and may offer insight about strategies for initial engagement, sustaining Aboriginal family engagement in services, and facilitating access and linkages to other Aboriginal agencies.’²⁷⁰ An important aspect of these roles is that they are independently undertaken by ACCOs recognising the significant concerns of ACCOs that where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed by mainstream agencies they may lack institutional support for continuous improvement as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practitioners.²⁷¹ Questions could also be raised about the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals to provide ‘outside’ cultural advice within the constraints of an employment relationship with a mainstream agency.

In general, collaboration with ACCOs through the Alliance structure has been recognised to provide mainstream agencies ‘greater access to cultural-awareness training and resources.’²⁷²

²⁶⁷ KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February. 47.

²⁶⁸ Ibid. 105.

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Ibid. 49.

²⁷¹ Ibid. 50.

²⁷² Ibid. 105.

Promising approaches to targeting integrated service delivery to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

- Targeted approaches that recognise the roles of ACCOs and mainstream agencies in culturally appropriate service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Multiple service system entry points for children and families, including through universal and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targeted programs.
- Single points of intake and case allocation that involve ACCOs in identifying appropriate support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- Genuine participation and decision-making roles for ACCOs within governance structures of integrated service systems.
- Identification of cultural identity of families referred for services and providing families with the choice to work with ACCOs.
- Secondary consultation and advice roles undertaken independently by ACCOs where families choose to work with mainstream agencies.
- Cultural awareness training and resource services provided by ACCOs to mainstream agencies.

5.6 Sustainability of integration initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts

The *NIRA* sustainability principle for programs and services of Indigenous Australians²⁷³

D10 *Sustainability principle*: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets. In particular, attention is to be given to:

- (a) service system orientation, particularly:
 - (i) using evidence to develop and redesign programs, services and set priorities;
 - (ii) recognising the importance of early intervention; and
 - (iii) including strategies that increase independence, empowerment and self management;
- (b) ensuring adequate and appropriate resources, particularly:
 - (i) setting time-frames for meeting short, medium and longer-term targets and outcomes;
 - (ii) considering flexibility in program design to meet local needs;
 - (iii) considering workforce supply and future planning;
 - (iv) considering sustaining or redesigning services to best use existing resources, as well as the need for programs and services to meet the COAG targets;
 - (v) minimising administrative red tape to enable greater integration of program and service delivery;
 - (vi) ensuring that programs and services are efficient and fiscally sustainable; and
 - (vii) ensuring that infrastructure is appropriate and adequately maintained;
- (c) building the capacity of both Indigenous people and of services to meet the needs

²⁷³ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

of Indigenous people, particularly:

- (i) developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations;
- (ii) supporting Indigenous communities to harness the engagement of corporate, non-government and philanthropic sectors;
- (iii) building governments' and service delivery organisations' capacity to develop and implement policies, procedures, and protocols that recognise Indigenous people's culture, needs and aspirations;
- (iv) ensuring that programs and services foster and do not erode capacity or capability of clients; and
- (v) recognising when Indigenous delivery is an important contributor to outcomes (direct and indirect), and in those instances fostering opportunities for Indigenous service delivery.

The *NIRA* sustainability principle recognises primarily the need for programs and services to be, 'directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.'²⁷⁴ Unsurprisingly, the most important and commonly identified factor necessary to support the sustainability of CfC initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service provision was the requirement for long-term and sustainable funding. As Flaxman et al describe:

'Many respondents believed that future, long-term funding for early childhood services in Indigenous communities was essential if Indigenous outcomes were going to improve. Programs like CfC, with its four-year funding cycle, are not sufficient to result in long-term positive outcomes for young children and their families in disadvantaged Indigenous communities.'²⁷⁵

The danger that short-term initiatives will 'fuel resentment and mistrust' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, accompanied the mistrust that had already developed as a result of 'the cycle of aborted programs and unfinished promises.'²⁷⁶ Significantly, Flaxman et al describe the likelihood that advances in partnerships, coordination and early childhood interventions will not be sustained if funding is not ongoing.²⁷⁷ Particularly in remote sites it was identified that there were 'few, if any, possibilities of finding alternative funding sources.'²⁷⁸ As well as the need for ongoing funding, realistic timeframes for the establishment of programs, including building relationships with communities and undertaking adequate consultation, were required.²⁷⁹ This was particularly evident in some cases where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 39.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ Ibid. 41.

²⁷⁸ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 46.

²⁷⁹ Ibid.

were not consulted at all, which obstructed community-ownership, success and sustainability of initiatives.²⁸⁰

As noted above, issues of broader social disadvantage impacted significantly on the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families to take up the primarily early childhood education and care focussed initiatives of CfC. Long-term outcomes cannot be effectively supported and sustained through these programs unless, as Muir et al describe, ‘families receive long-term support for serious social issues such as homelessness, housing instability or poor living conditions, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental illness.’²⁸¹ This highlights the need for broadly focussed integration initiatives that include a range of services that respond holistically to local needs in local contexts, considering the recognised need for multiple entry points both within and outside early childhood education and care environments, including outreach approaches.²⁸²

A critical aspect of sustainability for integration initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts is the economic empowerment and capacity building of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. Without taking an approach that includes local economic empowerment, initiatives cannot hope to impact long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, especially in regional and remote locations with limited economic opportunity. The importance of such an approach is recognised strongly in the *NIRA* sustainability principle which calls for initiatives with attention to: ‘developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations.’²⁸³ The need for investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service organisations is recognised in the recent ANAO report on *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery* as a priority not just for effective service delivery, but as a policy objective in itself, in so far as it promotes local governance, leadership and economic participation, building social capital for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.²⁸⁴ This reinforces the conclusion drawn in other sections above that all service integration

²⁸⁰ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 7-8.

²⁸¹ Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 34.

²⁸² Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 19; Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 16.

²⁸³ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

²⁸⁴ Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing. 17.

initiatives for child and family service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples require a stronger focussed element of capacity building and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities.

Promising approaches to ensuring sustainability of integration initiatives in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service contexts.

- Long-term funding for initiatives that seek to impact long-term outcomes for children, families and communities.
- Factoring in adequate time for sustainable community-owned service development in integration initiatives, including significant time for relationship building and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Broader efforts to address social disadvantage, including housing, living conditions, family violence and substance abuse.
- Multiple service entry points and outreach services to engage families where they are and respond to families in crisis.
- Initiatives that focus on 'developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations.'²⁸⁵

6. Conclusion

Leading Australian integration initiatives have included various elements that have focussed on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations in the design and delivery of integrated services, especially through processes of consultation, and involvement in implementation committees. While promising strategies are emerging for the meaningful inclusion Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the design and delivery of child and family services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, a strongly focussed approach has not yet been employed. Without this, integrated service systems are likely to have significantly reduced success in engaging vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and responding appropriately to their needs.

Key learnings are available from initiatives that have been, and continue to be rolled out in Australia. It is vital that these learnings are applied to improve the approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service development and delivery within these and other current and emerging initiatives for integrated service delivery, including the 38 new Children and Family Centres that are either newly operating or being established to support the implementation of the COAG *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous early childhood development*.²⁸⁶

²⁸⁵ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

²⁸⁶ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2008). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development. National Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth of*

The need to develop distinct, recognised and valued roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities in integrated service design and delivery is clear. Thus far, these roles have emerged only inconsistently, and while flexibility in service design for local contexts is essential, the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests in service design and delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cannot be left to chance. This requires active policy and resource support measures. Promising approaches have focussed on governance structures that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in decision-making alongside direct service delivery roles and secondary consultation and advice roles that support cultural competence in mainstream agency practice. Ensuring that such roles are included in integration initiatives is necessary to ensure a real choice for families between appropriately targeted services and culturally competent mainstream approaches. As is clearly recognised in the literature, this choice of services contributes to increase access to services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.²⁸⁷

Genuine partnerships are core to an integrated approach that respectfully engages with the vital processes of relationship development between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, mainstream agencies, and government. Attention is needed to principles that underpin and practices that support genuine partnerships for integrated service delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family service contexts. Funding for partnership facilitation roles is a recognised priority, but the skills and knowledge for developing integrated services that include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests must be addressed or made pre-requisite for organisations and staff taking on these roles.

One of the strongest conclusions to emerge from the literature and leading Australian initiatives is that all service integration activities for service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families require a focussed element of capacity building and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities. Choice for families is currently limited by the dearth of capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. This position is supported strongly within the service delivery principles of the *NIRA* and by the recent ANAO report on *Capacity Development for Indigenous*

Australia and the State and Territory Governments regarding Indigenous Early Childhood Development. Retrieved on 25 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-10-02/docs/indigenous_early_childhood_NPA.pdf

²⁸⁷ Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 11; Muir, K. et al. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA). 16; Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2011). 'Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services'. Policy paper. 2-3

Service Delivery,²⁸⁸ recognising the need to focus on 'developing the skills, knowledge and competencies, including independence and empowerment of Indigenous people, communities and organisations.'²⁸⁹ Implementation of these principles has the potential to realise the promise of service integration in contributing to sustainable responses to improve long-term outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

²⁸⁸ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf;
Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing.

²⁸⁹ Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Schedule D. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

Reference List

Alcock, P. (2004). Participation or Pathology: Contradictory Tensions in Area-Based Policy. *Social Policy & Society*, 3(1), 87-96.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*. Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012. Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Department of Health and Ageing.

Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). *Multifunctional Aboriginal Children's Services (MACS) and Crèches*. Audit Report No. 8, 2010–11. Commonwealth of Australia.

Ball, J. (2010). Centering Community Services Around Early Childhood Care and Development: Promising Practices in Indigenous Communities in Canada. *Child Health and Education*, 2(2), 28-51.

Brechman-Toussaint, M., and Kogler, E. (2010). *Review of international and national integrated service models for young people in the preadolescent and adolescent years: Benefits, barriers and enablers*, Australian Research Alliance for Children and Youth (ARCY).

Cheshire, L., and Lawrence, G. (2005). Neoliberalism, Individualisation and Community: Regional Restructuring in Australia. *Social Identities*, 11(5), 435-445.

Cortis, N., Katz, I., and Patulny, R. (2009). *Engaging hard-to-reach families and children*, Occasional Paper No 26, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Cortis, N. (2008). Evaluating Area-based Interventions: The Case of 'Communities for Children'. *Children and Society*, 22, 112-123.

Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*. Retrieved 28 March 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-04-30/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf.

Council of Australian Governments (COAG). (2009). *National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)*. Retrieved on 5 January 2012 from http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-07-02/docs/NIRA_closing_the_gap.pdf.

Council of Australian Governments. (2009). *National Partnership Agreement for Indigenous Early Childhood Development*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Cunha, F. and Heckman, J. (2006). *Investing in our Young People*. Funded by the National Institute of Health, the Committee for Economic Development, The Pew Charitable Trusts and the Partnership for America's Economic Success. 69.

Daniel, B. (2004). An overview of the Scottish multidisciplinary child protection review. *Child and Family Social Work*, 9, 247-257.

Edwards, B., Wise, S., Gray, M., Hayes, A., Katz, I., Misson, S., Patulny, R., and Muir, K. (2009). *Stronger Families in Australia study: the impact of Communities for Children*, Occasional Paper No 25, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Fisher, K., Thomson, C. and Valentine, K. (2006). THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILIES FIRST NSW: Process lessons from the first four years. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 31(1), March, 11-19.

Flaxman, S., Muir, K., and Oprea, I. (2009). *Indigenous families and children: coordination and provision of services*, Occasional Paper No 23, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services, and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

Garbers, C., Tunstill, J., Allnock, D., and Akhurst, S. (2006). Facilitating access to services for children and families: lessons from Sure Start Local Programmes. *Child and Family Social Work*, 11, April, 287-296.

Horwath, J., and Morrison, T. (2007). Collaboration, integration and change in children's services: Critical issues and key ingredients. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 31, 55-69.

Jenkins, S. (2005). *Whole of Government Policy Framework for the Early Years: Literature Review and Early Years programs, projects and initiatives operating in Tasmania*, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

KPMG. (2011). *Child FIRST and Integrated Family Services – Final Report*, prepared for the Department of Human Services, February.

Leigh, J. (2008). *Evaluation of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2000-2004: Improved integration and coordination of services*, RMIT University Circle.

Makuwira, J. (2007). The Politics of Community Capacity-Building: Contestations, Contradictions, Tensions and Ambivalences in the Discourse in Indigenous Communities in Australia. *The Australian Journal of indigenous Education*, 36, 129-136.

McInerney, P., Smyth, J., and Down, B. (2011). 'Coming to a place near you?' The politics and possibilities of a critical pedagogy of place-based education. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(1), 3-16.

Moore, T.G. (2008). *Rethinking universal and targeted services*, Centre for Community Child Health.

Moore, T., and Skinner, A. (2010). *An integrated approach to early childhood development*, Centre for Community Child Health (CCCH) and The Benevolent Society (2010).

Muir, K., Katz, I., Purcal, C., Patulny, R., Flaxman, S., Abello, D., Cortis, N., Thomson, C., Oprea, I., Wise, S., Edwards, B., Gray, M., and Hayes, A. (2009). *National evaluation (2004-2008) of the Stronger Families and Communities Strategy 2004-2009*, Occasional Paper No 24, Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families. (1997). *Bringing them Home*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Press, F., Sumsion, J., and Wong, S. (2010). *Integrated Early Years Provision in Australia*. Charles Sturt University, Bathurst.

Rogers, R., and Moore, T. (2003). *The Early Years Project: Refocusing community based services for young children and families: A Literature Review*, Centre for Community Child Health and Royal Children's Hospital, Melbourne.

Productivity Commission. (2011). *Early Childhood Development Workforce Research Report*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Scott, D. (2005). Inter-organisational collaboration in family-centred practice: A framework for analysis and action. *Australian Social Work*, 58(2), March, 132-141.

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare (SNAICC). (2012). *Opening Doors Through Partnerships*. Melbourne.

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2011). *Submission on the Early Childhood Development Workforce Draft Research Report*, Productivity Commission. Melbourne.

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2011). 'Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services'. Policy paper.

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC). (2010). *Working and Walking Together*. Melbourne

Secretariat National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care. (2010). 'Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services'. Policy paper.

Sims et al. (2008). "Indigenous child carers leading the way". *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 33 (1).

Siraj-Blatchford, I. (2010). *Improving development outcomes for children through effective practice in integrating early years services*, Centre for Excellence and Outcomes in Children and Young People's Services.

Smyth, J. (2009). Critically engaged community capacity building and the 'community organizing' approach in disadvantaged contexts. *Critical Studies in Education*, 50 (1), February, 9-22.

Steering Review for the Review of Government Service Provision. (2011). *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators 2011*. Commonwealth of Australia.

Tunstill, J., Blewett, J., and Meadows, P. (2009). *Evaluating the delivery by Action for Children, of targeted family support*, Synergy Research & Consulting Ltd.

Valentine, K., Katz, I., and Griffiths, M. (2007). *Early Childhood Services: Models of Integration and Collaboration*, Telstra Foundation Community Development Fund, Australian Research Alliance for Children & Youth, November.

Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA). (2008). *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*. Melbourne.

Whalley, M. (2006). Leadership in Integrated Centres and Services for Children and Families, A Community Development Approach: Engaging with the Struggle. *Children Issues*, 10(2), 8-13.



A Place for Culture? Exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Competence in the National Quality Standard

DECEMBER 2013

IKANBALA.



SNAICC
Secretariat of National
Aboriginal and Islander
Child Care

Content by: Emma Sydenham, Kate Foord, Holly Mason-White and Annabel Darbyshire,
SNAICC; Deb Mann and Eva Cox, Ngroo; SNAICC National Executive members Sharron
Williams, Garry Matthews; Geraldine Atkinson; Angela Webb; Maureen Mossman
Cover design artwork by Richard McLean Ikanbala

For more information: contact Frank Hytten, SNAICC CEO, frank.hytten@snaicc.org.au or
Emma Sydenham, SNAICC Deputy CEO, emma.sydenham@snaicc.org.au

SNAICC

Level 1, 252-260 St Georges Rd
North Fitzroy Victoria 3068
www.snaicc.org.au
Phone: (03) 9489 8099

A strong voice for our children and families

SNAICC is the national non-government peak body
that advocates on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander children and their families.

Contents

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	2
2. INTRODUCTION	4
3. RELEVANT NATIONAL POLICY AND REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS	5
The National Indigenous Reform Agenda	5
The National Quality Framework	7
The National Quality Standard	7
4. CULTURAL COMPETENCY	8
5. ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	12
Applying a Cultural Competence Framework to the NQS	12
The National Quality Framework and cultural competence	13
Inclusion of services within the NQS.....	14
From a 'common' lens to a 'cultural' lens	15
National leadership by ACECQA	16
The rating and assessment process: a partnership approach	17
Authorised Officers.....	18
Quality Improvement Plan.....	20
Ratings review process.....	20
Frequency of rating and ongoing monitoring.....	20
Mainstream services	21
5. CONCLUSION	21
ANNEXURE A: OVERVIEW NATIONAL INDIGENOUS POLICY INSTRUMENTS	23
ANNEXURE B: NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD PROCESSES	27
ANNEXURE C: THE NQF AND CULTURAL COMPETENCY MATRIX	30

1. Executive Summary

This paper investigates whether the current expectations of cultural competence in the early childhood education and care regulatory framework, and in particular the National Quality Standard (NQS), are appropriately articulated and whether they can be met by the current assessment and rating processes. It draws on the Coalition of Australian Government's national Indigenous reform agenda, which provides a strong imperative for cultural competency in the early childhood education and care sector, and introduces a cultural competency framework to aid analysis.

The paper finds that the National Quality Framework (NQF) does provide the foundation for a culturally competent approach through its guiding principle that "Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued." However, its application is currently limited with no guide or framework for how this principle might be operationalised or achieved in the NQF, including the NQS. This means first that there is currently no process or guide for assessing and ensuring the cultural competency of mainstream organisations supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (including service providers as well as ACECQA and its delegates). Secondly, there is no process or guide to ensure that the NQS is applied in a culturally appropriate manner to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander services. The paper poses a series of measures, detailed in the box below, to support the national regulatory body to operationalise this core principle to enhance operational practice and ensure a culturally competent early childhood education and care regulatory system.

Recommendations

RECOMMENDATION ONE: The Government, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and services, develops a cultural competence framework to support implementation of the guiding principle within the National Quality Framework that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued. This should be applied to the assessment process as a whole. It should also include criteria for the assessment of mainstream services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: That the terms of reference for the review of out-of-scope services as part of the review of the NQF include the cultural appropriateness of the NQS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: That the government process of considering the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF services in the NQS include an explicit process for:

- (a) input from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care sector on the cultural appropriateness of all aspects of the NQS, including the assessment and ratings process;
- (b) consideration of input; and
- (c) Government provision of response to input prior to reaching a determination.

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: That the government adapts the NQS based on the outcomes of the said review to ensure its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: That ACECQA establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group in partial fulfilment of its responsibilities under the Closing the Gap initiative.

RECOMMENDATION SIX: that the national regulation agency, ACECQA, includes dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions, and that the role and scope of these positions is developed in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.¹

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: that ACECQA takes a leadership role in steering Regulatory Authorities towards developing a commitment to cultural competency and strategies for its implementation.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT: That Regulatory Authorities in each state and territory:

- have specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency and partnership development training; and
- are supported and required to develop genuine partnerships according to the appropriate protocols with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

RECOMMENDATION NINE: that ACECQA provides cultural competency training for its Authorised Officers, delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel/organisations, to strengthen capacity to apply a cultural competency framework in rating and assessing services delivering services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

RECOMMENDATION TEN: That Regulatory Authorities create Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-identified positions in their workforce, and that ACECQA encourages and collaborates with regulatory authorities in this process.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN: That where Authorised Officers are non-Indigenous, regulatory authorities appoint local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mentors to guide assessors through the assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and services with significant proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. This can be authorised by powers that already exist in the legislation.²

RECOMMENDATION TWELVE: That knowledge of or experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is a core competency in selection criteria for Authorised Officers who are to assess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services.

¹ SNAICC 2009, *Submission on the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms*, North Fitzroy: SNAICC, p. 6.

² The Regulatory Authority may delegate any of its functions and powers under the National Law to any person employed under a public sector law of the jurisdiction, or any person in a class of persons prescribed in Regulation 237, Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012. In addition, a Regulatory Authority can declare that there be a Regulatory Authority for a class of education and care services within its jurisdiction.

RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence be listed as an additional area of expertise for appointment to the ratings and assessment review panel.

RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN: that, in fulfilment of COAG's goals of cultural awareness and enabling the evaluation, monitoring and review processes to be conducted from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, the ACECQA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group participate in the evaluation of the training of Authorised Officers, and the ratings and assessment process.

RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN that training funds be allocated and appropriate training be mandated to ensure all mainstream services have access to cultural competency training, resources and ongoing supports.

RECOMMENDATION SIXTEEN that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Cultural Education Advisory Group be appointed by the government to develop culturally sound training and evaluation guidelines. This group should include academics, practitioners and community representatives and should be funded to convene in 2014.

RECOMMENDATION SEVENTEEN: that, building on recommendation 1, an accessible and easy-to-use cultural competency guide be developed to assist services and authorised officers in, respectively, providing and assessing quality ECEC service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

2. Introduction

This paper investigates whether the current expectations of cultural competence in the National Quality Standard (NQS) are appropriately articulated and whether they can be met by the current assessment and rating processes. It explores whether the NQS is culturally appropriate for application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services or for assessing service quality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

In order to interrogate the cultural appropriateness of the NQS, this paper summarises the national policy and regulatory frameworks set out through: the national Indigenous reform agenda; the National Quality Framework (NQF); and NQS quality assessment process. It then explores the consistency of the NQS with cultural competence criteria. The paper discusses how a cultural competency framework can assist analysis and identification of gaps to operationalise the government's national Indigenous reform agenda and the guiding NQF principle of 'valuing' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

The paper poses a series of measures that will support the national regulatory body to move towards a more culturally competent early childhood education and care (ECEC) regulatory system. Ultimately it seeks to provide a discussion point for the sector on potential developments of the NQF to put forward during the 2014 review process.

3. Relevant National Policy and Regulatory Frameworks

The National Indigenous Reform Agenda

The national policy reform agenda is increasingly recognising and enshrining in law the necessity of a culturally competent approach to achieving targeted outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children. This is consistent with growing evidence of the importance of robust community governance, meaningful Indigenous community participation and cultural competence for social service access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.³

The national framework which guides policy, programmes and practices targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and early childhood education and care services, includes a raft of agreements, instruments, plans and strategies devised by the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) (Annexure A). These largely stem from and are designed to implement the Closing the Gap reform agenda, a commitment by all Australian governments to improve the lives of Indigenous Australians, and in particular provide a better future for Indigenous children. In 2008, COAG agreed to six Closing the Gap targets to overcome Indigenous Disadvantage, relating to Indigenous life expectancy, infant mortality, early childhood development, education and employment. This initiative recognises the importance of positive measures to overcome persistent discrimination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2012 the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) came into effect, with the express purpose of framing the task of 'Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage'.⁴ The NIRA provides a set of principles, targets, strategies and priorities for action that guide the implementation of all COAG's reforms, and which all government departments and agencies are expected to take into account in designing policies and providing services.⁵ Key principles are set out on the next page. National and state governments and their agencies are required to take 'the broadest possible spectrum of government action' to realise the NIRA aims.⁶

The NIRA requires a focus on cultural awareness and engagement by policy makers and people implementing government programs, the elimination of overt and systemic discrimination, and the development of programs that meet the cultural needs of Indigenous people.⁷ The National Indigenous Reform Agreement acknowledges that "effective engagement with Indigenous communities is critical to ensuring that Indigenous people's needs and aspirations are built into the planning and

³ See for example: NSW Ombudsman. (2011). *Addressing Indigenous Disadvantage: the need to do things differently*, Sydney: NSW Ombudsman, p4; Wild, R., and Anderson, P. (2007). *Little Children are Sacred*, Report of the Northern Territory Board of Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, Darwin: Northern Territory Government, pp142-143; Australian National Audit Office (ANAO). (2012). *Capacity Development for Indigenous Service Delivery*, Audit Report No. 26, 2011-2012, Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2010) *Towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement: overcoming barriers to child and family services*; Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (2011) *Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access and engagement with child and family services*.

⁴ *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Clause 4.

⁵ *Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians, National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule D, 66.

⁶ *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, Clause 2.

⁷ *National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule A p. 20.

implementation of initiatives agreed by COAG.”⁸ It requires developing and maintaining strengthened partnership arrangements.⁹ It fleshes out the meaning of partnership, acknowledging that “working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of implementation plans is critical as their input, ideas and solutions will contribute to the overall success and sustainability of the reforms.”¹⁰

Closing the Gap principles

Priority principle: Programs and services should contribute to Closing the Gap by meeting the targets endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs.

Indigenous engagement principle: Engagement with Indigenous men, women and children and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services.

Sustainability principle: Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets.

Access principle: Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible ... recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs.

Integration principle: There should be collaboration between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services.¹¹

One target is to close the gap in educational achievement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians within a decade, with early childhood education a building block to achieve this target. Action in this area must be based then on the national Indigenous reform agenda. The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NPAIECD) was established to improve outcomes for Indigenous children in their early years and to contribute to Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous Australians.¹² The National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy designed to support its implementation, reinforce the principle that governments have a major responsibility for the removal of barriers to participation in early years education and to ensure services are physically and culturally accessible for Indigenous children.

Each of these instruments contains strong principles, targets, strategies and priorities that place at the centre working in respectful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and using strategies which increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander independence, empowerment and self-management. An overview of these instruments is detailed in Annexure A. This Annexure highlights the extent to which the Closing the Gap initiative, and the policies and programs developed to assist and fast-track its implementation, are underpinned by recognition of the right to culture, right to participation and their importance for better outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

⁸ *Ibid*, Schedule A, 29.

⁹ *Ibid*, Schedule A, p. 22.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, Schedule A, 29; the *National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* agreed by COAG in 2008. Council of Australian Governments' Meeting 25 June 2004, *Communique*.

¹¹ Council of Australian Governments (2008) *National Indigenous Reform Agreement: Closing the Gap*. Canberra: COAG, p.6.

¹² *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, Clause 4.

The Closing the Gap and NIRA aims are achievable only by enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to run according to their cultural values and methods, and to input into the systems and processes that govern them. This requires concerted collective action by all governments, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services. Systems and processes established that contribute to the Closing the Gap outcomes, including early childhood development and education outcomes, need to incorporate and give life to these principles and strategies. This agenda then has explicit, clear implications for the Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA), the NQF and the NQS.

The National Quality Framework

The National Quality Framework is a new set of laws and regulations, introduced in 2012 to create a national approach to the regulation and quality assessment of early childhood education and care (ECEC) services. It replaces separate state-by-state licensing and quality assurance processes.

A Regulatory Authority in each state and territory is primarily responsible for administering the National Quality Framework, including the processes of approving, monitoring and quality assessing services against the new National Quality Standard. The Australian Children's Education and Care Quality Authority (ACECQA)—oversees the National Quality Framework.

The National Quality Framework claims to raise quality and drive continuous improvement and consistency in education and care services through:

- a national legislative framework
- a National Quality Standard
- a national quality rating and assessment process
- a new national body - ACECQA.

The National Quality Framework comprises the Education and Care Services National Law (National Law) and the Education and Care Services National Regulations (National Regulations), which include but are not limited to the National Quality Standards. The national law and regulations cover a broad range of issues including: setting up and administering services; processes of review, enforcement and compliance (beyond those of the NQS); information, records, privacy, and fees; and particular exemptions to staffing and qualifications requirements.

Details of the processes within the framework indicate gaps in the system that raise issues about both the way services respond to the framework and standards and the way these services are assessed. The different aspects of the NQF are detailed in Annexure B and considered against cultural competency criteria in Annexure C. This paper questions the application of one component of the National Quality Framework—the National Quality Standard—to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and services.

The National Quality Standard

The National Quality Standard (NQS) claims to set national quality benchmarks against which ECEC services are monitored and assessed. It governs the operational requirements of these services. The NQS comprises seven Quality Areas, within which there are a total of 18 standards. Each quality standard has a set of elements (of which there are 58 in total) that specify particular aspects within each standard.

Quality Area No.	Quality Area focus
1	Educational program and practice
2	Children's health and safety, including serious incidents, supervisions, protection from harm and hazards, collection of children and excursions
3	Physical environment, including security, hygiene, outdoor space provisions, and assessment of family day care venues
4	Staffing Arrangements, including educator-to-child ratios, qualification requirements
5	Relationships with children, including interactions between educators and children, and relations amongst children and between children and staff
6	Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities
7	Leadership and service management

The NQS became law when the National Quality Framework was established, on 1 January 2012, with the first NQS assessments commencing in mid-2012. The NQS marks a move away from assessing minimum standards. In addition, it broadens the realm of assessment, and is more focussed on achieving quality outcomes for children. The system has greater emphasis on three areas than its predecessor: education programs and practice (Quality Area 1); collaborative partnerships with families and communities (Quality Area 6); and leadership and service management (Quality Area 7).

These three areas are crucial to effectively meeting the needs and desires of Indigenous families both in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and the many families using mainstream services. The current exclusion of the many Budget Based Funding services from the NQS, 80% of which are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, needs to be addressed. While these services come under national law, they are not currently included within national regulations. They are therefore not assessed according to the National Quality Standard. The exception to this are the few BBF services who receive any Child Care Benefit (CCB) funds, and then they are only included in the Regulations to the extent of that funding. Aboriginal preschools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Centres also come within the NQS. This issue will be considered as part of the federal Government review of the NQF planned for mid-2014.

4. Cultural Competency

Culture is central to identity. Culture defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us... Every area of human development which defines the child's best interest has a cultural component. Your culture helps define HOW you attach, HOW you express emotion, HOW you learn and HOW you stay healthy.¹³

The right to practice culture requires governments to recognise, respect and enable distinct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, history, languages and way of life, and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities can exercise their

¹³ Muriel Bamblett 2006, quoted in VACCA 2010, *Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 13.

rights to practice and revitalise their cultural traditions, customs and languages.¹⁴ This right is inextricably linked to the rights to education, to equal access to quality, early childhood education,¹⁵ to non-discrimination and for Indigenous peoples to participate in decisions that impact their lives.¹⁶

These rights, and in particular the rights to participation and culture, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people require a mechanism and process for realisation. Frameworks for cultural competency can provide the means by which people and organisations can develop their own capacity to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise their rights to culture, to participation and to non-discrimination, and be required to respect these rights. This section explores the meaning of cultural competency to lay a foundation for its application to the National Quality Framework for the ECEC sector.

Cultural Competency, the VACCA model

There is increasing recognition of the need for a cultural competency framework to support and facilitate implementation of the culturally respectful approach required in the national Closing the Gap agreements and policies. Developing cultural competency is the process of integrating attitudes, values, knowledge, understanding and skills that enable effective interventions with people from a culture other than one's own.¹⁷ It recognises that enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to practice their rights to participate in decisions that impact them and to enjoy culture requires cultural awareness. This is the process of "embedding understanding of some of the...knowledge of another culture and an awareness that cultural differences necessitate a different approach to people of that other culture."¹⁸

The Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA) has developed a cultural competency framework in response to recognition by the Victorian government of the need for culturally competent child and family services. The VACCA framework comprises comprehensive cultural competency criteria and an assessment tool for assessing the cultural competency of services against Victorian child and family service standards. It is recognised as a leading framework and offers comprehensive criteria relevant to the National Quality Standard and the ECEC sector. The framework is based on the idea that resilience results from cultural safety, and cultural safety is a responsibility and a right for Aboriginal communities.¹⁹

The VACCA cultural competency framework identifies commitment to Aboriginal self-determination and respectful partnerships as the foundation of cultural competency and prerequisites for each other feature of cultural competency.²⁰ Self-determination is the over-arching right of Indigenous peoples to exercise control over the decisions that affect their lives. It is both the source of the right to participate in decisions and the

¹⁴ UN Committee on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination, General Recommendation No 23, paras 4(a) and 4(e); UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CEC), article 30..

¹⁵ Article 6.2 CRC; UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 28 and 29; and United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child. (2009). General comment No. 11 (2009) *Indigenous children and their rights under the Convention*. U.N. Doc CRC/C/GC/11.

¹⁶ DRIP (articles 3, 4, 18, 19), ICCPR (article 1), ICESCR (article 1), CRC

¹⁷ VACCA 2008, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, VACCA: Melbourne, p. 23.

¹⁸ VACCA 2010, *This is 'Forever Business': A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety*, VACCA, Melbourne, p. 104.

¹⁹ VACCA 2010, *This is 'Forever Business': A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety*, VACCA, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 27.

²⁰ VACCA 2008, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 26.

realisation of full empowerment to participate in public decision-making. Enabling increased participation of Indigenous peoples in decision-making promotes their self-determination.²¹

Participation encompasses a broad range of active engagement in public decision-making processes, which requires a shift in power-dynamics by which one party with control over decisions cedes authority and enables influence of others. There are differing levels of participation, ranging from non-participation - which involves therapy and manipulation - to more tokenistic forms of participation that is informative and consultative. The most empowering level of participation involves partnerships, delegated power and the highest level of participation, citizen control.²²

Applying an understanding of participation to the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires an appreciation of their unique rights to participate in decisions as distinct cultural groups, their special place as original inhabitants of lands, and their shared histories of colonisation and disempowerment in public decision-making. It requires recognition that cultural values that underpin public institutions and systems have been largely shaped without equal participation of Indigenous peoples. Therefore, participation on equal terms must allow for systems of cultural change, rather than simply including Indigenous peoples within existing mainstream systems and processes. Both participation and self-determination are required elements of cultural competence.²³

A commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and respectful partnerships is a prerequisite for a culturally safe and respected environment and must be embedded within the systems and approaches of non-Indigenous agencies to provide culturally competent services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Enacting this commitment requires partnerships: creating space for influence, participation and knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is acknowledged in the national Indigenous policy framework, which emphasises Aboriginal and Torres Strait participation and engagement, and commits government and its agencies to processes and policies that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.

What do genuine partnerships, founded on a commitment to self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, produce?	• Effective, culturally appropriate services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. • Commitment to developing long-term sustainable relationships based on trust. • The basis for successful outcomes in joint activities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and mainstream organisations. • A commitment to redressing structures, relationships and outcomes that are unequal and/or discriminatory. • The foundation for capacity building in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that deliver services to
--	--

²¹ Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC) 2012. *Genuine Participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Child Protection Decision-making for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: A Human Rights Framework*, Melbourne, SNAICC.

²² SNAICC 2013, *Whose voice counts? Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in child protection decision-making*, Melbourne: SNAICC, p.11.

²³ Libesman, T. 2007, Indigenising Indigenous child welfare. *Indigenous Law Bulletin*, 6(24), pp17-19.

	children and families. • Opportunities for capacity building in mainstream organisations through developing knowledge, skills and understanding in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.²⁴
--	---

In addition to the core commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination and building respectful partnerships, there are a number of other fundamental aspects of cultural competency. These are detailed in the box below.

Cultural Competency elements	What it involves
Self-determination and genuine partnerships	Commitment to principle or self-determination enacted in practice through genuine partnerships
Cultural awareness	Understanding the role cultural difference plays
Cultural respect	Valuing Aboriginal peoples and their cultures
Cultural responsiveness	Having the ability and skills to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
Cultural safety	Creating a service environment that is safe and welcoming for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Cross-cultural practice and care	Being able to relate and provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
Self-reflection	Being able to see how your culture and the dominant culture generally impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Cultural safety is an element of cultural competency but also provides a broader tool in testing whether a cultural competency framework is being successfully implemented. Cultural safety is about whether Aboriginal people feel 'safe' from covert or overt cultural abuse.²⁵ However, more broadly, cultural safety is about the safety of our ties with one another and with the land or environments we inhabit.²⁶ The "diminishing of cultural safety occurs through a lack of respect and recognition of the positive aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and their centrality in creating a sense of meaning and purpose for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples."²⁷

VACCA use a *treatment* model for cultural safety, which operates on the basis that changing the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are treated promotes cultural safety through healing. This *treatment* takes three forms:

1. Renegotiating the social contract and establishing appropriate ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous peoples *treat* each other in terms of a proper foundational relationship between them and the promotion of cultural respect;
2. Treatment as healing and tackling the impact of trans-generational trauma and trans-generational racism; and

²⁴ SNAICC 2012, *Opening Doors through Partnerships*. Genuine Partnerships meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, Melbourne: SNAICC; VACCA 2010, *Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 35.

²⁵ VACCA 2008, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 27.

²⁶ VACCA 2010, *This is 'Forever Business': A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety in Aboriginal Victoria*, VACCA, Melbourne, p. 13.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 5.

3. Creating a new shared narrative between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous peoples as a means of ensuring mutual respect and self-understanding. Ensuring that a dialogue respects and engages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as stakeholders and not as problems to be solved.²⁸

These items are actioned through our foundational elements of cultural competence: a commitment to Aboriginal self-determination, which is demonstrated by seeking a partnership approach.²⁹ This treatment model draws out further the content of the kind of process required to support a culturally competent quality system within a service sector. What is also critical is that to be effective, cultural competence must be built at organisational, program and practice levels. Whilst it is important for individuals to work in a culturally competent way, this is not sufficient by itself. “Cultural competence is a widely shared commitment, reflected in all aspects of policy development, program management and service delivery.”³⁰

Cultural competency is a complex and interwoven concept. It is not a quick fix or tick the box issue, but a journey for individuals and organisations to invest in. It is multi-faceted and requires time and consideration of each different aspect. Processes to support bottom up action from staff and top down requirements from organisations are both critical. This applies also from high-level government policy to action within services. This cultural competency framework is now used to assist understanding of the NQS and its application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and services.

5. Analysis and Recommendations

Applying a Cultural Competence Framework to the NQS

The COAG legislative and policy reforms provide a strong framework for the early childhood education and care sector and the foundation for assessment of the cultural appropriateness of the NQS. There is clear recognition at the highest level of Australian government that processes and programs impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must have strong cultural competency. This is reflected in the explicit principles of: cultural awareness; accessibility; local place-based approaches; strengthening Indigenous capacity engagement and participation; and fostering Indigenous service delivery.

National policy recognises that cultural competence in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture is a complex *process* that requires specific attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is not a general idea of cultural difference, but requires specific knowledge of the history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and of the effects of colonisation and the Stolen Generations. It requires a commitment to working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to produce services, programs, policies and processes that make it possible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture to thrive and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to pursue their culture and identity as is their right.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p.8.

²⁹ VACCA 2008, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 26.

³⁰ VACCA 2010, *Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 22.

Reflection on the national Indigenous policy framework exposes a missing link in the NQS and its implementation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. It is vital to make this link and to understand its consequences in order that these services can achieve their potential outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The National Quality Framework and cultural competence

The National Quality Framework provides the impetus for a culturally competent approach through its guiding principle that “Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued.”³¹ However, currently there is no provision in the NQF or the NQS for how this principle might be operationalised or achieved. There is nothing specific to cultural competence with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or services. There is also no reference to the national agenda to redress Indigenous disadvantage. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is rarely mentioned in the NQF or NQS and then only in the context of mainstream services and the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in their service provision.

Quality Area 6, Collaborative Partnerships with Families and Communities, does explicitly mention Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures. One Element, that ‘the service builds relationships and engages with the local community,’³² is relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures. In assessing this element, assessors are not in any way, however, assessing the cultural competence of the organisation or its workers. They are evaluating positive responses to difference between children, and an environment that reflects diversity. The emphasis is on raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, rather than more detailed and deeper ideas of cultural competence and engagement.

National Quality Area 1 applies a more substantial approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. The principle of ‘valuing’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is linked to specific requirements in the Early Years Learning Framework, the national curriculum for early childhood education. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence is a ‘concept’ of this framework. The EYLF is an approved learning framework that forms the basis of Quality Area 1 of the NQS. Through the EYLF then, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence is introduced into the NQS.

The *Educators Guide* to the EYLF highlights several crucial notions regarding cultural competence:

- that “cultural competence in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is distinctly different from the broad idea of ‘respecting all cultures.’”³³
- that acknowledgement of Indigenous ancestral relatedness, its values, and how these are realised is distinctly Australian.³⁴
- that the Early Years Learning Framework provides an opportunity for educators across Australia to work towards cultural security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.³⁵

³¹ *Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010*, Part 1, Section 3(3(d)).

³² Element 6.3.4 of Standard 6.3.

³³ DEEWR 2010, *Educators: Belonging, Being and Becoming: The Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, cited in Goodwin, J. 2012, Indigenous Culture, It’s Everybody’s Business, *Every Child* 18(1), 2012, 14-15, p. 14, http://www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au/nqsplp/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/EC1201_Indigenous_culture_its_everybodys_business.pdf.

³⁴ DEEWR 2010, *Educators: Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Canberra: DEEWR, p. 3.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 3.

While this is a significant aspect, the silence of the NQS itself on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence undermines its guiding principle to 'value' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The detail provided in the EYLF is not sufficient, applying as it does to one Quality Area only of the NQS. In addition, it does not provide a mechanism or tool for implementing the guiding principle.

The absence of cultural competence criteria associated with application of the NQS has two implications. First, there is no process for assessing and ensuring cultural competence of mainstream organisations (including service providers as well as ACECQA and its delegates). Second, there is no process for ensuring that the NQS is applied in a culturally appropriate manner for any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander service.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander models for cultural competency give substance to this concept of 'value.' They show how it can be operationalised by detailing what has to be valued, and how 'valuing' culture can be enacted, demonstrated and evaluated. A systemic approach to cultural competency would also bring the NQF into line with the Closing the Gap reforms detailed in section 3.

RECOMMENDATION ONE: The Government, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and services, develops a cultural competence framework to support implementation of the guiding principle within the National Quality Framework that Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued. This should be applied to the assessment process as a whole. It should also include criteria for the assessment of mainstream services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Inclusion of services within the NQS

As noted the bulk of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are not currently within scope of the NQS. A cultural competency approach should begin at consideration of this question of inclusion. Is the NQS culturally competent and how could it be applied to services in a culturally appropriate manner?

The current, wider context for change in which the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Budget Based Funding services operate will also be critical to the consideration of their inclusion in the NQS. This context includes: the current federal government review of BBF services; the interaction between current funding arrangements and meeting quality standards; and the relationship between the BBF program and COAG's Closing the Gap agenda.

RECOMMENDATION TWO: That the terms of reference for the review of out-of-scope services as part of the NQF review include the cultural appropriateness of the NQS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and children.

RECOMMENDATION THREE: That the government process of considering the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF services in the NQS include an explicit process for:

- (d) input from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care sector on the cultural appropriateness of all aspects of the NQS, including the assessment and ratings process;***
- (e) consideration of input; and***
- (f) Government provision of response to input prior to reaching a determination.***

RECOMMENDATION FOUR: That the government adapts the NQS based on the outcomes of the said review to ensure its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency.

From a 'common' lens to a 'cultural' lens

According to ACECQA, there are two aspects of the National Quality Framework that are 'shared' or 'common'. There is:

- a common language for educators and officers to use; and
- a shared understanding of what quality education and care should look like.³⁶

Reflecting on the cultural competency framework confirms that it is not enough to use the NQS itself to provide this common language and shared understanding. In itself, the NQS does not work towards producing a language or an understanding that is shared between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people or agencies.

A 'common language' and 'shared understanding' cannot be taken for granted between non-Indigenous people or agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. To arrive at a 'common language' and 'shared understanding' requires significant work, training and commitment on the part of both educators and officers. To date, this work has not been done. And if a 'common language' and 'shared understanding' are not reached, then the NQF is breaching its own guiding principle of 'valuing' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. A genuine 'common' language can only be devised by looking through a cultural lens.

Reflection on a 'common lens' and 'cultural lens' provides an optimum starting point for exploring the cultural competency of the NQS. This lies at the heart of a shift to make Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and therefore their implications, explicit. Developing cultural competency requires mainstream organisations to widen the lens through which they look at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and services to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. It is necessary that government processes "take account of this cultural lens...when it comes to assessing, planning and acting to promote an Aboriginal child's safety, stability and development."³⁷ Preserving and enhancing the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services cannot be done without looking at those services through a cultural lens. Seeing through a 'cultural lens' is a tool through which acts of interpretation and assessment are made³⁸ and critical in ensuring culturally competent practice and care.³⁹ It is the acknowledgement that each act of interpretation and assessment has a cultural dimension.⁴⁰

Applying a cultural lens has multiple implications. It is not only about how to view Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, but also about how to

³⁶ Department of Education, Training and Employment, Queensland Government 2012, *Authorised Officer Training*, podcast, delivered by R. Livingstone, R. Director of Quality Assessment & Research of the National Quality Framework Office for Queensland, *Authorised Officer Training*, podcast, <http://mediasite.eq.edu.au/mediasite/Play/31969afa97df4146b2cc533407dc6f5c1d>, last accessed 5 February 2013.

³⁷ VACCA, 2010, *This is 'Forever Business': A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety in Aboriginal Victoria*, VACCA, Melbourne, p. 106; VACCA 2008, *Cultural Competence Framework*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 27.

³⁸ VACCA 2008, *Aboriginal Cultural Competence Framework*, VACCA, Melbourne, p. 36.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 36.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 36.

understand the unrecognised and unanalysed mainstream assumptions. The ongoing process of colonisation takes a different shape today: that of ‘cross-cultural blindness’. Cross-cultural blindness is the opposite of seeing through a ‘cultural lens’. It is not only the failure to see the positive value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, but it is also the failure to see the indirect or systemic continuation of colonising practices.⁴¹ One of the effects of cross-cultural blindness is the disempowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.⁴² Cultural blindness sees the stereotype and mistakes it for the truth. This is because of cultural misunderstanding, caused by lack of cross-cultural knowledge and competence.⁴³

Being able to see through a cultural lens requires knowledge, understanding, and, crucially, the assistance of Aboriginal people. Building genuine partnerships—the second of the two key cultural competencies—is essential. This issue has implications for each of the following sub-sections.

National leadership by ACECQA

Achieving a culturally competent early childhood education and care sector does not stop at the cultural competency of educators. This view is reflected in the national Indigenous policy framework, which emphasises a multi-sectoral approach, underpinned by the COAG framework, involving partnerships between all tiers of government and local agencies.

The national Indigenous reform agenda sets out different layers on which this should occur. In particular, it recommends that the Commonwealth and/or state agencies establish sector-specific Indigenous Advisory Groups.⁴⁴ Consultation with these expert groups on programs with an impact on Indigenous people is critical when shaping policy or its implementation or indeed considering the policy interactions that may need to be addressed.⁴⁵ Other systemic strategies outlined include “involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in service delivery, assessment, monitoring and planning of programs and the development of a sustainable Indigenous workforce and a culturally competent non-Indigenous workforce.”⁴⁶ Genuine partnerships go well beyond ‘consulting’ the sector. A central element of building a genuine partnership is to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in processes and occupy positions through which they can have an effect.

The development of policy regarding cultural competency at the national level is a vital component in giving effect to the national agenda, and specifically to the Priority Reform Areas of the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development. This includes, in particular, Priority Reform Areas 4, 5 and 6:

- Quality early learning and childcare;
- Integrated, sustainable, universal and targeted services; and
- Development of a sustainable Indigenous workforce and a culturally competent non-Indigenous workforce.

⁴¹ VACCA, 2010, *This is ‘Forever Business’: A Framework for Maintaining and Restoring Cultural Safety in Aboriginal Victoria*, VACCA, Melbourne, p. 6.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 35.

⁴⁴ For instance, the National Indigenous Health Equality Council.

⁴⁵ National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule A, p. 23.

⁴⁶ Closing the Gap in Indigenous Life Outcomes in Early Childhood, Attachment A, *Closing the Gap: National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*.

This is also essential to progress the policy direction that the National Partnership Agreement identifies that “all services are delivered in an integrated, culturally competent way.”

This has implications for the regulatory framework managed by ACECQA and for capacity building supports provided to mainstream organisations in terms of training, ongoing mentoring relationships and support. See further Recommendations 15-17.

Recommendation 1 concerning the development of a cultural competency framework would encompass the processes, systems and instruments for ACECQA to promote, enable and require a culturally competent ECEC sector. This would be assisted by ACECQA reviewing and enacting the National Partnership Agreements – both on Indigenous Early Childhood Development and on Early Childhood Education - through its own policy and practice innovations. More specifically however, the following recommendations are made to ACECQA.

RECOMMENDATION SIX: That ACECQA establishes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group in partial fulfilment of its responsibilities under the Closing the Gap initiative.

RECOMMENDATION FIVE: that the national regulation agency, ACECQA, includes dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander positions, and that the role and scope of these positions is developed in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.⁴⁷

RECOMMENDATION SEVEN: that ACECQA takes a leadership role in steering Regulatory Authorities towards developing a commitment to cultural competency and strategies for its implementation.

The rating and assessment process: a partnership approach

The framework under which early childhood education and care is managed and assessed has broadened under the NQS. It is now underpinned by broad principles and focussed on outcomes for children. This type of framework provides the space and opportunity to view services through a cultural lens. The NQS potentially provides the opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to be recognised where they excel, for recognition of excellence in their own terms, and for services to be assessed on the cultural appropriateness of their work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

The capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to meet the NQS, particularly in relation to child development, safety, stability, and relationships with community (Quality Areas 1, 2, 5 and 6) is directly dependent on their capacity to offer the services they determine are those that their own communities want, and to deliver them in a manner appropriate for these communities. Culture and cultural identity are central to each of these Quality Areas. These services cannot offer such culturally embedded services *and* meet the NQS unless the rating and assessment tool and process is capable of rating and assessing them through a cultural lens. The process requires flexibility and capacity of Authorised Officers to understand cultural ways of defining and transmitting the content of these Quality Areas to determine areas of strength and need for improvement within services. The rating and assessment of services has both the potential to enhance or damage cultural identity and cultural involvement.

⁴⁷ SNAICC 2009, *Submission on the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement for Early Childhood Education and Care Quality Reforms*, North Fitzroy: SNAICC, p. 6.

There is no current requirement that Authorised Officers develop a relationship with services outside the direct exercise of their functions. In fact, the guide for Regulatory Authorities stipulates the amount of time to be spent in assessment visits, and that these minimum times be used as a guide so as not to disrupt the running of the services.⁴⁸ This approach mitigates against the development of partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which take time and are not best formed by a direct concentration on a specific task. The principles, practice and outcomes of effective partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander agencies and non-Indigenous organisations are well-documented.⁴⁹

As previously discussed, the formation of genuine partnerships is a key component of cultural competency. However, “There is not a ‘one size fits all’ approach as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are diverse.”⁵⁰ It is important to recognise that there “is a diversity of Aboriginal cultures in Australia. What is appropriate for an Aboriginal child in the Northern Territory may not be appropriate for an Aboriginal child in South Eastern Australia.”⁵¹ Cultural knowledge and cultural information is *local*, coming from the local community. Partnerships have to also be local. Partnerships between the Regulatory Authority and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will provide the basis for a culturally competent approach to regulation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBF sector within the NQS. These concepts need to be applied to ensuring mainstream services are also supported in meeting similar needs.

RECOMMENDATION EIGHT: That Regulatory Authorities in each state and territory:

- ***have specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competency and partnership development training; and***
- ***are supported and required to develop genuine partnerships according to the appropriate protocols with their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.***

Authorised Officers

Several aspects of the qualifications and training of Authorised Officers are problematic when considered against the cultural competence framework. In particular, these are:

- The ‘common lens’ approach to training;
- The lack of a specific requirement for Regulatory Authorities to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Authorised Officers; and
- That neither knowledge of, nor experience in working with, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities is a criterion for appointment to the position of Authorised Officer.

As noted above, training aims to provide a ‘common lens’ with which to rate and assess services. This ‘common lens’ is not defined except insofar as it coincides with the NQS itself. The standards *are* the lens. Without forming an idea of what looking through that lens is like for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services or children themselves, that ‘common’ lens is another way of saying a mainstream lens, not inclusive of Aboriginal

⁴⁸ ACECQA 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities*, ACECQA, Sydney, p.15.

⁴⁹ SNAICC 2012, *Opening Doors through Partnerships: Practical Approaches to Developing Genuine Partnerships that Address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Needs*, SNAICC.

⁵⁰ DEEWR 2010, *Educators: Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators’ Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Canberra: DEEWR, p. 25.

⁵¹ VACCA, 2010, *Building Respectful Partnerships: The Commitment to Aboriginal Cultural Competence in Child and Family Services*, Melbourne: VACCA, p. 39.

and Torres Strait Islander ways of seeing or doing. These ways include unique methods of child-rearing which can be interpreted by non-Indigenous people as indicative of deficient practices rather than indicative of cultural difference.⁵² The challenge for the training of Authorised Officers is to widen that lens to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and children are recognised, as are the culturally embedded viewpoints of the Authorised Officer.

A partnership approach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is recommended to overcome this challenge. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care sector and local communities have the knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture required for cultural competent assessments. Engagement to unpack this in a two-way learning process, acknowledged by national government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people alike as a cornerstone of success in early childhood education, is a critical step.⁵³ 'Both-ways learning means that Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing come together in learning situations and workplace practices'.⁵⁴

For evaluation of cultural competency to have any grounding, it must also be conducted within a cultural competency framework, developed, implemented and assessed by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

RECOMMENDATION NINE: that ACECQA provides cultural competency training for its Authorised Officers, delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel/organisations, to strengthen capacity to apply a cultural competency framework in rating and assessing services delivering services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

RECOMMENDATION TEN: That Regulatory Authorities create Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-identified positions in their workforce, and that ACECQA encourages and collaborates with regulatory authorities in this process.

RECOMMENDATION ELEVEN: That where Authorised Officers are non-Indigenous, regulatory authorities appoint local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander mentors to guide assessors through the assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and services with significant proportion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children. This can be authorised by powers that already exist in the legislation.⁵⁵

RECOMMENDATION TWELVE: That knowledge of or experience with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is a core competency in selection criteria for Authorised Officers who are to assess Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care services.

⁵² Bamblett, M., & Lewis, P. (2006). A Vision for Koorie Children and Families: Embedding rights, Embedding Culture, *Just Policy* 41, p. 43.

⁵³ DEEWR 2010, *Educators: Belonging, Being and Becoming: Educators' Guide to the Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*, Canberra: DEEWR, p. 25.

⁵⁴ RRACSSU NT, *Nation Quality Standard Indigenous Resource Package*, NT: Regional and Remote Children and Services Support Unit Northern Territory.

⁵⁵ The Regulatory Authority may delegate any of its functions and powers under the National Law to any person employed under a public sector law of the jurisdiction, or any person in a class of persons prescribed in Regulation 237, Education and Care Services National Regulations 2012. In addition, a Regulatory Authority can declare that there be a Regulatory Authority for a class of education and care services within its jurisdiction.

RECOMMENDATION THIRTEEN: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence be listed as an additional area of expertise for appointment to the ratings and assessment review panel.

Quality Improvement Plan

The *Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan* emphasises that, because the focus of the NQS is on quality improvement, it is important to be open, honest and critically reflective when undertaking the self-assessment and quality improvement planning processes. This is made far more difficult without an effective and functioning partnership between the Regulatory Authority and its Authorised Officers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. Requiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be open, honest and critically reflective without acknowledging the cultural context in which this occurs and the cultural competence required of the Regulatory Authority, is not only unworkable but goes against the spirit of the national Indigenous policy agenda.

A collaborative approach to the development of the Quality Improvement Plan is recommended, including consulting widely with the relevant community members and educators.⁵⁶ This is consistent with the operation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.

Ratings review process

There is no requirement to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as advisors or consultants in the ratings review of these respective services. There is also no cultural competency framework for the ratings review process. Similarly, there are no mechanisms to ensure that decision-makers are cognisant of relevant differences between Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures and the dominant culture.

RECOMMENDATION FOURTEEN: that, in fulfilment of COAG's goals of cultural awareness and enabling the evaluation, monitoring and review processes to be conducted from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, the ACECQA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group participate in the evaluation of the training of Authorised Officers, and the ratings and assessment process.

Frequency of rating and ongoing monitoring

The regulatory authority can, at its discretion and according to the National Law and National Regulations, reassess a service at any time within the assessment cycle. Reasons for this may be a decline in the quality of the service or the presence of other 'risk factors'.⁵⁷ This represents 'risk' as a neutral term, but it is established that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ideas of 'risk' are different from those that have become institutionalised in mainstream services.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are also impacted by a number of factors that mean that they are likely to be assessed and rated at the most frequent rate. For example, limited funding under the Budget Based Funding program means that the services need to do more with less funds, and BBF services are located in areas of particular disadvantage or remoteness, which could give rise to 'risks' unrelated to service quality per se. Therefore, how is 'risk' to be defined in a culturally appropriate manner?

⁵⁶ ACECQA 2011, *Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan*, Sydney: ACECQA.

⁵⁷ ACECQA, 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities*, Sydney: ACECQA, p. 33.

Again, applying the cultural competence framework, ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in the process is a first step, either directly conducting assessments or mentoring those who do so.

See recommendations NINE-ELEVEN ABOVE.

Mainstream services

It is also important that the regulatory system is applied to ensure that all mainstream services have the capacities and skills necessary for appropriate inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. This has a number of implications. Firstly, it requires the government to mandate and fund appropriate training and support so that services can deliver upgraded capacities and demonstrate their capacity to engage and sustain relationships with local communities, parents and children. It also requires a more specific guide for services and authorised officers on the meaning of quality service provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to assist them in appropriately assessing services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

RECOMMENDATION FIFTEEN: that training funds be allocated and appropriate training be mandated to ensure all mainstream services have access to cultural competency training, resources and ongoing supports.

RECOMMENDATION SIXTEEN: that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander National Cultural Education Advisory Group be appointed by the government to develop culturally sound training and evaluation guidelines. This group should include academics, practitioners and community representatives and should be funded to convene in 2014.

RECOMMENDATION SEVENTEEN: that, building on recommendation 1, an accessible and easy-to-use cultural competency guide be developed to assist services and authorised officers in, respectively, providing and assessing quality ECEC service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

5. Conclusion

The National Quality Framework provides a strong basis for a relevant, flexible quality system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC services and for assessing quality services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. There are however currently notable gaps that require redress. The core principle of ‘valuing’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures provides the centrepiece for making explicit the cultural competence framework that must underpin the NQF. The cultural competence framework and guide however has yet to be developed and incorporated to enhance operational practice in implementing this principle throughout the NQF, including the NQS.

This paper has detailed the policy and legislative framework already in place in Indigenous early childhood education and more broadly to redress Indigenous disadvantage. This framework has major implications for regulation of the early childhood education and care sector. When the core principle of ‘valuing’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is implemented according to the national Indigenous policy framework adherence to all other NQF principles will follow. If it is not, then the

other principles *cannot* be followed. If we follow the principle of valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in this way, then these other principles become:

- The rights and best interests of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child are paramount in the same way as the rights and best interests of the non-Indigenous child;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are successful, competent and capable learners;
- The principles of equity, inclusion and diversity extend to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander forms of best practice are expected in the provision of education and care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children..

The National Quality Standard is then interpreted with the above principles, through a common lens that includes an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lens. This paper seeks to draw out some of the implications of this approach and makes a series of recommendations for incorporation of the national Indigenous policy framework into the new National Quality Framework, or specifically its National Quality Standard.

Essentially a cultural competency framework requires respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice and worldview. This model has implications for the way ACECQA and the Regulatory Authority of each state or territory interacts with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services in the process of rating and assessment, and mainstream services that are providing a service to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This has to be thought through in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A first step is engagement by ACECQA with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ECEC sector on the development of a plan to drive this process.

Annexure A: Overview National Indigenous Policy Instruments

Instrument	Principles	Targets	Strategies	Priority areas for action
National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage (Schedule A of the NIRA)	<i>Priority principle</i> Programs and services should meet Closing the Gap targets while being appropriate to local community needs. <i>Indigenous engagement principle</i> Engagement with Indigenous people and communities should be central to the design and delivery of programs and services. <i>Sustainability principle</i> Programs and services should be directed and resourced over an adequate period of time to meet the COAG targets. <i>Access Principle</i> Programs and services should be physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people recognising the diversity of urban, regional and remote needs. <i>Integration principle</i> There should be collaboration	Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage Strengthening Indigenous capacity, engagement and participation Building Indigenous people's needs and aspirations into the planning and implementation of initiatives agreed by COAG Ensuring Indigenous peoples' active participation in the design and implementation of COAG measures. Developing bilateral and local implementation plans	<i>Building partnerships and strengthening existing ones</i>⁵⁹ ➤ work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the development of implementation plans ➤ share decision-making and responsibility for implementation ➤ develop and use strategies that increase Aboriginal independence, empowerment and self-management <i>Local need / place-based approaches</i> ➤ recognise local circumstances ➤ build relationships with local communities ➤ ensure local representation where required ➤ establish appropriate structures to facilitate local level community engagement and partnerships.⁶⁰ <i>Fostering Indigenous service</i>	<i>Integration and Governance</i> Developing a coordinated approach to identifying priorities at both intra- and inter-governmental levels <i>Strengthening Indigenous Capacity, Engagement and Participation</i> ➤ promoting a strong and positive view of Indigenous identity and culture ➤ strengthening individual, family and community wellbeing and capacity as a necessary impetus to improved access to and take-up of services <i>Focus on Local Need/Place Based Approaches</i> Enabling initiatives appropriate to the needs in a particular location <i>Effective Services</i> Reforming service delivery systems

⁵⁹National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule A, p. 22.

⁶⁰National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule A, 29.

Instrument	Principles	Targets	Strategies	Priority areas for action
	between and within Governments at all levels and their agencies to effectively coordinate programs and services. <i>Accountability principle</i> Programs and services should have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation.⁵⁸		<i>delivery</i> ➤ recognise when Indigenous delivery is an important contributor to outcomes (direct and indirect), and in those instances foster opportunities for Indigenous service delivery; ➤ support the capacity of the Indigenous service sector and communities to play a role in delivering services and influencing service delivery systems and organisations to ensure their responsiveness, access and appropriateness to Indigenous people <i>Effective evaluation and review</i> ➤ evaluation should be done from an Indigenous perspective	<i>Building Effective Accountability and Sustainability</i> Requiring governments to improve statistical collection services and other information sources to improve the detail and accuracy of reporting on outcomes.⁶¹ <i>Indigenous-led evaluation and review</i> Incorporating lessons from Indigenous-led evaluation into future program and service design
National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education (NPAECE)	Governments share responsibility for the removal of barriers to participation in a preschool program, including ensuring cost is not a barrier—especially for Indigenous and disadvantaged children.	<i>Removal of barriers</i> ➤ To ensure that every child is enrolled in and attending a pre-school program ➤ To actively make programs and services physically and culturally accessible to Indigenous people		
The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy	The Commonwealth has responsibility to lead the development of the Aboriginal	To support the implementation of the NPAECE	<i>Developing cultural awareness</i> ➤ recognise Indigenous culture, language and identity	Four focus areas for action: ➤ increasing access to early childhood education

⁵⁸ Service Delivery Principles for Programs and Services for Indigenous Australians, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule D, 2-7.

⁶¹ National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, Schedule A,

Instrument	Principles	Targets	Strategies	Priority areas for action
	and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy. The states and territories have responsibility to develop specific strategies for delivering universal access in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including remote communities.		➤ build governments' and service delivery organisations' capacity to develop and implement policies, procedures and protocols that recognise Indigenous people's culture, needs and aspirations	➤ positive community awareness and engagement ➤ quality early childhood programs and activities ➤ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness of teachers and support staff⁶²
National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development (NPAIECD)	Parties to the agreement will pursue the NPAIECD's aims 'through the broadest possible spectrum of government action'⁶³ The Commonwealth and the States and Territories have a shared commitment to improvements in Indigenous Early Childhood Development	➤ to improve outcomes for Indigenous children in their early years ➤ to contribute to COAG Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous Australians⁶⁴ ➤ to give Indigenous children the best start in life by addressing their high levels of disadvantage ➤ to provide integrated child and family services which focus on quality early learning, child care and parent and family support ➤ to increase the proportion of Indigenous children participating in quality early childhood education and development services ➤ to increase the proportion of Indigenous people using parent and family support services	To implement this National Partnership in a way that contributes to COAG's social inclusion, early childhood development, education, health, housing, and safety agendas, by identifying reforms and models of service delivery that will improve outcomes for Indigenous children.	Priority Reform Areas include: ➤ developing a sustainable Indigenous workforce and a culturally competent non-Indigenous workforce ➤ developing integrated, sustainable, universal and targeted services ➤ providing quality early learning and childcare Using the NPAICD's integrated policy framework as the 'basis for developing future reforms by all governments in Indigenous early childhood development'⁶⁵

⁶² *Universal Access to Early Childhood Education for Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Universal Access Strategy*, p. 2.

⁶³ *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, Clause 2.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, Clause 4.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, Schedule A.

Instrument	Principles	Targets	Strategies	Priority areas for action
		➤ to achieve tangible improvements in outcomes for Indigenous children ➤ to achieve generational change over the longer term		
National Framework of Principles for Government Service Delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians	➤ sharing responsibility ➤ harnessing the mainstream ➤ streamlining service delivery ➤ establishing transparency and accountability ➤ developing a learning framework ➤ focusing on priority areas	➤ achieving better outcomes for Indigenous Australians ➤ improving the delivery of services ➤ building greater opportunities ➤ helping Indigenous families and individuals to become self-sufficient	Use the principles to guide discussions b/w the Cth and each State/ Territory Government on the new arrangements for Indigenous affairs and the best means to engage with Indigenous people at the local and regional levels. Governments will consult with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to achieve this. ⁶⁶	
Melbourne Declaration for Educational Goals for Young Australians [The Melbourne Declaration (referenced in the EYLF)]	Values the role of education in producing a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future.	Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; aims to: ➤ provide access to high-quality schooling that is free from discrimination ➤ build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students as a foundation for learning, and work in partnership with local communities on all aspects of schooling process ➤ improve learning outcomes of Indigenous students to match those of other students ➤ eliminate disadvantage as a significant determinant of educational outcomes ➤ socially cohesive society that respect & appreciate diversity	Develop partnerships between schools and Indigenous communities, based on cross-cultural respect	Strengthening early childhood education

⁶⁶ Council of Australian Governments' Meeting 25 June 2004, 'Communique'.

Annexure B: National Quality Standard processes

This Annexure provides some further information on the processes that are each relevant to implementing the National Quality Standard:

- Guiding principles of the National Law
- The Standards themselves, which comprise: the actual requirements; plus a series of reflective questions designed to help the service to meet the requirements of the standard
- The elements, which are detailed requirements within each standard, each of which has to be addressed in trying to meet the standard
- The approved learning framework, the national *Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)* plus whatever state or territory learning framework (approved by ACECQA) applies in the local area
- The Assessment tool, which is used to rate the service against the standards and the national law and regulations
- The Quality Improvement Plan.

The guiding principles in the national law are particularly important in the broad application of the National Quality standards. These principles are:

- The rights and best interests of the child are paramount
- Children are successful, competent and capable learners
- The principles of equity, inclusion and diversity underlie the national law
- **That Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are valued**
- That best practice is expected in the provision of education and care services.

National guiding principles are also contained in the Early Years Learning Framework. The EYLF principles are:

- Secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships
- Partnerships
- High expectations and equity
- Respect for diversity
- Ongoing learning and reflective practice.

The EYLF is relevant to the assessment of early childhood education programs within the National Quality Standard monitoring and assessment process (Quality Area 1).

The assessment process

ACECQA oversees the monitoring and assessment of services against the National Quality Standard. The aim is that the National Quality Framework 'provide a common language for educators and officers to use,' and a shared understanding of what quality education and care should look like.⁶⁷ ACECQA has devised an assessment and rating instrument and guide for determining how services measure against the NQS.⁶⁸ The Regulatory Authority of each state or territory conducts the actual assessments.

⁶⁷ ACECQA 2012, *National Quality Framework: Assessment and Rating Overview and Authorised Officer Training*, Podcast Series 4, presented by Rhonda Livingstone, Director Quality Assessment and Research, National Quality Framework Office for Early Childhood Education and Care.

⁶⁸ ACECQA 2011, *Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan*, Sydney: ACECQA, p. 9.

The goals of the assessment process are:

- a) To rate each service's current practices against each of the National Quality Standard; and
- b) To produce a process of continuous improvement for each service.

As part of the assessment, services must complete a self-assessment and **Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)**. The Quality Improvement Plan, revised at least annually, is designed to promote reflection, self-assessment and evaluation. It:

- Includes an assessment of the quality of the practices of the service against the National Quality Standard and the National Regulations;
- Identifies areas of strength;
- Identifies areas that the provider considers may require improvement;
- Identifies areas where a service is not meeting a regulatory requirement and strategies for redress;⁶⁹ and
- Includes a statement of philosophy of the service.

The QIP assists authorised officers to understand the services engagement with the National Quality Framework, although it does not form evidence in the assessment and rating process.⁷⁰

As part of the assessment process, assessors must visit the service. During each visit, assessors:

- a) **Observe** the children in their setting in a range of activities and engagements with others, and the educators in their various roles;
- b) **Discuss** with the educators their current approaches and philosophies relevant to each element and standard; and
- c) **Sight** relevant documentation.⁷¹

After the visit, assessors prepare a final assessment and rating report. In their assessment, the national Regulations require the assessors to consider:

- The current Quality Improvement Plan for the service;
- The service's rating history;
- The service's history of compliance;
- Steps taken by the service to rectify matters identified during the rating and assessment;
- Relevant information that comes to them via other government regulatory authorities;
- Provision of a pre-school program, where the service is required by regulation to do so; and
- Information obtained through a service visit.

There are five possible ratings a service can be given:

- **Excellent**—indicates that a service demonstrates excellence and is recognised as a sector leader
- **Exceeds National Quality Standard**—indicates that a service is exceeding NQS
- **Meets National Quality Standard**—indicates that a service is meeting the National Quality Standard

⁶⁹ See ACECQA 2011, *Guide to Developing a Quality Improvement Plan*, Sydney: ACECQA, pp.5-6; and ACECQA 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities*, Sydney: ACECQA.

⁷⁰ ACECQA 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities*, Sydney: ACECQA, p. 14.

⁷¹ ACECQA 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Services*, Sydney: ACECQA, p. 1.

- **Working towards the National Quality Standard**—indicates that a service is working towards meeting the National Quality Standard
- **Significant improvement required**—indicates that a service is not meeting the NQS and the regulator is working with the service to immediately improve its quality (otherwise the service's approval to operate will be withdrawn).

To meet the NQS for a particular quality area, services need to meet the National Quality Standard for all elements within a standard and all standards within a quality area.⁷² Services can also seek an 'excellent' rating. To do this, a service must obtain the exceeding rating and then apply in writing to ACECQA for the highest rating on the basis of the published criteria. There is a fee associated with this application.⁷³

Monitoring of education and care services under the National Quality Framework is not limited to this ratings and assessment process. Regulatory Authorities will also monitor services through a further schedule of visits, including announced and unannounced, and random and targeted visits.

The assessors

An Authorised Officer of the state or territory Regulatory Authority assesses services. These officers are appointed by the state or territory regulatory authority, in accordance ACECQA has established key requirements for authorised officers that they:

- are appropriately trained for the functions they are undertaking;
- are appropriately trained in NQF, including National Law, Regulations and NQS;
- have qualifications and experience consistent with their functions;
- are appropriately trained in record keeping, investigation, decision making and report writing;
- have knowledge, expertise, professional values, integrity and the ability to develop respectful working relationships, which will give them credibility with services, the families of the children in those services, and the broader sector;
- are reliable and consistent in their assessments and enforcement approach;
- are able to operate as part of a team based approach to assessment;
- have opportunities for ongoing professional development; and
- have skills, experience and qualifications to enable informed assessment of the pedagogical aspects of the NQS.⁷⁴

ACECQA auspices a Lead Assessor Training Programme which is delivered to Lead Assessors. Following their training, Lead Assessors train the Authorised Officers at the state/territory level. The training includes: legal and regulatory context; rating the NQS standards and elements; how to prepare for assessment; collecting evidence; building rapport; and avoiding weighting some evidence more than other evidence. The emphasis is to use the NQS as the 'common lens'. The training assists trainees to understand how services could demonstrate their qualities against the standards and elements.

⁷² ACECQA 2012, *Guide to Assessment and Rating for Regulatory Authorities*, Sydney: ACECQA, p.18.

⁷³ ACECQA 2011, *National Quality Framework Resource Kit*, Sydney: ACECQA, p. 48.

⁷⁴ ACECQA 2011, ACECQA Board Position on Authorised Officer Qualifications, <http://acecqa.gov.au/storage/1-NQF%20qualifications%20requirements%20for%20Authorised%20Officers.pdf>.

Annexure C: The NQF and Cultural Competency Matrix

This matrix reflects on the cultural competence of the NQF and opportunities for strengthening cultural competency. It is a starting point and requires input from the key stakeholders that both apply the NQF or are subject to its regulation.

Aspects of the NQF	Cultural Competency					
	Commitment to self-determination & partnerships	Cultural awareness -	Cultural respect	Cultural responsiveness	Cultural safety	Cross-cultural practice and care
		Knowledge and understanding of the role of cultural difference	Attitudes towards and valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their cultures	Ability and skills to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Creating a safe and welcoming service environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	Ability to apply the lens of culture and provide appropriate services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
NQS	The NQS is silent. No recognition of history or commitment to Aboriginal led processes. No requirement for partnerships between ATSI* services and mainstream agencies. NQS does encourage partnerships between services and local communities.	There is no explicit requirement that any agencies or staff develop knowledge, skills, or educative practice specifically with respect to ATSI* people and cultures. There is no recognition of the role of ATSI* cultural difference	A guiding principle is 'valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures'. However, no framework or mechanism to implement this principle. Thus there is no requirement to ensure cultural respect.	There is no cultural competence criteria, and therefore no process to require or assess mainstream organisations, including service providers, ACECQA or assessors, on cultural ability and skills to work with ATSI* services and	There is no cultural competence criteria, and therefore no process to ensure that any ATSI* services is treated in a culturally appropriate manner or a service is safe for ATSI* children and families.	The NQS has not developed a cultural lens through which to view services. A cultural competency assessment has not been applied to the assumption that the NQS can function as a 'common' language and as a common lens to assess quality. The EYLF supports

Aspects of the NQF	Cultural Competency					
	Commitment to self-determination & partnerships	Cultural awareness -	Cultural respect	Cultural responsiveness	Cultural safety	Cross-cultural practice and care
				communities.		cross-cultural practice for education programming
ACECQA	There is little information that indicates that ACECQA has considered or developed procedures and systems yet to: - consider impact of regulatory system on ATSI* people; - form genuine partnerships with ATSI* people and services; - implement the national Indigenous reform agenda.	There is no evidence of processes developed to assess need for ATSI* involvement in any particular initiative or process. There is little in ACECQA public documentation that reflects or recognises an understanding of the role of culture.	We are not aware of whether or how ACECQA has considered how it can value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. This is not visible in its public documentation.	One 2 hour cultural competence training for assessors is conducted. No training for other personnel. No indication that ACECQA evaluates its service delivery to ATSI* people. We are not aware of means developed to assess service responsiveness.	It is unknown whether ACECQA has ATSI* staff. There are no identified positions. It is unknown whether ACECQA includes cultural competence in staff selection. It is unknown whether consideration has been given to cultural safety.	It is unknown whether any systems or processes have been established to support and facilitate cross-cultural practice and care
Assessors – Authorised Officers	We are not aware of any ATSI* authorised officers. There are no identified assessor positions. No support for local ATSI* mentors to support assessors assess.	There is neither knowledge of, nor experience in working with, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities in selection criteria.	There is no requirement that Regulatory Authorities consult with ATSI* communities or people when training assessors how to work with ATSI* services.	We understand that a 2 hour cultural competency training is conducted	2 hour cultural competency training. Feedback from services is that current assessment processes do not ensure cultural safety.	There is a ‘common lens’ approach to training, which does not include a cultural competency testing. No requirement to employ any ATSI* people, who could assist in developing

Aspects of the NQF	Cultural Competency					
	Commitment to self-determination & partnerships	Cultural awareness -	Cultural respect	Cultural responsiveness	Cultural safety	Cross-cultural practice and care
	A 2hr cultural competency training provided. Training also includes use of some ATSI* case studies.		We are not aware of any ways in which local cultural protocols are considered.		No guidance to Authorised Officers on administration of the NQS to ATSI* services.	on organisational cultural lens.
Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) and process of continuous improvement	Comments under Authorised Officers apply, as they assess the QIP. There is no explicit requirement that Authorised Officers build relationships with individual services outside a visit.	There is no cultural competency approach which would inform Authorised Officers about the values and ideas that influence the approach of ATSI* services to quality.	There is no cultural competency approach which would inform Authorised Officers of cultural differences, and therefore no framework within which to assess quality where there is a difference.	There is no cultural competency framework. No ATSI* cultural expertise required of staff. No emphasis on building partnerships with ATSI* services.	There is no ATSI* cultural knowledge required of staff or system to support and monitor it. Therefore, capacity to ensure cultural safety is weak.	There is no process for ensuring that use of the QIP is supported by a cultural lens.
Rating and assessment process	ATSI* services have not been consulted about the appropriateness of the rating and assessment process.	Without proper cultural competency or a process to support application of a cultural lens, Authorised Officers are not in a position to be able to assess quality or value in ATSI* services. This lack of awareness risks: ▪ Failing to see the strengths of the service; ▪ Mis-interpreting	There is no encouragement in the NQS process of services adopting distinctly different cultural practices. The approach flattens out differences between cultures by adopting a uniform approach to assessment and ratings. This puts ATSI* services in a defensive position,	Without identified positions, required cultural competency of staff or emphasis on partnerships with ATSI* services, it is difficult to see how staff would acquire the knowledge necessary to effectively rate and assess Aboriginal and Torres Strait	There is no guide for assessing quality specifically for ATSI services or services supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The appeal process also does not include ATSI* person or required knowledge and	The Authorised Officers assessing services are required to observe the children and assess them against the NQS, and this assessment includes on safety, stability and development. This is not a neutral activity, but the approach taken assumes a common lens and not

Aspects of the NQF	Cultural Competency					
	Commitment to self-determination & partnerships	Cultural awareness -	Cultural respect	Cultural responsiveness	Cultural safety	Cross-cultural practice and care
		things negatively.	having to justify difference from the mainstream, rather than actively encouraging them to develop their services according to their own cultural position and values.	Islander services.	experience. All other elements discussed put the cultural safety of services under significant threat through the assessment process.	a cultural one.
Ratings review process	There is no requirement to involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as advisors or consultants in the ratings review of Aboriginal services.	There is no cultural competency framework for the ratings review process. There are no mechanisms to ensure that decision-makers are cognisant of relevant differences between Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures and the dominant culture	There is no indication that it might be important to have a cultural competence approach to the ratings review process.	There is no requirement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence for members of the ratings review panel.	There is no evaluation tool specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services. At this stage, there is no publicly available information from ACECQA including feedback from ATSI* services.	Whilst the ACECQA Board will endeavour to ensure that the pool of members of the ratings review panel includes people from diverse backgrounds, including ATSI* people, there is no requirement that the process incorporates ATSI* perspectives.

Aspects of the NQF	Cultural Competency					
	Commitment to self-determination & partnerships	Cultural awareness -	Cultural respect	Cultural responsiveness	Cultural safety	Cross-cultural practice and care
Monitoring outside the NQS cycle	There is no requirement to involve ATSI* people as advisors or consultants in the monitoring of ATSI* services.	The regulatory authority can reassess a service at any time. Reasons include a decline in the quality of the service or other 'risk factors'. This represents 'risk' as a neutral term, but ATSI* ideas of 'risk' differ from mainstream approaches. There is no cultural approach to risk.	The lack of cultural competence training or a framework means that Authorised Officers have little or no context for developing a way of apprehending the strengths of ATSI* services.	There is no explicit training on cultural difference in general or on particular points of cultural difference. Therefore an accurate assessment of quality where these differences are in operation is difficult to attain.	ATSI* services are likely to be assessed at the most frequent rate, given their location and funding issues for BBF services, with implications for quality.	There is no cultural lens applied to the assessment framework in general, whether the NQS cycle or outside that cycle to general monitoring and compliance issues.

*ATSI REFERS TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER