



# NATIONAL CHILD AND FAMILY INVESTMENT STRATEGY

Driving the shift towards earlier supports and the transition towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Sector





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## Acronyms/Terminology

Acronyms	Terminology
ACCO	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation
CB	Connected Beginnings
DSS	Department of Social Services
ECCDPP	Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership
FLDM	Family Led Decision Making
ICC	Implementation Coordination Committee
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OOHC	Out-of-Home Care
QATSICPP	Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak
SVA	Social Ventures Australia
SDMC	Shared Decision-Making Committee
SLWG	System Leadership Working Group
SOC	Senior Oversight Committee
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
Transition of services	The transition of services from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs with the characteristics of the service largely preserved
Transfer of funding	The transfer of government funding from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs, including for the design and delivery of new or changed culturally appropriate supports



## **Acknowledgements**

SNAICC – National Voice for our Children (SNAICC) acknowledges and thanks the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) and Social Ventures Australia (SVA) as project partners for their generous contributions to the National Child and Family Investment Strategy (Strategy). QATSICPP’s experience with implementation of the transfer of statutory authority and resources in child protection to the Aboriginal Community Controlled Sector has contributed significantly to the development of the Strategy.

SNAICC extends its acknowledgment to the organisations and individuals, in particular the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and community-controlled organisations (ACCOs) from across many Nations who provided input to the Strategy. We thank members of the ACCO Sector Panel who brought forward sector leadership and priorities that are at the heart of this work. The ACCO panel included child and family representatives from across Australia and enabled us to build off the existing strength and expertise of the sector to ensure it is effectively positioned and well-resourced to lead changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

We also acknowledge the contributions from representatives across the non-Indigenous child and family service sector, including through Families Australia, the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing (National Coalition), the Allies for Children, and broader sector representatives. We also thank Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments who provided input to the development of this Strategy, and the Department of Social Services (DSS) as funders of the project.

This Strategy is only realised with support from this broad range of stakeholders and their ongoing commitment towards achieving better outcomes for children and families across Australia.



## Executive Summary

Extensive evidence highlights that early support to children and families focusing on strengthening families and addressing the underlying drivers of child neglect and abuse must lie at the heart of efforts to ensure Australian children are safe and supported. In line with the evidence, it is critical that children, young people and families are referred to and actively engaged through culturally safe and accessible support services to prevent contact with child protection systems. However, policy settings in child and family support focus heavily on tertiary intervention, with varying approaches to early supports and funding for ACCOs across Australia.

Despite the clear benefits of prevention and early supports, “84.1% of national expenditure on the child protection system is directed at the tertiary end of the system, including intervention and out-of-home care services”.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Productivity Commission report into Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory found duplication of effort and gaps in spending between and within governments. It also found that family support services were poorly targeted and did not always account for the cultural strengths or needs of children and families.<sup>2</sup>

To ensure that children and families have access to appropriate, culturally responsive early support and prevention, a more cohesive and considered approach to how these supports are developed and implemented is needed. This includes developing a shared understanding of the definition and scope of early supports and prevention services and the investment required from governments to ensure these services can be delivered where and when families need them most.

The National Child and Family Investment Strategy (the Strategy) has been developed to deliver on the commitments outlined in Action 2 of the Safe and Supported: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan. The Strategy will work in collaboration with Safe and Supported to shift towards adequate and coordinated funding of early, targeted, healing-informed culturally safe support services that are effective in supporting children and families, and are delivered by ACCOs.

The Strategy presents an opportunity to re-shape the child and family service system and how activities are delivered for all children across Australia. It acknowledges that it is in the best interests of all children to be safely cared for in their own families, with appropriate supports in place to ensure all families can provide safe and nurturing care for children. The Strategy also recognises that ACCOs are best placed to provide holistic, wrap around supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and their communities.

The Strategy outlines national principles and system elements to realign and drive funding priorities within the child and family service system by:

- shifting investment to prevention and early supports that build upon the underlying social determinants of child safety and wellbeing, and

<sup>1</sup> SNAICC (2023), *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families Report*, 13, <https://www.snaicc.org.au/resources/stronger-accos-stronger-families-report/>

<sup>2</sup> Productivity Commission (2020), *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory: Study Report*, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/nt-children/report>



- driving a shift in proportionate investment for child and family services delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, towards the ACCO sector.

Achieving this requires a significant change in government policies, decision-making and resourcing of child and family support services. In line with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, there must also be investment in strengthening the community-controlled sector to ensure that ACCOs are adequately resourced to provide services and supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The Strategy will support Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to implement the shift across existing systems and processes and support the transition of investment to ACCOs. These two areas share a collective focus on proactive and strengths-based investment to support children, young people and families to thrive. By prioritising early and tailored supports and acknowledging that ACCOs are best placed to deliver those supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Strategy leverages and builds on the strengths of families and communities to create a support environment that is holistic, culturally safe and driven by community priorities and needs.

The Strategy includes:

- A set of principles for growing early supports and shifting funding and services to ACCOs
- A national definition of early and tailored supports
- A set of system elements for growing early supports
- A set of system elements to support the shift towards ACCOs for delivery of these services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
- A set of example best practice actions for consideration by jurisdictions during implementation. Commonwealth Agencies and State and Territory Governments are not expected to commit to all of these actions but should consider them in developing tailored implementation plans.
- A commitment for all Australian governments to develop – in partnership with ACCOs and Aboriginal communities – an implementation plan to embed the principles and system elements in their jurisdictions.
- A range of resources to support the development of implementation plans including:
  - An implementation plan template
  - Existing resources to support the shift towards ACCOs for delivery of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
  - Illustrative case studies demonstrating examples of promising practice and live learnings to draw upon to support the shift of funding and resourcing towards ACCOs.

To ensure accountability and transparency in the implementation of the Strategy, jurisdictions will develop implementation plans through jurisdictional shared decision-making, with all plans submitted to the Safe and Supported Senior Oversight Committee (SOC) for oversight and



comment within 12 months of the Strategy’s final endorsement by the SDMC, after formal endorsement occurs through state and territory-level shared decision-making arrangements.

As part of the Strategy, DSS is establishing an \$8.5 million Innovation Fund to trial key principles and elements from the Strategy in selected locations across Australia. The Innovation Fund focuses on supporting the growth of early and tailored supports and driving a proportionate shift in investment for child and family support services towards the ACCO sector.

The Strategy is anchored in research, evidence, and the experiences and expertise of ACCOs, non-Indigenous organisations and governments; all of which have central roles to play in actively supporting the shift. Clear accountability and demonstrated commitment to achieving outcomes will be critical to the success of the Strategy.

*“To be successful the transition must be a partnership; we’re on this journey together.”  
– Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AO, CEO, Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency*



## Introduction

All children in Australia have the right to grow up safe and connected to their family, community, and culture. *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2021-2031* (Safe and Supported) is a shared commitment from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (Leadership Group), National Coalition and all levels of government, to improve the safety and wellbeing outcomes of children and young people across Australia.

Safe and Supported will drive this change through joint efforts across governments and non-government sectors to deliver strategic actions and activities under two Action Plans. Both action plans present opportunities to achieve meaningful change and better outcomes for children and families across Australia. The development of the National Child and Family Investment Strategy is a key action under Safe and Supported.

State and Territory Governments recognise the urgent need to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems and have committed to a range of actions focused on achieving Target 12 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (National Agreement), which seeks to reduce the rate of overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care by 45% by 2031.

Achieving this requires committed efforts to reform government service systems, invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led solutions and change policies that work against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

It is intended that the same commitment that governments and the sector have made to the implementation of Safe and Supported is applied to the delivery of the Strategy and its implementation. The Strategy proposes an approach to implementation that ensures accountability for tangible change, while allowing governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities flexibility to work in partnership to tailor actions to align with planned and existing initiatives to grow early supports and transition resources to the ACCO sector, including in a way that is consistent with Treaty processes being undertaken in some jurisdictions.

### Purpose

The purpose of the Strategy is to draw the following elements into a comprehensive approach that can be implemented by all Australian governments:

- **Growing Early Supports:** Principles and guidance for policymakers to increase resources for early child and family supports, including a shared definition and understanding of early and tailored supports for children and families at risk of child protection contact and intervention.
- **Shifting services and funding to the ACCO Sector:** Principles and guidance for policymakers addressing the system elements required to strengthen the ACCO sector and transition resources to ACCOs.
- **Supporting development and implementation of jurisdictional plans for growing earlier supports and shifting resources and programs for child and family support to ACCOs:** Principles and guidance for policymakers addressing the



system elements required to strengthen the ACCO sector and implement a proportionate transfer of resources to ACCOs, for child and family supports delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



## The National Child and Family Investment Strategy

A key activity under the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026.

### Two objectives

**Prioritising investment in early and tailored supports** – which aims to shift investment to early and tailored supports that address and prevent the underlying social determinants of child safety

**Transition of funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs)** – which aims to drive a proportionate shift in investment for child and family services delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, towards ACCOs

### Principles will guide the development of policies, programs and implementation plans

- Cultural safety and connection to culture
- Self determination
- Shared decision making
- Sustainability
- Integrated services and systems
- Evidence informed investment and innovation
- Rights based investment

### Prioritising investment in early and tailored supports System elements and key actions to deliver upon each element

Evidence informed investment and innovation	Development of legislation, policy and frameworks	Budget decisions and funding processes	Community leadership and accountability	Collaboration and buy-in	Independent oversight and governance
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### Transition of funding to ACCOs System elements and key actions to deliver upon each element

ACCO funding prioritisation policies	Sustainable resourcing of ACCO services	ACCO Workforce Development Strategies	Aboriginal led decision-making in funding allocation	Direct investment in ACCOs
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### Stakeholders accountable for delivering the Strategy cuts across sectors

Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	Non-Indigenous child and family service providers	ACCOS
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### A strategy for all children and families

The Strategy focuses on shifting investment to early support for *all* children and families as well as shifting investment to ACCOs for service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Importantly, the Strategy has a significant focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledge and the evidence that highlights the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of caring for and raising children and supporting families. This includes acknowledging that the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care nationally has climbed to nearly 45 per cent as at June 2023 despite being just 6 per cent of the general child population (0-17 years) in Australia<sup>3</sup>, reflecting that systems are failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.

Support services regularly identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families as “hard to reach”. However, it is the service system that presents significant barriers and limitations to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement – often as a result of services not being accessible, culturally safe, appropriate or responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. Many of these barriers can be overcome by working in accordance with the principles of self-determination and community-led decision making, as committed to under the National Agreement.

There is an imperative to put the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families at the centre of legislation, policy, programs and practice in supporting families and preventing child protection intervention.

The Strategy presents opportunities for governments to transfer funding to ACCOs and realign investment to grow early supports concurrently. The Strategy recognises that early and tailored supports need to be increased for all children and families who experience vulnerability to address unacceptably high rates of child neglect, abuse and removal for all children across Australia.

The principles and system elements outlined in the Strategy will drive the child and family sector towards prevention focused systems that support wellbeing, safety, positive identity and connection to culture and family for every child.

*“Everyone knows that if you get it right for Aboriginal kids you get it right for all kids because you start to focus on the child, and not just the physical needs of the child but their cultural and social wellbeing as well.”*

*Adjunct Professor Muriel Bamblett AO*

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<sup>3</sup>Australian Government Productivity Commission, Closing the Gap Information Repository, *Socio Economic Outcome 12*, 2024, <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard/se/outcome-area12/out-of-home-care>



### What difference will the Strategy make?

The Strategy is designed to shift the dial on the way governments approach the design, implementation and delivery of supports to children and families across Australia. It provides guidance for strengths-based approaches to investing in the safety and wellbeing of children and families, with a focus on preserving connections to kinship and culture. The Strategy recognises that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, this is best done through harnessing the strengths of ACCOs.

In implementing the Strategy, governments can demonstrate a genuine commitment to the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement.

*“Everyone is trying to work in and fix a broken system. If we get the systems right, it then supports the individual, family and community level of a child’s wellbeing.”*  
– member of the NGO Sector Reference Group.

The Strategy will support the achievement of the following 10-Year Outcomes from the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes Framework<sup>4</sup>:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families know they can easily access the services and supports they need, that those services will be safe and respectful of their cultures, and that they will be trauma-informed, child-centred and family-focused.
- High-quality child and family wellbeing services are designed and delivered by ACCOs to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, in line with families’ needs, and focus on supporting families to stay safe together.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families lead care and protection decision-making for their children (with children and young people involved in all decisions) and participate in policy and program design through their own community leadership and institutions.
- ACCOs and community leadership have authority in system design and child protection processes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and evidence drives best practice.

The Strategy will also support the achievement of the following 10-Year Outcomes from the Safe and Supported Outcomes Framework for all children:<sup>5</sup>

- Children and young people grow up in safe and nurturing homes, supported by strong families and communities.

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<sup>4</sup> Department of Social Services, *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021-2031, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan*, p. 28, [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2023/final\\_aboriginal\\_and\\_torres\\_strait\\_islander\\_first\\_action\\_plan.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2023/final_aboriginal_and_torres_strait_islander_first_action_plan.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Department of Social Services, *Safe and Supported: National Framework for Protecting Australia’s Children 2021-2031, First Action Plan, Outcomes Framework*, p. 20, [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf)

- Systems and services prioritise resourcing, strengthening and supporting families to stay safe together.

These outcomes, and their corresponding sub-outcomes (several of which directly reflect the goals of the Investment Strategy) will be monitored and evaluated in accordance with the Safe and Supported Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy. At the time of the Investment Strategy's publication, both Monitoring and Evaluation Strategies were still in development, with finalisation expected to take place in mid-2026.

#### Partnership, engagement and consultation

SNAICC, QATSICPP and SVA partnered to develop an approach that responds to the needs of ACCOs, the broader child and family service sector, and government policymakers. Project-specific reference groups and panels were convened to test and refine the findings and ensure the Strategy is designed through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approach and targeted to best support end users. Specifically, expertise and input were drawn from:

- **ACCOs** through a project-specific ACCO Sector Panel and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership Group (Leadership Group) for Safe and Supported
  - This ACCO sector panel was comprised of leaders in the ACCO sector who provided oversight and advice throughout the development of the Strategy, bringing expertise in sector leadership and the priorities that are at the heart of this work.
  - The ACCO sector panel's role ensured that the Strategy built on the existing strengths and expertise of the community-controlled sector to ensure it is effectively positioned and well-resourced to lead this change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.
- **Non-Indigenous Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)** through a project-specific Sector Reference Group consisting of representatives of the broader child and family sector through the Allies for Children
  - Broader representatives from the non-Indigenous child and family sector also participated in the work via Families Australia and the National Coalition on Child Safety and Wellbeing.
- **Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments** in a range of fields related to the social determinants of child protection involvement, including child safety, health, education, mental health and justice
  - Working with governments informed the development of practical guidance on how the principles and elements can be applied across processes and systems, and ensured the elements are clearly articulated, accurate and actionable.
  - A government only workshop was held for government representatives to provide collective feedback, share inter-jurisdictional insights and raise early opportunities for implementation and alignment with existing priorities.
  - Jurisdictions were also engaged through the Safe and Supported governance structure.



In addition to detailed engagements with the ACCO panel and NGO sector reference group, a series of workshops with governments and broader stakeholders from the child and family sector were held to ensure the Strategy was informed by a range of perspectives and experiences from across the child and family service system.



## Strategic Context

This strategy sits alongside a range of policies, strategies, frameworks and commitments to support children and families. These are outlined below.

## National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The National Agreement is one of the most significant changes in the policy landscape in the last five years. All Australian governments are committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their communities, organisations and businesses to implement the National Agreement at the national, state and territory, and local levels.

Safe and Supported and its Action Plans is the first national strategy developed under the National Agreement. The National Agreement sets the key parameters for system reforms impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. It has been built around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives on what is essential for improving their lives, includes four Priority Reforms to change the way governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as government accountability measures and shared monitoring and implementation arrangements.

The Priority Reforms must inform all government actions including legislation, policy and practice, and are critical to driving change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia. The priority reform areas are outlined below.

- 1. Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision-Making:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments, to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.
- 2. Building the Community-Controlled Sector:** There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country. Clause 55 under the National Agreement commits government parties to implement measures that increase the proportion of services delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, particularly community-controlled organisations.
- 3. Transforming Government Organisations:** Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.
- 4. Shared Access to Data and Information at a Regional Level:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup>Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reforms*, Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/priority-reforms>.



The priority reform areas provide the foundational pillars for the Strategy and must be collectively implemented to successfully grow early supports and shift investment towards the ACCO sector. The Strategy will also directly contribute to achieving Target 12, addressing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.

## Safe and Supported

Finalised in 2021, *Safe and Supported*<sup>7</sup> is Australia's framework to reduce child abuse and neglect and its intergenerational impacts. It builds on the *National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, which laid the critical foundation for national collaboration on protecting Australia's children. It will drive change through collective effort across governments and sectors that impact the safety and wellbeing of children and young people.

*Safe and Supported* sets out a 10-year strategy to improve the lives of children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage or who are vulnerable to abuse and neglect. It includes an agreed vision and goal, priority groups, focus areas and underpinning principles. *Safe and Supported* also supports the commitments under the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform areas.

*Safe and Supported* will be delivered through two sets of Action Plans. The first Action Plans were launched on 31 January 2023, and will be delivered between 2023 and 2026. The Action Plans represent a commitment from all Australian governments to build stronger futures for children.

The First Action Plan aims to address the needs of all Australian children and families, focusing in particular on children and families who are experiencing disadvantage and/or vulnerability.<sup>8</sup> The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan focuses on achieving safety and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. It sets out actions and activities to address the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan recognises that systemic change is needed to address the legacy of colonisation and the Stolen Generations and move towards a future in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are in control of decisions made about their children and families.<sup>9</sup>

This Strategy delivers Action 2(a) under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan. Action 2 focuses on '*Investing in the Community-Controlled Sector: Shift towards adequate and coordinated funding of early, targeted and culturally safe supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families*'. Under this action, all governments are committed to a range of activities focused on bolstering prevention and early support, growing the ACCO child and family

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<sup>7</sup>Department of Social Services (2021) *Safe and Supported: The National Framework for Protection Australia's Children 2021-2023*. Available at: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12\\_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/12_2021/dess5016-national-framework-protecting-childrenaccessible.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Department of Social Services (2023) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026*. Available from: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.



sector, and ensuring government policy settings support self-determination and the exercise of authority by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The Strategy will also help drive jurisdictional efforts under activities 2(b) to 2(g), which include co-designing jurisdictional ACCO market development strategies, commissioning frameworks and investment strategies that deliver dedicated future investment in ACCOs, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led, place-based commissioning models to increase local control over funding priorities and allocation.

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

The Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) is a shared decision making forum to improve early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The ECCDPP is one of five Policy Partnerships established under the National Agreement to accelerate progress towards the Closing the Gap Targets. The ECCDPP brings together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and all Australian governments (via representatives from early childhood education and care and child protection departments) to progress policy reform. The ECCDPP is co-chaired by the Commonwealth Department of Education and SNAICC.

The purpose of the ECCDPP is for governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parties to make shared policy decisions so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are born healthy and supported to thrive in strong families, proud in their culture. The scope of the Partnership includes outcomes 2, 3, 4, 12 and 13 under the National Agreement, which span maternal and child health, early childhood education and care (ECEC) and child and family safety.

This Strategy supports many of the ECCDPP's identified priorities, including its focus on providing adequate and coordinated funding of ACCOs that deliver child and family services, with consideration to the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children involved in child protection systems, and collaborating with Safe and Supported on delivering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led, place-based commissioning models in each jurisdiction to address child and family needs.

### **Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan**

The Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan (ECCD SSP) is a key enabler of Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement. It was developed in 2021 by dedicated working groups, co-chaired by the Australian Government and SNAICC. The ECCD SSP outlines high level priorities to guide joint national effort and targeted jurisdictional actions to build a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled early childhood care and development sector.

The ECCDPP is guided by the Sector Strengthening Plan and the ECCDPP priorities are a pathway for implementing the SPP. The Sector Strengthening Plan closely aligns with this Strategy, particularly through the key areas of action in the SSP relating to workforce (actions A4, A6, A7) and capital infrastructure (actions B3 and B5).



## Early Years Strategy

The Australian Government has developed an Early Years Strategy, which sets out the Government's vision to best support Australia's children and their families.

Recognising how critical the early years are for children's development and continued success over their lifetime, the Early Years Strategy articulates how the Australian Government will prioritise and support child-centred policy development, and target investment in early years supports and services over the next 10 years. The vision of the strategy is that all children in Australia thrive in their early years.

Children can reach their full potential when nurtured by empowered and connected families who are supported by strong communities. The Early Years Strategy has four (4) priority focus areas:

1. Value the early years
  - a. Raise awareness about why early childhood matters
  - b. Embed the voices of children and their families
  - c. Empower parents, caregivers and families
2. Empower parents, caregivers and families with skills, resources and capabilities
  - a. Support parents to connect with other parents and their local community
  - b. Make supports and services responsive and inclusive to children and their parents
  - c. Move towards universal access to early childhood education and care
3. Support and work with communities
  - a. Support local solutions to local problems
  - b. Foster shared decision making
4. Strengthen accountability and coordination
  - a. Better integration, collaboration and coordination of policy, programs and services
  - b. Stronger data, research and evaluation

This Strategy will complement work occurring as part of the Early Years Strategy by driving actions and commitments that relate to priority focus areas 2 and 3. In particular, it will support the goal that all families have access to high-quality, integrated and holistic approaches to maternal and child health, parenting support and early learning services, and the importance of communities designing and delivering local solutions.

## National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy

Launched in December 2021, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy (Early Childhood Strategy) has five goals that cut across early learning, health, housing, disability, safety, wellbeing, care and development. The Early Childhood Strategy includes strong opportunities for improvements in early childhood wellbeing.<sup>10</sup>

The Early Childhood Strategy is aligned with commitments under the National Agreement and the ECCD SSP and builds on existing Australian Government commitments to support and grow the

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<sup>10</sup> National Indigenous Australians Agency 2021, 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Early Childhood Strategy'. Retrieved from: <https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/niaa-early-years-strategy-5.pdf>.



ACCO sector. Opportunities identified under Goal 4 and 5 of the Early Childhood Strategy include building the role of the ACCOs to provide support for families and communities.<sup>11</sup>

This Strategy will deliver on some of the opportunities identified under goal 4 and 5, which includes focuses on building a better service system. Specifically, the Strategy directly responds to the three key factors identified in the Early Childhood Strategy that would enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities to be active partners in building a better service system:

- community-led design of programs and services for children and families
- a strong and well-resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce
- an increase in formal partnerships and shared decision-making with governments.

### **Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families**

SNAICC was engaged by DSS in 2022 to review DSS funding to ACCOs for child and family services. The purpose of the Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families project was to identify existing knowledge and consult with ACCOs on their strengths, needs, barriers and opportunities for accessing DSS funding and delivering the DSS-funded Family and Children Activity programs.<sup>12</sup>

The report identified significant systemic barriers faced by ACCOs in accessing funding for child and family services. Barriers included competitive grant processes that advantage larger non-Indigenous organisations, reporting and administrative burdens that are not supported by core functions funding. These barriers resulted in a fundamental misalignment between how services are funded, and the services communities want and need.

Importantly, ACCOs identified that dedicated, sustainable, flexible, and sufficient funding would enable them to build upon the existing strengths of their sector by increasing the number of ACCOs and delivering services to more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

The Stronger ACCOs Stronger Families report was a key piece of evidence that was drawn upon for the evidence and research scan conducted to underpin the development of the Strategy. Specifically, the Strategy built upon the findings and recommendations from the Report to assist in identifying the overarching principles and system elements that support the transition to ACCOs. This includes ACCO funding prioritisation policies and alternative commissioning models, the need for sustainable and coordinated resourcing of ACCO services, and direct investment in ACCOs to adequately resource core functions, infrastructure and service delivery.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid, pg. 9.

<sup>12</sup> SNAICC 2022, 'Stronger ACCOs Stronger Families'. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/SNAICC-Stronger-ACCOs-Stronger-Families-report-2022.pdf>.



## Principles

The principles outlined below are designed to provide an overarching framework to guide the development of jurisdictional policies, programs and implementation plans. The principles are intended to be used when growing early and tailored supports and shifting resources to ACCOs.

The principles address relevant aspects of policy, program design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and accountability across the range of risk factors that cause interaction with the child protection system.

They are aligned with the direction and priorities of existing frameworks and agreements, particularly the four Priority Reforms under the National Agreement. The principles were informed by a policy and evidence scan and developed through the comprehensive engagement process outlined above.

Principles
<b>Principle 1 - Cultural identity and connection to culture</b>
Children and young people grow up safe, connected and supported in their family, kin, community, and culture.
<b>Principle 2 - Self-determination</b>
Self-determination is the collective right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine and control their own destiny. It is a right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to exercise autonomy in their own affairs and to maintain and strengthen distinct political, legal, economic, social and cultural institutions. <sup>13</sup>
<b>Principle 3 - Shared decision-making</b>
Shared decision-making and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, families, organisations and practitioners are genuine and recognise the need for dedicated resources, place-based approaches and commitment to ensure equity in participation between parties.
<b>Principle 4 - Sustainability</b>
A commitment to the long-term and sustainable efforts required to achieve improved outcomes.
<b>Principle 5 - Culturally responsive integrated services and systems</b>
Services and systems are culturally responsive and adopt a holistic, wrap around approach to supporting children and families, recognising that the social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing, safety, health and economic needs of families and children are interrelated.
Cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families is best achieved through the delivery of services by ACCOs, but also requires that mainstream providers continue to adapt

<sup>13</sup> This principle reflects the rights articulated in the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*, which the Australian Government formally endorsed as a signatory in 2009. United Nations (2007), *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* [Article 3, Article 4, Article 5]. Retrieved from: <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/indigenous-peoples/united-nations-declaration-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples>



their services to ensure they are culturally responsive and safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who need to or choose to access them.

**Principle 6 - Evidence-informed investment and innovation**

Investment planning and innovation is driven by evidence-informed practice and outcomes-focused approaches, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led design to ensure funding and investment is community driven and approaches are tailored to cultural contexts at the local level and contribute to building the evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led services.

**Principle 7 - Rights based investment**

Investment in child and family services ensures that children receive and access services and responses that reflect and uphold the full range of children’s rights as set out by international human rights frameworks. This includes the distinct rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It also includes all rights set out under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

**Prioritising investment in early and tailored supports**

There is a clear and pressing need to shift government investment towards earlier and tailored supports for all children, young people and families, to strengthen the social determinants of wellbeing and prevent interaction with the child protection system. The effectiveness of prevention and early supports is well documented across a range of research, which highlights that reducing risk factors for harm and strengthening child and family wellbeing can reduce the likelihood of engagement with the statutory child protection system.<sup>14,15,16</sup>

There are a range of often co-occurring individual, family, and environmental factors such as poverty, intergenerational trauma, and system level failures that increase the risk of interaction with the child protection system. To reduce these risk factors, experts highlight the importance of prioritising early and tailored supports such as strengthening parenting skills and knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Evidence also suggests that holistic strength-based approaches to delivering early supports are effective in building protective factors. These protective factors also reduce the likelihood of interaction with child protection systems. A strength-based approach leverages “what families do

<sup>14</sup> Mullan, K., & Higgins, D. (2014). A safe and supportive family environment for children: Key components and links to child outcomes (DSS Occasional Paper No. 52). Canberra: Department of Social Services. Retrieved from [www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/publications-articles/research-publications/occasional-paper-series](http://www.dss.gov.au/about-the-department/publications-articles/research-publications/occasional-paper-series)

<sup>15</sup> Higgins, D., & Dean, A. (2020). Ensuring all children get the best start in life: A population approach to early intervention and prevention. Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

<sup>16</sup> Higgins, D., Sanders, M., Lonne, B., & Richardson, D. (2019). Families—private and sacred: How to raise the curtain and implement family support from a public health perspective. In B. Lonne, D. Scott, D. Higgins, T. I. Herrenkohl (Eds.), *Re-visioning public health approaches for protecting children* (pp. 127–143). Springer Nature.

<sup>17</sup> Herrenkohl T, Leeb R & Higgins D (2016), *Public health model of child maltreatment prevention*, *Trauma, Violence and Abuse*, 17(4), 363–65.



well and explores their aspirations and hopes”.<sup>18</sup> Tailoring early supports to build on strengths within the family unit is critical to preventing the need for child protection intervention and keeping families together.<sup>19</sup> Children, young people and families experiencing disadvantage and vulnerability should be referred to early strength-based support services, with child protection services engaged only as a last resort.

Recent findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS) point to the broad and enduring impacts of child maltreatment at individual, community and societal levels.<sup>20</sup> The study recommends a coordinated approach to investing in primary prevention across portfolios, including in supports during “prenatal and postnatal periods, and in early childhood”.<sup>21</sup> This includes strengthening the layers of supports around children and families and increasing protection intervention.

In addition, evidence suggests that early and tailored support helps to avoid economic costs associated with late-stage intervention. For example, previous estimates have suggested that late intervention relating to children and young people experiencing crisis costs the Australian Government over \$15 billion per year.<sup>22</sup> Separate modelling showed that “by investing in early supports over a 10-year period, Victoria can save \$1.6 billion in the child protection and out-of-home care system alone”.<sup>23</sup> It is important to recognise that an investment ‘shift’ is not an immediate or short-term exercise. The need for parallel investment in tertiary responses will remain high in the short-term until the long-term social benefits and cost savings of investing in prevention are realised and reduce demand on child protection systems.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the ongoing impacts of colonisation and racism, including intergenerational trauma, drive the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children across all key stages of the child protection system. SNAICC’s annual Family Matters Report examines government actions to address this over-representation and the corresponding outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in child protection systems. The 2023 Family Matters Report found that in 2021-22 “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children nationwide were 5.7 times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be

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<sup>18</sup> Bromfield L, Parker R, & Sutherland K (2012), *Families with multiple and complex needs: best interests case practice model: specialist practice resource*, 23, <https://nla.gov.au/nla.obj-2900132719/view>

<sup>19</sup> SNAICC (2023), *Family Matters Report 2023*, <http://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Family-Matters-Report-2023.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> Haslam D, Mathews B, Pacella R, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Higgins D, Meinck F, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence DM and Malacova E (2023), *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, Queensland University of Technology, Accessed 4 June 2024, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/239397/>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>22</sup> Teager W, Fox S, Stafford N (2019), *How Australia can invest in children and return more: A new look at the \$15b cost of late action*, Accessed 4 June 2024, <https://colab.telethonkids.org.au/siteassets/media-docs---colab/coli/how-australia-can-invest-in-children-and-return-more---final-bn-not-embargoed.pdf>

<sup>23</sup> Social Ventures Australia (2019), *The economic case for early intervention in the child protection and out-of-home care system in Victoria*, 3, <https://www.berrystreet.org.au/uploads/main/Files/SVA-ResearchPaper-TheEconomicCaseForEarlyIntervention-2019.pdf>



reported to child protection authorities, 10.6 times more likely to be subject to a child protection order and 10.5 times more likely to be in out of home care”.<sup>24</sup>

These rates of intervention are disproportionate to the rates of child maltreatment across the broader population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children.<sup>25</sup> Systemic reform is required to address the over-representation and trajectory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the protection system and allow children to stay safely with their families. In line with the findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study (ACMS), there must be a coordinated approach to investing in primary prevention across portfolios, including in supports during “prenatal and postnatal periods, and in early childhood”.<sup>26</sup> This includes strengthening the layers of supports around children and families and increasing services that respond to the historic failure to address the drivers into the child protection system.

*“There is a constant focus on the immediate issues at hand and we need to build the evidence base and investment in primary prevention and earlier supports.” – member of the NGO Sector Reference Group*

Importantly, strength-based early supports must be holistic and tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and address the current lack of culturally safe and responsive service options, particularly in remote and regional contexts. For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been calling for holistic wrap around supports delivered in culturally safe ways.

The ACCO sector is uniquely equipped to address the underlying drivers that lead to contact with child protection through a more holistic approach to safety that focuses on healing from trauma and building strengths within families. ACCOs provide culturally safe and supportive environments that connect children and families to culture and Country and break down the barriers that prevent access to the supports and services that families need.

However, current funding and contracting systems and approaches for children and family services limit ACCOs ability to deliver services in this way. This is one of the many reasons for the under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in existing early and preventative service systems.<sup>27</sup>

It is only through adequate investment into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led solutions that we will see this story change, because what is driving these outcomes is over 250

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<sup>24</sup> SNAICC (2023), *Family Matters Report 2023*, 19, <http://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/Family-Matters-Report-2023.pdf>

<sup>25</sup> Haslam D, Mathews B, Pacella R, Scott JG, Finkelhor D, Higgins D, Meinck F, Erskine HE, Thomas HJ, Lawrence DM and Malacova E (2023), *The prevalence and impact of child maltreatment in Australia: Findings from the Australian Child Maltreatment Study: Brief Report*, Queensland University of Technology, Accessed 4 June 2024, <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/239397/>

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.



years of colonial policymaking and continuing government failure to invest in the wellbeing of families and the organisations that support them.

*“There needs to be a shift in the way that investments are decided and implemented, with a focus on what ACCOs and communities need, not what type of service the government wants to provide. Governments need to acknowledge the leadership of ACCOs and act through funding decisions, with collaboration and buy-in from across states and territories.” – Sector workshop participant*

### **National definition: Early and tailored supports**

Currently there is no nationally agreed definition of early and tailored supports that prevent children and families coming into contact with child protection. A unified understanding across jurisdictions will help to develop a shared foundation for evidence-informed policymaking, investment and evaluation, and result in a more effective and consistent approach to addressing the needs of children and families.

A commonly agreed definition will also improve cross-portfolio and interagency coordination and delivery of supports, and assist in mitigating the risk of government funding streams lacking complementary objectives and compounding fragmented support systems.

The following proposed definition has been developed through extensive input from representatives of the child and family sector and informed by a research and evidence scan:

**Early and tailored supports** are programs, services and activities that:

- provide support:
  - pre-birth and/or early in a child’s life, with a focus on the first 1000 days from conception to age 2; AND/OR
  - prior to or in the early stages of family challenges; AND/OR
  - prior to or to prevent further child protection intervention for families already engaged with child protection systems; AND
- strengthen preventative and protective factors and address risk factors for children, young people (up to age 21) and families before they escalate; AND
- may be inclusive of and linked to universal service provision, but include additional tailored elements to strengthen families; AND
- are tailored to address the drivers of child protection intervention, including reflecting the intensive support required for families with multiple and complex needs.

Strong practice elements of effective early and tailored support programs include that they:

- provide or support families to access holistic, wrap around supports such as housing and health services; AND
- strengthen protective factors that keep children, young people and families safe and strong; AND
- recognise and respond to intergenerational cycles of disadvantage and trauma; AND



- are delivered in a culturally capable, culturally driven, and strengths-based environments; AND
- keep children connected in their family, kin, community, and culture: AND
- embed the voice of children and families and empower them in goal-setting and decision-making; AND
- are accessible through multiple entry points and referral pathways supported by adequate resourcing, to maximise the capacity of families to engage with a range of supports; AND
- prioritise the prevention of child protection intervention through early and tailored supports, while also ensuring access to tailored supports once a child or family has entered the child protection system; AND
- incorporate a focus on supporting families early in a child’s life, including the provision of pre-birth supports and preparing parents for parenthood; AND
- focus on and support families to engage with a range of universal supports alongside ‘early and tailored’ support; AND
- achieve measurable outcomes in addressing and preventing the underlying social determinants of child protection intervention.

#### National definition: Child and family services

In addition to a national definition of early and tailored supports, sector feedback has outlined the need for a common definition of child and family services to ensure families are able to access consistent information and services across the sector. Establishing a common definition will help to ensure better intra and inter-government coordination of investment into child and family support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and enable a future state of innovation to respond more holistically.

Without a common definition of child and family services, government funding streams may lack complementary objectives leading to funding and service gaps for key functions. A lack of a common definition also impacts effective data collection and analysis of the effectiveness of investment in these services. For example, in its investigation into child and family expenditure in the Northern Territory, the Productivity Commission found that the lack of this definition resulted in multiple Territory and Commonwealth Government funding streams with different objectives, and no common unit for reporting location data.<sup>28</sup> It is recommended that, once developed, a common definition of child and family services be universally adopted by governments to improve coordination and reporting of relevant services and funding.

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<sup>28</sup> Productivity Commission (2020), *Expenditure on Children in the Northern Territory: Study Report*, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/nt-children/report>



Sector and government feedback has advised a common definition of child and family services should:

- be developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in line with the shared-decision-making principles and strong partnership elements within the National Agreement
- enable parents accessing adult focused services to be viewed holistically in the context of their parenting role
- include community healing and supports as foundational to success in family services
- include the definition of ACCO child and family service providers in the system elements, in line with the National Agreement
- consider alignment with statutory and non-statutory responses and definitions
- consider alignment with different organisational, community and geographic contexts

### System Elements – prioritising investment in earlier supports

The system elements outlined in this section of the Strategy are the levers, mechanisms, approaches, political mindsets, and processes available to governments to support investment in targeted and early supports, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. The system elements are aligned with the principles underpinning the Strategy and aim to provide an overarching framework for operationalising the transition of investment, whilst being flexible to account for the differences across systems at the jurisdictional level.

The system elements were primarily shaped by input from representatives across the child and family service sector and are supported by an evidence scan that focused on identifying the practical elements of system design required to overcome long-standing barriers to investment in early and tailored supports.

<b>Prioritising Investment in Earlier Supports</b>
<b>System Element 1 - Evidence-informed investment and innovation</b>
Investment decisions must draw on the evidence base and sector knowledge that promotes prevention, whilst further investing in research and evaluation to build the evidence base about what works to address the needs and support the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families. This includes adequately investing in organisations to support rigorous, collaborative and context specific evaluation and knowledge translation.
<b>System Element 2 - Development of legislation, policy, and frameworks</b>
Relevant legislation, policy and frameworks (both updated/amended <u>and</u> newly developed) must prioritise early supports and strengthen protective factors relating to child safety. These must be consistent with the best interests of the child and family and have clear language and definitions of key concepts to promote consistency across the sector.
<b>System Element 3 - Budget decisions and funding processes including contracting</b>
Budget decisions and funding processes must adequately resource early support, address gaps in existing service provision and consider future avoided costs and economic benefits. Reliable,



sufficient and long-term funding is needed to achieve long-term positive outcomes. For early supports that sit across government portfolios, there is a need for responses and resourcing to be coordinated to ensure early supports receive sufficient and sustainable funding, particularly for organisations that provide a range of different services and supports.

#### **System Element 4 - Community leadership and accountability, including by ACCOs**

Community leadership, accountability and shared decision making must be incorporated in all decisions regarding children and families. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations often prioritise a focus on early support, and that leadership can play a huge role in reorienting the system. Alongside broader community leadership in child and family services, this element focuses on investing in ACCO leadership as essential partners in program and service design and delivery.

#### **System Element 5 - Collaboration and buy-in across different levels and portfolios of government**

Strengthening family supports requires multidisciplinary responses that extend across multiple portfolios. Collaboration and integration between government departments, within and across jurisdictions, including cross-portfolio buy-in at local service, departmental and ministerial levels is crucial to reduce siloes and adopt a holistic approach to service delivery. This includes collaboration between national and state/territory governments including national levers to support State and Territory Governments in prioritising early and targeted services for families, transferring investment to the ACCO sector and growing ACCO sectors.

#### **System Element 6 - Independent oversight and governance**

Adequate resourcing of existing organisations that have the cultural authority to conduct independent oversight and governance of systems. This includes promoting increased accountability and independent oversight to drive system reform, hold governments, organisations and systems to account and avoid repeating approaches that do not work.

Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates for children across the country have a critical role in ensuring the accountability of systems for protecting children's rights and improving outcomes.

Empowered, legislated and resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners for Children and Young People are key to keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children safe within systems and ensuring their rights are at the centre of responses.

#### *Examples of best-practice implementation actions*

Implementation pathways for operationalising the system elements may vary across jurisdictions, noting that jurisdictions may be at different starting points and have existing initiatives underway to grow early supports and shift resources and responsibilities towards ACCOs.

The following table provides examples of best-practice actions that can be taken to operationalise the system elements for prioritising investment in earlier supports. These actions were developed based on the review of relevant evidence and in consultation with senior child and family service sector representatives, including ACCO peaks and service providers with expertise in culturally



safe and evidence-informed practice. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are encouraged to consider these actions in developing tailored implementation plans in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and peak bodies, adapted to their jurisdictional context. Further information on best-practice implementation pathways, including examples of detailed sub-actions are included at **Appendix C** (pages 69 – 73).



Examples of best-practice actions – prioritising investment in earlier supports	Responsible parties
<p>1. Ensure a comprehensive policy framework for the prioritisation of early and tailored support in investment, program and practice development is in place in each jurisdiction, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligning policy frameworks to the National Child and Family Investment strategy, and</li> <li>• Incorporating the national definition of early and tailored supports in jurisdictional policy frameworks.</li> </ul> <p>2. Review expenditure in programs and conduct a re-prioritisation of investment exercise to better align in scope funding streams with the principles and system elements in the Strategy</p> <p>3. Ensure the outcomes of the expenditure re-prioritisation exercise are applied through a structured process of recommissioning, replacing or re-engineering identified programs.</p>	<p>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</p>
<p>4. Increase pathways and leverage existing mechanisms to embed the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into policy and program design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and accountability across the social determinants of child protection involvement.</p> <p>5. Build a comprehensive evidence base on early and tailored support models and practice, including consolidating existing evidence, with an emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and evidence that reflects the voice, needs and priorities of children, families and communities.</p> <p>6. Partner with communities, service providers and peaks to redesign programs and funding models for early and tailored support to better align with the needs of children, families and communities.</p> <p>7. Build greater flexibility into programs and funding contracts for relevant services to enable community-led design of early and tailored support models and ensure practice is not constrained by rigid program requirements that are misaligned to local communities, contexts and cultures.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks and service providers)</li> <li>• National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> <li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</li> </ul>
<p>8. Design a national early and tailored support funding program with Commonwealth, state and territory funding contributions, that considers the need for multi-agency cooperation and coordination, administered at the state and territory level, to help address the</p>	<p>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</p>



Examples of best-practice actions – prioritising investment in earlier supports	Responsible parties
<p>disproportionate investment in tertiary systems and address gaps in early and tailored support service availability.</p> <p>9. Incorporate requirements to provide early and tailored support to children and families into relevant state, territory and/or national legislative frameworks. Where relevant, based on the varying legislative responsibilities of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, legislative provisions should reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A requirement in relevant child protection legislation for active efforts to provide all reasonable supports to families prior to child removal to ensure a child can be safely cared for in the child’s family, community and culture</li> <li>• A requirement to implement all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts</li> <li>• A requirement that a preventive support service to a child’s family is prioritised over other services wherever that is consistent with the best interests of the child, and</li> <li>• An explicit obligation of government to resource and make available early and tailored support services, including culturally safe and appropriate service delivered through ACCOs.</li> </ul> <p>10. Develop jurisdictional early intervention investment frameworks in collaboration with relevant Departments of Treasury and Finance that include requirements to forecast future avoided costs in new policy proposals to ensure government budget decision-making takes account of both the economic and social benefits of investing in early and tailored supports.</p> <p>11. Improve cross-border collaboration between governments and child and family service agencies to strengthen coordination and provision of supports to families who have contact with multiple state and territory service systems, with a focus on ensuring the timely availability of early and tailored supports.</p> <p>12. Invest in strengthening referral pathways between universal services, such as education and maternal child health, and early and tailored supports, as well as initiatives to integrate a child and family focus in adult services that relate to the social determinants of child protection intervention such as mental health, housing, family violence and drug and alcohol services.</p>	



Examples of best-practice actions – prioritising investment in earlier supports	Responsible parties
<p>13. Strengthen information and data sharing across portfolios and jurisdictions relating to the social determinants of child protection involvement while maintaining adherence to relevant privacy and data sharing legislation and regulatory frameworks, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships in data sharing aligned to Priority Reform 4 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and</li><li>• Safeguards to ensure a focus on early support rather than surveillance and intervention.</li></ul>	



## Shifting funding towards the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled sector

ACCOs have delivered culturally appropriate support services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families for decades. They provide a means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to exercise control over services that are delivered to their communities, representing an important act of self-determination.<sup>29</sup> Through this connection to community, ACCOs are uniquely positioned to operate in a way that is centred on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, doing and knowing, ensuring the services they offer are culturally safe and tailored to their communities.<sup>30</sup> ACCOs typically provide holistic and culturally responsive models of care that include integrated wrap around supports for families.<sup>31</sup>

ACCOs are best placed for delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families, in accordance with the Priority Reforms agreed by all Commonwealth, State and Territory governments through the National Agreement.<sup>32</sup> These include the commitment of all governments to build the Aboriginal community-controlled sector, acknowledging that Aboriginal community control is an integral part of self-determination, and Aboriginal community-controlled services are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>33</sup> The proportionate shift of investment for the design and delivery of child and family supports to ACCOs is critical to closing the gap.

For decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have been saying that families thrive when they have access to holistic, wraparound services delivered in culturally safe ways, but that the current funding structures for child and family services limit ACCOs' ability to operate in this way. Despite their invaluable role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, the current system fails to meet the needs of ACCOs in delivering supports to their communities.<sup>34</sup> ACCOs are regularly forced to compete for short-term and inadequate funding against non-Indigenous providers, many of which operate on a larger scale with greater resources to support their ability to participate in government tender processes. In transferring investment towards ACCOs, there is an urgent need for fundamental changes to the way governments approach investment in ACCOs, alongside scaffolding and supporting ACCOs to take on this work.

The non-Indigenous child and family sector has a central role in supporting this transition, to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care, re-unite children and families and ensure children and young people grow up safe, strong, connected to culture, country and kin. Specifically, non-Indigenous organisations in the sector that have

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<sup>29</sup> SNAICC (2023), *Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families Final Report*, 18, <https://www.snaicc.org.au/resources/stronger-accos-stronger-families-report/>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, 19.

<sup>31</sup> SNAICC, 2023, [Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families](#).

<sup>32</sup> Australian Government, *National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Priority Reforms*, Accessed 15 December 2023, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/priority-reforms>.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



resourcing for delivering services and responsibility for targets related to improving outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, must work with local ACCOs to take tangible steps towards commencing and completing transition processes.

This includes upholding the importance of ACCOs leading transfer or transition processes from non-Indigenous organisations, to ensure a genuine and meaningful process and avoid tokenistic practices.

*“Genuine shared decision making and partnerships are critical when non-Indigenous services and government agencies are working with ACCOs. A legitimate shift in power is needed to make real change and transcend rhetoric.” – Government workshop participant*

### **System Elements – shifting funding towards the ACCO sector**

The system elements outlined in this section are required to support the phased transfer of resources and responsibilities for child and family service delivery toward ACCOs.

The system elements are readily available to Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments and provide a tangible yet flexible framework to meet their obligations under the National Agreement to:

- Build and sustain a thriving ACCO sector
- Drive funding of ACCOs that is proportional to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
- Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led place-based commissioning models.

The system elements were shaped primarily by input from representatives across the child and family service sector and are supported by a review of the available evidence base.



System Elements
<p><b>System Element 1 - ACCO funding prioritisation policies and alternative commissioning models<sup>35</sup></b></p>
<p>In line with the National Agreement, State and territory governments have committed to increasing the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs.</p> <p>The commitment of governments to increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs can be operationalised through policy and program instruments, such as Aboriginal organisation first procurement policies and quarantined funding or percentage-based allocation to ACCOs based on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.</p> <p>This element also includes going beyond funding prioritisation policies and moving towards a transformational shift to alternative commissioning models, in line with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement.</p>
<p><b>System Element 2 - Sustainable and coordinated resourcing of ACCO services</b></p>
<p>The short-term nature of funding cycles has a significant negative impact on children and families and ACCOs delivering these services.</p> <p>ACCOs often receive small, short-term grants with complex reporting requirements, making their funding fragmented and unsustainable. The uncertainty and instability of this type of funding impacts service delivery through ‘stop-start’ programs that undermine community trust and prevent ACCOs from being able to build stable local workforces and invest in organisational growth and development.</p> <p>Longer and recurrent funding cycles, and dedicated funding for organisational growth and development (in addition to service delivery funding) will help to support stable and consistent service delivery. A coordinated funding approach from all government agencies to supporting the transition will also assist in establishing best practice policy and influence funding decisions.</p>
<p><b>System Element 3 - ACCO Workforce Development Strategies in all jurisdictions</b></p>
<p>Demand for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce will increase with the transfer of investment to the sector. Recruitment and retention of highly trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will be critical to the positive child and family outcomes that ACCOs and government are both striving towards. Strengthening the workforce relies on jurisdictional commitment and investment to the co-design and implementation of new or expanded workforce development strategies that include a focus on the needs of the ACCO sector. Workforce development requires investment in ACCO-led programs and initiatives to support workforce</p>

<sup>35</sup> Actions to implement the System Elements, particularly Elements 1 and 4 of *Shifting funding towards the ACCO sector* and Element 3 of *Prioritising investment in earlier supports*, require governments to reflect the Strategy in creating, updating or implementing obligations under Federation Funding Agreements (FFAs) related to child and family services. The System Elements are designed to inform the individual and collective actions of governments to drive increased investment in ACCOs to deliver child and family supports.



attraction, recruitment and retention such as through supporting workers to gain necessary qualifications or providing on-the-job support and mentorship. This may include comprehensive engagement with national and jurisdictional peak bodies to provide backbone support to services in the development of workforce strengthening initiatives. Workforce development strategies also require investment in education and training to strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to meet the requirements of roles within ACCOs.

#### **System Element 4 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision-making in funding development and allocation<sup>35</sup>**

There is a need to move towards ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision making’ in national and jurisdictional program and service design for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.<sup>36</sup> This element does not conflict with commitments to ‘shared’ decision-making under the National Agreement. It rather enables the commitment to support self-determination through shared decision-making (clause 32(c)(v)), which necessitates that governments recognise, respect and support the cultural authority and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to determine what resources are needed and how they are best allocated to support their children and families.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision making in funding processes is crucial, as government-funded programs often do not meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs or support holistic care models. This includes transforming budgeting, contracting and funding processes within governments to ensure funding reflects and aligns with community needs, priorities and aspirations. It is also critical to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in decisions about the resources and responsibilities that are being transferred from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs. The development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commissioning policies, processes and frameworks are a key mechanism to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision-making for funding allocation.

#### **System Element 5 - Direct investment in ACCOs to adequately resource core functions, infrastructure and service delivery**

In line with Clause 45a of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap strong sectors require sustained capacity building and investment in ACCOs. Clause 45d of the National Agreement requires that ACCOs who deliver common services have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities.

ACCOs deliver holistic and integrated services that are not appropriately covered by current funding models and amounts. As current funding often falls short of meeting the needs of children and families, ACCOs fill service gaps by doing unfunded or underfunded work at their own cost.

<sup>36</sup> Action 2e of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 (Safe and Supported) commits to establishing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led commissioning models to increase community control over funding priorities and allocation. This system element does not propose that, by transforming these processes, governments should forego their Constitutional and legislated responsibilities to ensure probity, value for money, and transparency in the allocation and expenditure of public funds.



Many ACCOs operate at a small scale on the individual community level, which supports their cultural authority and local responsiveness. However, they often lack the economies of scale of larger non-Indigenous providers that are required to resource core operations and infrastructure.

Direct investment in ACCOs is required to adequately resource core functions, infrastructure and service delivery. Direct investment has resulted in substantial growth of the ACCO sector in states like Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD) (e.g. Queensland Child and Family Wellbeing Services; Victoria Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care).

Although there is a place for sector and workforce strengthening partnerships and non-Indigenous services have a role to play in the transition of service delivery, there are risks for potential power imbalances and the superficial engagement of ACCOs. Where there are partnerships in place, there must be an intentional approach to embed self-determination and genuine shared decision-making.

#### *Best-practice implementation action examples*

The following table provides examples of best-practice actions that can be taken to operationalise the system elements for shifting investment towards the ACCO sector. These actions were developed based on the review of relevant evidence and in consultation with senior child and family service sector representatives, including ACCO peaks and service providers, who are experts in culturally safe and evidence-informed practice. Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments are encouraged to consider these actions in developing tailored implementation plans in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and peak bodies, adapted to their jurisdictional context. Further information on best-practice implementation pathways, including examples of detailed sub-actions are included at **Appendix C** (pages 69 – 73).



Examples of best-practice actions – shifting funding towards the ACCO sector	Responsible parties
<p>14. Quarantine a proportion of child and family service funding for delivery through ACCOs that is equivalent to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including establishing funding targets for child and family services programs.</p> <p>Giving consideration to local and jurisdictional context and community priorities, targets should be developed using the following guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) where a program is targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (through either target population or service areas with predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations), an amount of funding that is proportionate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users and populations in the relevant programs in local and jurisdictional contexts will be available only to ACCOs</li> <li>b) where a program is targeted for vulnerable children and families, a proportion of funding based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family need in local and jurisdictional contexts (using representation in out-of-home care as a proxy indicator) will be available only to ACCOs</li> <li>c) where a program is targeted for the general population of children and families a suitable proportion of funding will be available only to ACCOs, acknowledging the need for higher focus on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through universal provision to address inequities and achieve Closing the Gap Targets<sup>37</sup></li> </ul> <p>Note: This guidance is intended for governments to consider in developing targets that are most appropriate within their individual jurisdictional contexts.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> </ul>

<sup>37</sup> Targets may vary based on individual jurisdictional contexts, including the capacity of ACCOs to meet service demand based on the targets and the parallel work of governments to support and invest in that capacity.



Examples of best-practice actions – shifting funding towards the ACCO sector	Responsible parties
<p>15. Build government capacity to work more effectively with and support the growth of ACCOs. Actions should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build awareness and understanding of government staff about the value and importance of ACCO service delivery and the role ACCOs play in the community</li> <li>• engage with existing and emerging partnership structures to undertake shared decision-making in program design and funding allocation, such as the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership and Safe and Supported governance bodies at the national level, and aligned state and territory partnership structures</li> <li>• fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-designed training on implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision making for government officials involved in relevant funding development and allocation processes</li> <li>• address structural bias and racism and increase cultural competence in procurement requirements and processes</li> <li>• utilise and strengthen existing accountability mechanisms to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through peak bodies, Commissioners, and partnerships at community, jurisdictional and national levels.</li> </ul> <p>16. Engage with ACCOs to identify and scope the skills and capability needs of their current and future workforce in line with planned transition and growth under Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. This process should consider opportunities for a collective workforce approach across relevant Closing the Gap priority areas and should include engagement with ACCO peaks to understand sector-wide needs in regions, states, territories and nationally.</p> <p>17. Develop new and/or expand existing workforce development strategies focused on developing the ACCO workforce, including through the supply of new entrants, retention and wellbeing, skills development and building effective workforce foundations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>• National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> </ul>
<p>18. Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to meet the requirements of roles within ACCOs, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensuring pay parity between ACCO, governments and non-Indigenous agencies</li> <li>• Targeted initiatives to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attain qualifications matched to sector needs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>



Examples of best-practice actions – shifting funding towards the ACCO sector	Responsible parties
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACCO designed and delivered cultural safety and competence training for non-Indigenous workers, and</li> <li>• Investment in ACCOs to support the training and development needs of staff.</li> </ul>	
<p>19. Simplify and tailor funding allocation and reporting processes to privilege ACCO service delivery and reduce administrative burden while maintaining robust and accountable processes, including:<sup>38</sup></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implementing relational, non-competitive funding processes that enable community design and delivery of services aligned to community needs and priorities, and</li> <li>• Reducing and simplifying funding reporting and administration requirements.</li> </ul> <p>20. Review program funding for child and family service programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and align funding allocations with the full cost of effective ACCO service delivery, including capital infrastructure, core operational funding, wage parity, and workforce development costs. The timing of this activity should allow for notification of changes to program funding to be provided well in advance of program funding renewal/cessation periods.</p>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments
<p>21. Provide sustainable and dedicated funding for organisational development activities and supports for ACCOs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks and service providers)</li> </ul>
<p>22. Develop State and Territory plans and processes for ensuring jurisdictional Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People are established, legislated and fully empowered in line with the Minimum Requirements for National, State and Territory Commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• State and Territory Governments</li> </ul>
<p>23. Ensure the National Child and Family Investment Strategy is reflected in new and existing market strategies developed under Safe and</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> </ul>

<sup>38</sup> Action 2g of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 (Safe and Supported) commits to reforming funding models and procurement policies to direct proportionate funding and address systemic barriers to support the growth of the ACCO sector. This best-practice example action suggests options to reform funding processes and reduce barriers to the growth of the ACCO sector. It's important that funding and reporting processes are robust and maintain accountability.



Examples of best-practice actions – shifting funding towards the ACCO sector	Responsible parties
Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, Action 2(c): “Develop a market strategy to support ACCO capacity and establish market transition approaches that increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs. This includes mapping the growth, spread and location of new ACCOs and building the capability of existing ACCOs against where the need is going to be across a jurisdiction.”	
24. Where partnerships with non-Indigenous organisations are used as a mechanism to support ACCO development and transition funds to ACCOs, ensure ACCOs have the option to become the lead funding recipients to address power imbalance and ensure genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership in partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks and service providers)</li> </ul>

## Innovation Fund

As part of the Strategy, DSS is establishing an \$8.5 million Innovation Fund to trial key principles and elements from the Strategy in selected locations across Australia.<sup>39</sup> The Innovation Fund focuses on supporting the growth of early and tailored supports and driving a proportionate shift in investment for child and family support services towards the ACCO sector, in communities across Australia.

The Innovation Fund will:

- Trial methods for implementing the principles, system elements and practical mechanisms developed under the Investment Strategy, to identify practical learnings from the process of shifting investment and resources, including the key challenges and opportunities experienced by participating organisations, and better understand what supports may be required to facilitate the broader implementation of the Investment Strategy.
- Aim to improve support for children and families and achieve improved outcomes in those locations.

DSS will commission an external evaluation of the Innovation Fund to evaluate the outcomes by 2027. Evaluation of initiatives will be co-designed and undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations.

This Strategy and evaluation of the Innovation Fund will help guide government’s future funding decisions for the child and family sector, and learnings will also influence how funding is allocated for new and renewed programs.

<sup>39</sup> For more information on the Innovation Fund, please see the Australian Government’s Grant Connect website: <https://www.grants.gov.au/Go/Show?GoUuid=8b869b96-fc70-4b2b-b058-2d85369bfd62>.



## Implementing the principles and system elements

Commonwealth, State and Territory governments will agree the principles and system elements through endorsement of the Strategy. To ensure accountability and transparency in the implementation of this Strategy, in line with the commitments made through Safe and Supported, all jurisdictions will commit to developing implementation plans through jurisdictional shared decision-making. All jurisdictional implementation plans will be submitted to the Safe and Supported SOC for oversight and comment within 12 months of the Strategy’s final endorsement by the SDMC, after formal endorsement occurs through state and territory-level shared decision-making arrangements. Jurisdictions may seek discussion and early input to their implementation plans through the appropriate Safe and Supported Working Group, currently the System Leadership Working Group (SLWVG), however the SOC will be responsible for final comment on all implementation plans.

Implementation plans will deliver on a range of activities under Safe and Supported, primarily Activities 2b – 2g in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026, as set out in the below table. The 12-month timeframe set in this Strategy for establishing jurisdictional implementation plans aligns with the timeframes set for these existing commitments:<sup>40</sup>

### Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026: Action 2 (Investing in the Community Controlled Sector)

Activity	Timing
<p>2b) Co-design with ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family peaks (or leadership where no peak yet exists) a plan to strengthen ACCOs, which considers their aspirations, evidence-based service models of culturally appropriate care, and workforce and infrastructure needs.</p> <p>2c) Develop a market strategy to support ACCO capacity and establish market transition approaches that increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs. This includes mapping the growth, spread and location of new ACCOs and building the capability of existing ACCOs against where the need is going to be across a jurisdiction.</p>	1 year (2023)
<p>2d) Develop jurisdictional frameworks and plans for recommissioning family support services to achieve quarantined, proportional funding directed to ACCOs to provide services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. This may be through redistributing existing resources to ACCOs.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Jurisdictional plans include specific priorities for family support services that address the issues associated with child protection intervention, including harmful use of drugs and alcohol, domestic violence and mental health.</li> </ul>	2 years (2024 and 2025)

<sup>40</sup> Department of Social Services (2023) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 20023-2026*, 29-30. Available from: [https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01\\_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf](https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/01_2023/final-first-action-plan.pdf)



<p>2e) Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led, place-based commissioning models to increase local control over funding priorities and allocation.</p> <p>2f) Commence implementation of new commissioning models in each jurisdiction and monitor progress and results in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>	<p>1–3 years (2023 to 2025)</p>
<p>2g) Reform funding models and procurement policies to direct proportionate funding and address systemic barriers to support the growth of the ACCO sector, to ensure it is funded in line with the level of system representation and community need.</p>	<p>1–5 years (2023 to 2027)</p>

Operationalising this Strategy will require governments and the children and family sector to think and act differently to integrate new ways of working in processes, systems, approaches and decision making. Genuine commitment and action are required from all responsible parties to progress outcomes under Safe and Supported and contribute to achieving targets under the National Agreement.

*‘You can’t change any system without strong and committed leadership from both sides - governments and the sector. Coupled with strong governance and strategic implementation - we need leaders who are going to be brave’ – member of the ACCO panel.*

It is important that implementation commences promptly across governments and the sector; individually, and as a collective, to support the transition. The suggested implementation approach for the Strategy considers existing work underway, including the transition of investment towards ACCOs and steps towards treaties in some jurisdictions, and seeks to build upon achievements and elements of success across the country. To ensure action and accountability for genuine change, the Strategy aims to support jurisdictions to develop clear commitments and timeframes for implementation.

There must be a well-considered, planned and coordinated approach to shifting funding, including through the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies. Aligning efforts with the best practice implementation guidance where appropriate and committing to developing implementation plans will assist in ensuring effective operationalisation of the strategy, while allowing flexibility for implementation approaches that are tailored to specific jurisdictional and community contexts.



### Scope of funding streams

Each Commonwealth, State and Territory Government must consider how they can best implement the principles and system elements within new and existing funding commitments, decisions, policy and program design.

Broadly, the types of services or existing funding streams that the Strategy should be applied to include, but are not limited to:

- Relevant ceasing contracts and program streams across the social determinants of child safety and wellbeing
- Children and family services
- Parenting and early years support
- Child and maternal health services
- Children and family intensive support services
- Family support and family wellbeing services
- Carer support
- Family and domestic violence services
- Mental health services
- Child protection services, including protective intervention, out-of-home care and leaving care services

*“There is a need to move away from short term funding and for funders to fully understand the benefit of funding ACCOs to provide services – including cost savings and ultimately many non-Indigenous services are not providing the supports needed or driving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.” – Government workshop participant*

Responsibilities for implementing the Strategy extend beyond the remit of primary child protection and social service agencies, and each government must consider the agencies that need to be involved in driving implementation given the varying division of portfolio responsibilities in each jurisdiction.

### Resourcing

It is critical that there is a real commitment to adequate funding for implementation to ensure accountability and operationalisation of the Strategy.

As the responsibility for implementation is shared across Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, so too is the responsibility to allocate adequate resourcing. Investment must be proportional and equitable, understanding the different context specific cost factors across each state and territory (this includes factors such as geographical challenges, child and family needs, population, demographics, remoteness, workforce costs and service accessibility.)



As part of initial implementation planning, governments should collaborate to identify the resourcing requirements and appropriate funding to support effective implementation.


*“It’s also about how we understand, operationalise, and report on that flexibility in timeframes - we need to enable community pacing but guard against delays and a lack of accountability” – Sector representative and workshop participant*

### **Key considerations**

In addition to the core principles (see pages 21-22), there are some key considerations that should be applied across the implementation process. These considerations are drawn from guiding policy frameworks such as the National Agreement and reflect best practice in implementation.

In line with the objectives of the Strategy, the following advice should be considered and incorporated into implementation planning and delivery:

- The voice of all children and families should guide decisions that impact both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities. Consultation with relevant peak bodies, ACCOs, service providers and community organisations that have trusted relationships with children and families can be leveraged to assist with embedding the voice of children and families in decision-making.
- It is critical that the implementation process preserves the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to choose the services they access. There must be a desire at the local community level for funding and service delivery responsibilities to be shifted to the ACCO sector. Similarly, some ACCOs may not aspire to expand their service delivery, particularly when doing so may create additional legal, governance and compliance requirements. In these circumstances there is a need to consider whether the desire to expand service delivery is being limited by the system requirements, lack of supports and investment for ACCO development, and limited resources for program development and delivery. Removing systemic barriers to ACCO growth and development is critical alongside supporting local needs and aspirations through the development of locally determined strategies. Comprehensive engagement with national and jurisdictional ACCO service and peak infrastructure will help to ensure that investment processes and outcomes are genuinely responsive to the needs and desires of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ACCOs.
- Government processes should adhere to the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty, including by ensuring that ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities design, own, oversee and have access to data, including government-held data, about their communities, to inform community-led decision making in investment processes.
- Governments should increase needs-based approaches to service funding and economic modelling that is based on the identification of detailed and context-specific community need and cost factors (this includes factors such as child and family needs, population, demographics, remoteness, workforce costs and service accessibility).

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- The transition of funding is not a cost neutral exchange, and additional funds should be made available prior to and during the transitioning of funding and services to ACCOs to ensure that these organisations are able to implement appropriate infrastructure, governance and organisational support to acquire the new, and/or additional work. When developing implementation plans, Governments should consider and incorporate the time and investment required ahead of commencing activities.
  - Ensure funding prioritisation decisions are made well in advance of program funding expiring, to allow sufficient time for a structured process of recommissioning, replacing or re-engineering programs.
  - Investment decisions should consider the principle of least coercive intervention and practice – for example, providing families with support outside of statutory child protection wherever possible.
  - The leadership and authority of ACCOs in the sector should be formally acknowledged, and there is a need to reduce the reliance on partnership arrangements led by non-Indigenous organisations (particularly long-term arrangements) in which funding for ACCOs is delivered through sub-contracting arrangements controlled by governments or non-Indigenous NGOs.
  - Implementation planning should consider opportunities to maximise the collective impact of child and family supports by strengthening linkages between initiatives at the national level, including through improved information and data sharing across sectors and jurisdictions, while maintaining adherence to relevant privacy and data sharing legislation and regulatory frameworks.

## Implementation guidance

The Strategy is underpinned by research, best practice and implementation experience, all of which have helped to inform practical guidance and government implementation plan templates.

A range of practical guidance on the strategic and operational aspects of shifting funding and functions to ACCOs has been consolidated to support governments to implement the Strategy. SNAICC has also drawn on its extensive existing suite of tools and training materials to inform the guidance to jurisdictions on practical implementation processes. Local conversations between non-Indigenous organisations and ACCOs relating to the transfer of funding and responsibilities can also be taking place to support governments in implementing the transition.

This guidance includes:

- Implementation plan templates to be completed by State and Territory Governments and Commonwealth Agencies responsible for child and family services, to support the identification of tangible actions and reporting of progress
- Examples of best practice actions for governments to consider adopting in their tailored implementation plans
- Key implementation resources to support the shift

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- Illustrative case studies demonstrating examples of promising practice and live learnings to draw upon to support the transition to ACCOs

### Key implementation resources

Some key implementation resources to support the transfer of funding and transition of services to ACCOs are in **Appendix A**, including:

- SNAICC's Genuine Partnerships resources, audit tool, training program and guidance materials that support genuine partnership of non-Indigenous providers and government agencies with ACCOs to facilitate increased service delivery roles and funding transfer to ACCOs.
- SNAICC's ACCO Leadership Transition Framework, which was developed to inform and guide the transition of the Connected Beginnings backbone role from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs where there is agreement and support from the community.
- The Stronger ACCOs Stronger Families Report, that draws on research and consultation with the ACCO sector on the barriers to ACCOs accessing government funding for child and family services and what is required to overcome them. The report identifies significant systemic barriers that ACCOs face in accessing funding within the Families and Children Activity program administered by DSS and has lessons and recommendations that can be applied across children and family services more broadly.

These resources provide important tools to support transition process and have been used in a number of settings across the sector. The resources are readily available to be used and can be found on SNAICC's website at <https://www.snaicc.org.au/resources/>.

### Illustrative case studies

A range of organisations across the child and family sector are undertaking the transition of services and transfer of resources delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, towards the ACCO sector.

There are significant examples of promising practice that showcase the strength and importance of ACCOs, and that have important learnings for how to increase ACCO delivered services. These examples demonstrate the commitment to partnerships, community-led processes, place-based approaches and local decision making.

Examples of live learnings from the following organisations, including SNAICC's role in facilitating community led processes, are at **Appendix B**.

### Examples of best practice actions

The system elements will inform tangible actions for all Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments to meet their commitments under the National Agreement, alongside ACCOs, peaks and sector partners. Jurisdictions will identify these actions and implementation timeframes through the development of tailored implementation plans.

Implementation pathways and timeframes for operationalising the system elements may vary across jurisdictions, noting that jurisdictions may be at different starting points and have existing



initiatives underway to grow early supports and shift resources and responsibilities towards ACCOs.

The actions listed at **Appendix C** are intended to provide best practice examples of pathways that can be taken to operationalise the system elements. Commonwealth Agencies and State and Territory Governments are not expected to commit to all of these actions but should consider them in developing tailored implementation plans. Where possible, the example actions are aligned with commitments under Safe and Supported.

### Implementation plan template

A major difference between Safe and Supported and other frameworks is that the Leadership Group is at the decision-making table with equal status to governments. Working in partnership enabled the development of strategic action plans that have the potential to make a significant difference to improving outcomes for children and their families.

Implementation of the Strategy must progress with the same level of shared decision-making that governs the delivery of Safe and Supported and its Action Plans.

While national consistency is desirable and an aim underpinning Safe and Supported, jurisdictional readiness and contexts will vary and require different implementation approaches. The implementation plan template allows flexibility for jurisdictions to determine how they operationalise the strategy through tailored actions and activities, based on their existing and planned efforts, needs, priorities and aspirations. This will help to ensure that the Strategy can be implemented across all jurisdictions in a way that works within their local policy and funding context.

It will be important that governments communicate across portfolios to outline the new activities they will undertake to implement the strategy, alongside planned or existing activities that are already underway.

An Implementation plan template for governments to complete is at **Appendix D**.

## Accountability

### Endorsement of the Strategy

In line with Safe and Supported governance, the Strategy requires endorsement from the Shared Decision-Making Committee (SDMC). In accordance with Priority Reform One of the National Agreement, the SDMC is guided by the principle that decision-making is shared equally between Governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The SDMC brings Community Services Ministers and the Leadership Group together for the purpose of decision-making for Safe and Supported. This Committee role includes:

- Leading Safe and Supported strategic direction and oversight;
- Resolving complex policy and implementation issues where the Safe and Supported Senior Oversight Committee (SOC) has not been able to reach consensus on a matter requiring decision;
- Monitoring implementation progress, reporting and evaluation activities.



The SDMC is the final decision maker for the adoption of the Strategy, and will oversee delivery of the implementation plans that will operationalise the Strategy.

*“Governments must be held to account – we cannot keep having this conversation for the next ten to twenty years.” – Member of the NGO Sector Reference Group*

### Endorsement of implementation plans

Jurisdictional implementation plans are critical to operationalising this Strategy and making meaningful progress towards embedding the principles and system elements outlined. The SOC will provide oversight and comment on all jurisdictional implementation plans to promote national consistency and accountability. Formal endorsement of implementation plans will be the responsibility of individual governments through shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives in each jurisdiction. Implementation plans must be submitted by all jurisdictions to the SOC within 12 months of the Strategy’s endorsement by the SDMC.<sup>41</sup>

### Tracking and sharing progress against implementation plans

Regular reporting against implementation plans will assist in tracking the delivery of commitments against timeframes, and public reporting requirements will support accountability to communities and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for achieving outcomes – such as those set out in the Safe and Supported Outcomes Framework and Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes Framework (detailed at pp. 12-13 above), as well as Target 12 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Information reported against Investment Strategy implementation plans will also feed into overarching Safe and Supported evaluation, pursuant to the upcoming Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Monitoring and Evaluation Strategy (which are expected to be finalised in mid-2026).

In the first instance, accountability and regular reporting requirements to monitor progress will follow the processes and mechanisms of the Safe and Supported governance structure. This includes:

- All signatories of Safe and Supported are accountable for supporting the implementation of the Strategy within their respective portfolios and organisations.
- Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments responsible for child and family services must provide a completed implementation plan outlining specific actions that will be taken to operationalise the system elements.
- Progress will be monitored through regular reporting to Safe and Supported governance bodies, and issues escalated for resolution where required.

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<sup>41</sup> Implementation plans will deliver on a range of activities under Safe and Supported, primarily Activities 2b – 2g in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026. The 12-month timeframe for establishing jurisdictional implementation plans is required to avoid delaying the delivery of these existing commitments.

- The frequency of reporting, including whether it can be incorporated with existing reporting, will be negotiated and determined through the appropriate Safe and Supported Working Group, currently the System Leadership Working Group (SLWG).

As Action 2 under the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan is within the remit of the SLWG, this group will oversee the reporting and coordination of the Strategy. Safe and Supported Working Groups are responsible for driving collective and coordinated implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023–2026 and First Action Plan 2023–2026 (Action Plans) and facilitating a coordinated and shared decision-making approach to addressing issues, challenges and barriers that are the responsibility of each Working Group.

While the Working Group will be responsible for day-to-day oversight of the Strategy, the significant scope and high-level responsibilities and accountabilities require consistent higher-level oversight of the direction of the Strategy. This will include reporting and escalation of issues as required to the Implementation Coordination Committee (ICC) and Senior Oversight Committee (SOC), with final decision-making resting between the Community Service Ministers and the Leadership Group, through the SDMC.

It will also be important for the non-Indigenous child and family sector to demonstrate their commitment and progress in supporting and enabling the investment in ACCOs. They can demonstrate their commitment through:

- Advocating for the support and investment of resources into ACCOs
- Changing the way they currently design and deliver existing child and family services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, e.g. revising existing policies, functions and processes
- Outlining their transition plan for moving existing child and family services delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, towards the ACCO sector
- Forming local partnerships with ACCOs that have clear plans and commitments to transition services to ACCOS.

#### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership

The Strategy will maintain strong accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership through the Leadership Group and SNAICC's internal governance mechanisms as the national ACCO peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

#### The non-Indigenous child and family service sector

The non-Indigenous child and family service sector has an important role to play in actively contributing towards the transition of funding towards ACCOs. Some organisations are already deeply involved in the process of transitioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to the care of Aboriginal organisations across the jurisdictions in which they operate. It is hoped that existing commitments alongside the guidance provided by this Strategy will help set a precedent for future service delivery and support the sector on a much wider scale.



In some cases, the transition will represent a change to the way non-Indigenous service providers operate. An element of the future funding changes will be the impact and responsibility of non-Indigenous NGOs that currently receive funding and provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Families Australia’s research report *Changing the Balance* examined the impact of the proportionate transition of funding from non-Indigenous NGOs to ACCOs and highlighted some important findings for the sector, including:<sup>42</sup>

- Non-Indigenous NGOs support the transition of services and strengthening of the ACCO sector, while also noting:
  - many non-Indigenous NGOs are still awaiting key details on the ‘how’ of the transition process; and
  - organisations are at different levels of preparedness for the transition; and
  - the impact of change will be uneven across the sector – and particular attention needs to be paid to service delivery in rural and remote communities.
- Non-Indigenous NGOs advocate for the needs of families, children and young people to be placed front and centre and noted:
  - excellent community consultation will be needed to manage the transitions at a local level; and
  - diverse communities will have different needs – and flexibility in approaches will be key.
- Transition is a change management process requiring clear and consistent communication about proposed changes, including a clear need for:
  - advance notice and clearer detail on the exact quantum and timelines for changes; and
  - centralised information and consistent documentation to be made accessible through a shared resource repository.
- Great care will need to be taken to ensure the transition process does not exacerbate existing workforce shortages and issues, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Coordination with States and Territory transition plans will be crucial for a successful transition.
- The transition process will incur additional short-term costs for all parties (including in human resources, data transfer, legal agreements, time taken to develop partnerships and transition clients).
- It is difficult for non-Indigenous NGOs to identify the impact of these changes on their future funding sustainability until the quantum and nature of changes is known, however, potential issues of future funding sustainability for NGOs in the child and family services sector will likely include a loss of economies of scale which could mean change is felt in areas beyond just the funded service.

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<sup>42</sup> Families Australia (2024), *Changing the Balance: Research Project Final Report*, p. 8.



It is recognised that the sector, both ACCOs and non-Indigenous NGOs, want clarity and certainty about how the transition will work in practice, including how the organisations involved in the transition will be supported through the process. It is important that governments, ACCOs, and non-Indigenous NGOs across the country work together throughout the transition process and are each held accountable for their respective roles.



## **APPENDICES: IMPLEMENTATION GUIDANCE**

Practical guidance to support governments to implement the  
shift of funding and functions to ACCO



## Appendix A – Key resources to support the transition to ACCOs

### Genuine Partnerships resources

SNAICC's Genuine Partnerships resources, audit tool, training program and guidance materials support genuine partnership of non-Indigenous providers and government agencies with ACCOs to facilitate increased service delivery roles and funding transfer to ACCOs.

Genuine and respectful partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and non-Indigenous service providers have multiple benefits.

The following resources to support genuine partnership are available on SNAICC's website:

- **Opening Doors Through Partnerships** – An omnibus of promising practices in partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in early childhood education and child and family services. This SNAICC resource analyses nine case studies of successful partnerships to identify practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs.<sup>43</sup>
- **Creating Change Through Partnerships** – An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services. This SNAICC resource provides guidance to services as to how they can best develop and maintain genuine partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations.<sup>44</sup>
- **Applying for Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Services** – A guide to best practice partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations. This SNAICC guide has been designed to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations to consider and adopt partnership-centred approaches when applying for funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family support services.<sup>45</sup>
- **Genuine Partnerships Audit Tool** – This SNAICC audit tool has been created to support inter-agency partnerships in child and family service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. It provides a framework for measuring progress

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<sup>43</sup> SNAICC (2012) *Opening Doors Through Partnerships: Practical approaches to developing genuine partnerships that address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs*. Research report. Retrieved from:


<https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/02804.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> SNAICC (2020) *Creating Change Through Partnerships: An introductory guide to partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations in child and family services*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1148\\_SNAICC\\_PartnershipBook\\_LR-Final.pdf](https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/1148_SNAICC_PartnershipBook_LR-Final.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> SNAICC (2020) *Applying for Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child and Family Services: A guide to best practice partnerships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous organisations*. Retrieved from:

[https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/200201\\_13\\_Applying-for-Funding-for-Services.pdf](https://www.snaicc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/200201_13_Applying-for-Funding-for-Services.pdf)



towards achieving genuine partnership goals and can be used at all stages of partnership development.<sup>46</sup>

Potential partners can also view a Child Family Community Australia webinar, hosted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS) and presented by SNAICC, Kurbingui Youth and Family Development (a South East Queensland-based ACCO), and Mercy Community. This webinar records a conversation about Kurbingui and Mercy's Yadeni Tago partnership, discussing their key learnings and helpful tips for those wanting to engage in a partnership.<sup>47</sup>

*“SNAICC’s partnership resources helped us to be really clear about what our primary and core objectives are as individual organisations and as partners, beyond our everyday service delivery. In our partnership we share all our resources, so much of what we do is integrated, so ensuring that we have a plan and know what the bigger picture is really is crucial for getting outcomes for our communities.” – Kurbingui*

### **Kids Come First: ACCO Leadership Transition Framework**

SNAICC’s ACCO Leadership Transition Framework was developed to inform and guide the transition of the Connected Beginnings backbone role from non-Indigenous organisations to ACCOs, where there is agreement and support from the community.

It also provides tools to help determine readiness for transition, strengthen partnerships, and to support project handover and evaluation. The ACCO Leadership Transition Framework has been developed in partnership with ACCOs who have high levels of cultural expertise and non-Indigenous backbone organisations who are aware of the implications of transition for self-determination and supportive of transitioning backbone functions to ACCOs.

There has been strong engagement of non-Indigenous organisations that are aware of the implications of transition for self-determination and support the transitioning of backbone functions to ACCOs. It has been really encouraging to see recognition of non-Indigenous organisations and ACCOs alike that the strongest outcomes for children are achieved when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are supported and resourced as leaders for their children, families, and communities.

### **Guiding Principles of Transition**

The principles in the ACCO Leadership Transition Framework are drawn from existing bodies of SNAICC work in conjunction with consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Connected Beginnings communities.

The principles offer a shared language, they provide scaffolding for ways of working together and when adopted, can ensure accountability, support relationships and guide behaviour.

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<sup>46</sup> SNAICC (2014) *Genuine Partnerships Audit Tool*. Retrieved from: <https://www.snaicc.org.au/product/partnership-audit-tool-creating-change-partnerships-2014/>

<sup>47</sup> AIFS (2021) *Advancing partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations*, Webinar presented by SNAICC, Kurbingui Youth and Family Development Ltd, and Mercy Community. 16 June 2021. Retrieved from: <https://aifs.gov.au/webinars/advancing-partnerships-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-organisations>




1. Kids Come First
2. Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ways of Knowing, Doing & Being
3. Accountability to Community & Governance Groups
4. Cultural Safety
5. Commitment to respectful, reciprocal partnerships
6. Restorative Partnerships
7. Resourcing ACCOs to get the job done

A clear and transparent understanding of the resources and capital is integral in the partnership process. This may include:

- Agreements that clarify commitments, roles and accountability ensuring there is a level playing field between the two partners
- An understanding of the time and resources allocated to joint planning, review, and partnership development for each organisation and sharing other resources partnerships and linkages to colleagues, program areas and leadership in early years programs
- Reallocating resources in fair, equitable and culturally safe ways
- Advocating with Department of Education for additional resourcing of the ACCO and streamlined funding processes, acknowledging the fact that funding application processes can drain staff resources and time

### **Leadership Transition Framework: Recommendations for Transition**

- Remove bureaucratic barriers where possible – for example, compliance demands, funding arrangements, and government regulations
- Capacity building at the community level through infrastructure, training, mentoring, technical support and workforce development where requested by the ACCO
- Negotiate long-term, adaptable funding so initiatives can be developed properly and have time to work
- Examine power relations and address systemic racism - Projects were enhanced when the power dynamics influencing the relationships between stakeholders were acknowledged and addressed throughout the course of the project.
- Create a supportive policy context – such as changes to funding guidelines which support building ACCOs' organisational capacity or decrease in administrative burden
- Have realistic timeframes regarding how long a transition takes and be clear about expectations and requirements early on

- 
- Be flexible in timelines, program guidelines, funding, and operations
  - Ensure transparency through timely sharing of information
- 

### **Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families Report**

The Stronger ACCOs, Stronger Families Report identifies significant systemic barriers that ACCOs face in accessing funding within the Families and Children Activity program administered by DSS and has lessons and recommendations that can be applied across children and family services more broadly.

Barriers include competitive grant processes that advantage larger non-Indigenous organisations, reporting and administrative burdens that are not supported by core functions funding and the fundamental misalignment between how services are funded, and the services communities need.

ACCOs identified that dedicated, sustainable, flexible and sufficient funding would enable them to build on the existing strengths of the sector to deliver culturally responsive and holistic services. By addressing these barriers to access funding, a greater number of ACCOs will be able to provide services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

ACCOs deliver services using a holistic model of care resulting in better health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. They are accountable to their communities and thus deliver high quality, responsive and culturally safe services, and their position as a preferred provider in their communities ensures higher levels of engagement with service users. Current approaches to funding do not support ACCOs to provide services in this way. Without appropriate funding, ACCOs are limited in their ability to meet the objectives of the National Agreement in achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families, and communities.

Commonwealth Government determining the way programs and services are delivered diminishes self-determination for ACCOs, and often does not align with community needs and aspirations.

The Report, including Recommendations for implementation can be found on SNAICC's [website](#).



## **Appendix B – Case studies**

- Nugel Program – The Victorian Aboriginal Child and Community Agency (VACCA)
- Implementing Delegated Authority Across Queensland – QATSICPP
- Connected Beginnings Transition to ACCO Leadership – SNAICC
- Co-designing the Health Navigator Pilot Program (HNPP) – WA Health



### **Case study: Nugel Program**

VACCA's Nugel Program has been at the forefront of transforming the landscape of child protection in Victoria. Nugel implements [section 18 of the Children, Youth and Families Act](#) which transfers responsibility for decision making and direct work with Aboriginal children and their families from Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) Child Protection to authorised Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs).

The program, known state-wide as 'Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care' (ACAC) was called 'Nugel' at VACCA, a Woiwurrung word that means "belong" as Aboriginal children "belong" and have a sacred place at the centre of Aboriginal communities – they have a right to be seen; to be heard; to be nurtured; and to be safe. They have the right to know who they are, where they come from and where they belong.

#### ***How did we do it?***

Extensive advocacy over many years of VACCA and the ACCO sector for Aboriginal decisions to be in Aboriginal hands and that Aboriginal services and ways of working can achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal children. The official commencement of VACCA's Nugel Program in 2017 was the first ACAC program to be implemented in Victoria – followed shortly by Bendigo & District Aboriginal Cooperative's (BDAC) Mutjang Bupuwingarrak Mukman in 2019. Nugel were authorised to provide care, case planning and case management to Aboriginal children already subject to Child Protection Orders.

In 2023, legislative reform expanded the scope of authorisation to include an Aboriginal-led 'investigations' response to child protection reports. This means that Nugel is now able to step in when a report is first made about an Aboriginal child, with the aim of strengthening Aboriginal families and reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal children in child protection and care. VACCA and BDAC continue to work collaboratively and chose the state wide name [Community Protecting Boorais Program](#) to represent this pilot.

#### ***How ACCOs are doing things differently***

VACCA's Cultural Therapeutic Ways (CTW) prioritises Aboriginal ways of working and formalises our practice across the organisation. It is VACCA's commitment to strengthening and growing Aboriginal leadership, Aboriginal knowledge, and ensuring the staff health and wellbeing of our staff as we support community to heal, protect and connect. CTW brings together the three pillars of practice to guide our work: cultural practice with trauma informed and self-determination theories. As integrated practice, CTW is our point of difference as an Aboriginal organisation and applies to everyone within VACCA.

Nugel's Practice Approach adopts the symbol of Yinga (a Wemba Wemba word for "This Way") representing connection to body, mind and emotions, family, community, Country and spirituality –each representing the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing for Aboriginal children and families.





Nugel uses a dual language approach when describing our work – prioritising cultural language terms that reflect [our own unique practice approach](#), alongside the terms commonly used in the Child Protection system.

- Intake
- Understanding Story (Investigation): This phase is about connecting and exploring together with purpose.
- Stepping In and Strengthening Safety Together (Protective Intervention): This phase is about stepping in when it is necessary to ensure the safety of the child. We take inspiration from ‘Big Aunty Energy,’ we strive to step-in with love and care - reflecting the way Community has always stepped in to stand between a child and risk.
- Strong Steps for Boorais (Protection Order): This phase is about walking alongside families and taking strong steps with and for Boorais. It occurs after a child has already been found to be in need of protection and a Children’s Court Order has been issued.
- Stepping Out/Stepping Back (Closure): This phase is about coming to healthy endings and transitions - whatever the circumstances might be.

### ***Improved outcomes for children and families***

Our Nugel approach has demonstrated improved results in reunification, parental involvement in decision making, keeping children connected to their culture, and better health and wellbeing outcomes for children and families, including:

- Higher reunification rates – including a significant number of children who were previously on Care by Secretary Orders with non-reunification case plans.
- Improved practice approach that is “more culturally appropriate, trauma-informed, timely and responsive”.
- Increased engagement of families including increased participation in decision making.
- Children and young people having increased contact with their parents, siblings and extended kinship networks.
- Significant increase in children and young people’s connection to culture and community.
- Increased involvement of parents in Court Processes.

### ***Expansion of Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care***

In recognition of the growing evidence that Aboriginal Community Control is achieving better outcomes for Aboriginal children, the Victorian Government has committed to the transfer of authority and funding with the expansion of Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care across Victoria. This is resulting in more local ACCOs taking on the responsibility and accountability of the safety and protection of Aboriginal children.



### **Case study: Implementing Delegated Authority across Queensland**

The delegation of functions and powers under the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld) is a major initiative under *Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families – 2017-37* a shared commitment to eliminating the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in statutory child protection and ensuring they grow up safe and cared for with family, in community and connected to culture, within a generation. QATSICPP and the then Queensland Department of Child Safety, Seniors, and Disability Services (DCSSDS) partnered to develop and deliver a 10-year blueprint for implementing Delegated Authority across Queensland. The blueprint gives respectful consideration to the readiness, priorities and needs of local communities and to families wishes and aspirations. The last Queensland budget committed over \$100 million to the roll out of Delegated Authority across Queensland providing significant funding for Community Controlled organisations across Queensland to lead this work.

#### ***Embedding self-determination***

QATSICPP and DCSSDS have formed a strong partnership over the past four years with both establishing Delegated Authority teams to implement this significant change effectively.

With the increased funds came a significant opportunity to build on the work that had occurred in establishing Delegated Authority in two early adopter sites over the past four years. Key lessons learned from this work informed the process. It was also recognised that the established and strong partnership between QATSICPP and DCSSDS would allow for a different approach to commissioning these funds to grow the work across the state.

Instead of instigating a regular procurement process that was competitive in nature and called for tenders, it was agreed with QATSICPP and the Community Controlled organisations that the best approach was for a collective discussion that would enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to decide how to implement in their region and locality the timing and process for taking on this new work and investment.

QATSICPP's strong relationships with its members, the lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's services across the state meant that they could convene members quickly and efficiently to come together and conduct meetings that were culturally safe and respectful.

#### ***Partnerships***

As a part of this process QATSICPP partnered with DCSSDS from the onset to provide Delegated Authority Information Sessions targeted at CEOs of Community-Controlled organisations. This included sharing data snapshots to unpack the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in each community and region. This provided CEOs the



opportunity to consider the need in each of their communities and if they had the capability and capacity to take on this work.

QATSICPP and DCSSDS provided numerous information sessions with CEOs and their staff to:

- Increase their knowledge and encourage them to consider their capabilities
- Facilitate open and transparent conversations about what is available to support them
- Funding allocations and resources
- Tender processes and funding agreements
- Gauge interest in taking on Delegated Authority
- Connect CEOs with similar catchments to decide boundaries and readiness

These sessions provided Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Organisation (ATSICCO) CEOs the opportunity to decide if they were ready and able to take on Delegated Authority. Some of their considerations included:

- Alignment to organisation strategic objectives
- Existing capability vs capability needs
- Appropriate levels of funding and resources

By working together QATSICPP and DCSSDS were able to provide all the information to ATSICCO CEOs to make informed decisions on what was right for their communities.

At the end of each session the DCSSDS staff left the session, and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led discussion was held. This allowed ATSICCO CEOs to speak freely and to collectively discuss the willingness and ability of each organisation to take the opportunities of Delegated Authority in the near-, medium- or longer-term future. It also enabled organisations to think about collaborations and to look at how they could work across areas in the best way to provide greater choice for families and children.

These discussions ensured that a self-determining process for allocation of resources and readiness was supported. Those organisations ready entered into a contracting negotiation with the DCSSDS with a clear sense of purpose and vision for the implementation of the program. This process has meant that in a record time of 12 months ten additional sites for delegated authority have come online, with another seven planned in the coming months.

This proves that when governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peaks to build strong partnerships that First Nations knowledge, wisdom and processes can work together to ensure that we can deliver rigorous and robust procurement process that embody Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing being and doing, leading to more effective and efficient outcomes.

***Enablers of success include:***

- Shared vision – everyone needs to be on the same page.
- Solid commitment from all levels within DCSSDS - shifting government thinking.

- Self-determination – allowing ATSICCOs to decide if and when they were going to take on Delegated Authority.
- Information sharing – building capability and knowledge.
- Partnerships – leveraging from QATSICPPs strong relationships with ATSICCOs and DCSSDS.
- Strong relationships – between QATSICPP and DCSSDS and ATSICCOs. Constantly engaging in information sharing and decision making and QATSICPP being the conduit between government and the community.

For more detailed information on the implementation of Delegated Authority post the early adopter sites see: [Blueprint – Reclaiming Our Storyline: Transforming systems and practice by making decisions in our way \(QATSICPP\)](#).

### **Outcomes**

Since the implementation of Delegated Authority in Queensland there have been 36 children reunified with their families. And as of July 2024:

- There are 12 different organisations in 20 different locations – working with 20 different Child Safety Service Centres under Delegated Authority.
- There are 198 children and young people subject to Delegated Authority.
- The decisions that have been delegated to date, under the corresponding sections of the *Child Protection Act 1999* (Qld), include – Family Time (87), Cultural Connection (88), Placement at home with parents (82(2)), Removal from carer’s care (90), Case planning (51), Information Sharing (159), Transition from care (75).



### **Case study: Connected Beginnings transition to ACCO leadership**

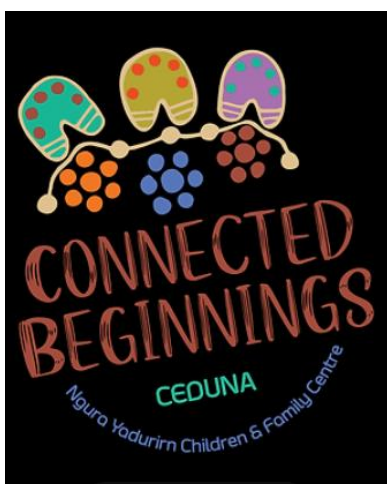
The Connected Beginnings program (CB) has been operating since 2016 to support school readiness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged zero to five, by integrating education, health and family support services. Each CB community has a backbone organisation responsible for key aspects of shaping projects' direction and coordinating the response to families with children in their early years.

To align with commitments to Priority Reform 2 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Department of Education, through partnership with SNAICC, aims to transition funding from non-ACCO led backbone organisations to ACCOs. After just a few years of dedicated effort, SNAICC, in partnership with the Department of Education (DoE), has supported the establishment of 50 CB sites across the country, with 33 currently led by ACCOs. Another 17 are planned to transition to ACCO leadership by 2025. That will be a change from less than 10% ACCO delivery, to 100% in a few short years.

The transition process is guided by the ACCO Leadership Transition Framework (ALTF) – which places cultural authority holders and the voice of community at the forefront of decision making. The framework outlines guiding principles and responsibilities for ACCOs and non-Indigenous organisations in facilitating the transition of backbone functions to ACCOs. The authenticity of the ALTF's application is what sets it apart from other tokenistic approaches to enshrining self-determination.

### **Connected Beginnings in Ceduna**

CB has been operating in Ceduna since 2017. It has supported and guided an interactive, community-informed approach to build a sense of what might work best to address the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families and has laid the foundations for community-led systems change. The program supports families in several communities, including Ceduna, Koonibba, Scotdesco and surrounding homelands, as well as the transient members of the Yalata and Oak Valley (Maralinga) communities who often pass through Ceduna and Koonibba. Community members and a clear majority of stakeholder organisations have a clear understanding of CB's role in engaging families and fostering collaboration amongst service providers to support school readiness.



### **Application of the ACCO Leadership Transition Framework**

Ceduna is the second of two communities selected by DoE to trial a structured approach to the CB backbone transition process and showcases a rich example of the ALTF being applied in a pilot transition site.

Facilitated by SNAICC, community consultations were held to identify an Aboriginal organisation that has sufficient community support to engage families, and the operational capacity to take on the backbone role currently held by the Ngura Yodurim Children and Family Centre (NYCFC).



Before consultations began in community, there was extensive information sharing and pre-work to ensure that community and community leaders were best placed to provide informed feedback and contribute to discussions on the framework. This included sharing the framework with local ACCOs. Group discussions and individual interviews were held to ensure that all community members, early years organisations and ACCOs had the opportunity to have their say.

*“Our Nannas group are the cultural authority holders, and we go to them for everything, including yarns about the framework.” - Project Officer Connected Beginnings NYCFC*

SNAICC’s approach to transition consultations undertakes the same approach and methodology used by SNAICC’s CB Community Partner when exploring readiness for, and receptiveness to initiating a CB program in a new site. The conversation unfolds organically, and is guided by the following principles articulated in the framework:

### **Principle 2: Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ways of Knowing, Doing & Being**

- This principle places the knowledge, cultural authority and self- determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at the core of the transition process

### **Principle 3: Accountability to Community & Governance Group**

- This principle acknowledges the accountability and cultural authority ACCOs hold in their communities regardless of what they are funded to deliver and implies the need for transparency in the operation of all aspects of CB projects, including the transition of backbone functions.

Responses from Elders, mothers with young families and stakeholder organisations including ACCOs have consistently supported the retention of backbone functions at NYCFC. Although community members determined that the CB site would remain with the non-ACCO, the process and methodology for arriving at this decision was driven by self-determination and cultural authority within the community.

### ***Community led decision making at the heart of the work***

Community self-determination in the choice of CB backbone is integral to families’ engagement with the program. To ensure that the transition process aligns with the self-determined choice of the community, the recommendation for transition is always guided by a combination of factors, including:

- The recommended organisation is backed by cultural authority;
- Clear evidence that the recommended organisation is driven by community need and community input;
- Evidence that the organisation is non-partisan and generally well regarded by community;
- Clear understanding of the role of the CB programme and the role of the backbone organisation;
- Evidence that the organisation has capability to manage the program and its compliance requirements.



*“We take connecting with community very seriously and ensure cultural authority is embedded in everything NYCFC does.” Project Officer Connected Beginnings NYCFC*

More information on the framework and resources for how it can be applied can be found at [Kids Come First | Report | SNAICC](#).



## **Case study: Co-designing the Health Navigator Pilot Program (HNPP) WA Health and Department of Communities**

Carers and children in out-of-home care often find it challenging to navigate the health system to access the services they need. The Health Navigator Pilot Program (HNPP) provides a new model for eligible children and young people in out-of-home care to navigate to the right service at the right time, including access to culturally safe and holistic services.

The HNPP is being piloted in the South West and Mirrabooka regions of Western Australia, and partners with Aboriginal Medical Services to help children and young people access required health assessments and services.

To design the service, the Department of Health and Department of Communities facilitated a co-designed series of workshops across the South West and Mirrabooka regions with 143 key stakeholders to discover, develop, test and implement the pilot. Stakeholders included:

- ACCOs (particularly local Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs));
- carers;
- advocacy groups;
- non-government providers;
- other WA Government representatives; and
- those with lived experience.

The co-designed engagement process was enabled by joint endorsement from the Minister for Child Protection; Women's Interests; Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence; Community Services and the Minister for Health and Mental Health.

Initial workshops were designed to identify the current state, key areas for improvement and what worked well within the existing landscape, to set the direction and principles for the HNPP. Follow-up workshops were held to test and confirm understanding of what was heard to ensure that the draft model aligned with community and stakeholder expectations.

Following the co-design process, the HNPP funded the South West Aboriginal Medical Service, and Derbarl Yerrigan Health Service to:

- employ Aboriginal Health Navigator positions;
- increase existing service capacity to support Aboriginal children in out-of-home care through access to child health nurses and paediatricians; and
- enable self-determined growth for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), with government as an enabling partner.

The Noongar Family Safety & Wellbeing Council was also funded to raise awareness of the existing capability and capacity across the ACCHOs.

The ACCHOs provide holistic and culturally appropriate health assessments and care through a diversity of skills and experience that benefit the health outcomes for Aboriginal children and



young people in out-of-home care. They are represented at each level of governance to ensure Aboriginal community advice is informing decision making.

Ongoing engagements with the HNPP are conducted through strong partnerships, governance, including advisory groups, and independent program evaluation. The Centre for Social Impact at the University of Western Australia (UWA) are conducting an independent evaluation to review the efficacy and sustainability of the pilot.

### **Outcomes**

During the initial 18 months of the trial, HNPP has identified and aided improved pathways and access to alternative models of care with respect to cultural safety, workforce, capacity, and infrastructure.

This partnership has contributed to an increase in capacity of AMSs to deliver child health and development services.

Independent evaluation by the Centre for Social Impact, UWA found that the HNPP is demonstrating a significant increase in timely access to health services, mental health services, disability and cultural supports and services for children and young people in out-of-home care.

The HNPP has been awarded a further two years of funding for a continuation of service delivery.

## Appendix C – Examples of Best Practice Actions

Example Action	Responsible parties	Interrelated actions
<p>1. Ensure a comprehensive policy framework for the prioritisation of early and tailored support in investment, program and practice development is in place in each jurisdiction.</p> <p>1.1 Develop new or strengthen existing policy frameworks to embed a priority for early and tailored support aligned to the National Child and Family Investment Strategy, Safe and Supported and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p> <p>1.2 Integrate the definition of early and tailored supports from the National Child and Family Investment strategy within jurisdictional policy frameworks to support a shared foundation for evidence-informed policy development, investment, data development and evaluation.</p> <p>2. Review expenditure in programs and conduct a re-prioritisation of investment exercise to better align in scope funding streams with the principles and system elements in the Strategy</p> <p>3. Ensure the outcomes of the expenditure re-prioritisation exercise are applied through a structured process of recommissioning, replacing or re-engineering identified programs.</p>	<p>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>4. Increase pathways and leverage existing mechanisms to embed the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children into policy and program design, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and accountability across the social determinants of child protection involvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> <li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 7 of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>5. Build a comprehensive evidence base on early and tailored support models and practice, including consolidating existing evidence, with an emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research and evidence that reflects the voice, needs and priorities of children, families and communities.</p> <p>5.1. Increase dedicated funding for research initiatives focused on supporting ACCO-led service delivery capacity and documenting and developing innovative best-practice models for delivering early and tailored supports to all children and families.</p> <p>5.2. Provide direct and ongoing investment for, contribute to and utilise research through the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support (National Centre for Excellence).</p> <p>5.3. Resource jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led institutions to build a comprehensive evidence base and collaborate with the National Centre for Excellence.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> <li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 2 of the Safe and Supported Action Plan and Action 3 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>6. Partner with communities, service providers and peaks to redesign programs and funding models for early and tailored support to better align with the needs of children, families and communities.</p> <p>6.1 Redesign programs and funding models for ACCO early and tailored support services in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ACCOs and peaks, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) to develop implementation advice relating to dedicated, needs-based and sustainable funding model options for ACCOs delivering early years services, including integrated early years services.</li> <li>Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commissioning models for early and tailored support services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> </ul>	

Example Action	Responsible parties	Interrelated actions
6.2 Build greater flexibility into programs and funding contracts for relevant services to enable community-led design of early and tailored support models and ensure practice is not constrained by rigid program requirements that are misaligned to local communities, contexts and cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</li> </ul>	
<p>7. Design a national coordinated early and tailored support funding program with Commonwealth, state and territory funding contributions, that considers the need for multi-agency cooperation and coordination, administered at the state and territory level, to help address the disproportionate investment in tertiary systems and address gaps in early and tailored support service availability.</p> <p>7.1. Draw on the service planning to inform required funding allocations aligned to need, population and geography.</p> <p>7.2. Develop a policy and investment framework for delivering a national coordinated early and tailored support funding program (for example, A National Partnership Agreement, or other appropriate mechanism).</p> <p>7.3. Allocate proportional program funding to ACCOs in line with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family needs in alignment with Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p> <p>7.4. Utilise existing partnership mechanisms to design and direct shared investments in alignment with Priority Reform 1 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, such as the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership, and the Safe and Supported Shared Decision-Making Committee.</p>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 8 of the Safe and Supported Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>8. Incorporate requirements to provide early and tailored support to children and families into relevant state, territory and/or national legislative frameworks. Where relevant based on the varying legislative responsibilities of Commonwealth, State and Territory governments, legislative provisions should reflect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A requirement in relevant child protection legislation for active efforts to provide all reasonable supports to families prior to child removal to ensure a child can be safely cared for in the child's family, community and culture.</li> <li>A requirement to implement all five elements of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Placement Principle to the standard of active efforts</li> <li>A requirement that a preventive support service to a child's family is prioritised over other services wherever that is consistent with the best interests of the child.</li> <li>An explicit obligation of government to resource and make available early and tailored support services, including culturally safe and appropriate service delivered through ACCOs.</li> </ul>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 2 and 5 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
9. Develop jurisdictional early intervention investment frameworks in collaboration with all jurisdictions, including relevant Departments of Treasury and Finance, that include requirements to forecast future avoided costs in new policy proposals to ensure government budget decision-making takes account of both the economic and social benefits of investing in early and tailored supports.	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
10. Improve cross-border collaboration between governments and child and family service agencies to strengthen coordination and provision of supports to families who have contact with multiple state and territory service systems, with a focus on ensuring the timely availability of early and tailored supports.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>Non-Indigenous child and family service sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 8 of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
11. Invest in strengthening referral pathways between universal services, such as education and maternal child health, and early and tailored supports, as well as initiatives to integrate a child and family focus in adult services that relate to the social determinants of child protection intervention such as mental health, housing, family violence and drug and alcohol services.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>Non-Indigenous child and family service sector</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Action 2 of the Safe and Supported Action Plan and Action 3 and 8 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>

Example Action	Responsible parties	Interrelated actions
<p>12. Strengthen information and data sharing across portfolios and jurisdictions relating to the social determinants of child protection involvement, while maintaining adherence to relevant privacy and data sharing legislation and regulatory frameworks</p> <p>12.1 Identify and increase linkages between existing data and data development initiatives, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data initiatives, such as place-based data projects under the National Agreement.</p> <p>12.2 Include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partnerships in data linkage and sharing initiatives to align with Priority Reform 4 in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p> <p>12.3 Develop safeguards for data sharing arrangements to ensure they focus on informing the provision of early and tailored support to families in need, not on increasing surveillance, risk identification and child protection intervention.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 3 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>13. Quarantine a proportion of child and family service funding for delivery through ACCOs that is equivalent to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, including establishing funding targets for child and family services programs.</p> <p>Giving consideration to local and jurisdictional context and community priorities, targets should be developed using the following guidance:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• where a program is targeted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families (through either target population or service areas with predominantly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations), an amount of funding that is proportionate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users and populations in the relevant programs in local and jurisdictional contexts will be available only to ACCOs</li> <li>• where a program is targeted for vulnerable children and families, a proportion of funding based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family need in local and jurisdictional contexts (using representation in out-of-home care as a proxy indicator) will be available only to ACCOs</li> <li>• where a program is targeted for the general population of children and families a suitable proportion of funding will be available only to ACCOs, acknowledging the need for higher focus on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through universal provision to address inequities and achieve Closing the Gap Targets<sup>48</sup></li> </ul> <p><u>Note:</u> This guidance is intended for governments to consider in developing targets that are most appropriate within their individual jurisdictional contexts</p>	<p>Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</p>	
<p>14. Build government capacity to work more effectively with and support the growth of ACCOs. Actions should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• build awareness and understanding of government staff about the value and importance of ACCO service delivery and the role ACCOs play in the community</li> <li>• engage with existing and emerging partnership structures to undertake shared decision-making in program design and funding allocation, such as the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership and Safe and Supported governance bodies at the national level, and aligned state and territory partnership structures</li> <li>• fund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-designed training on implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision making for government officials involved in relevant funding development and allocation processes</li> <li>• address structural bias and racism and increase cultural competence in procurement requirements and processes</li> <li>• utilise and strengthen existing accountability mechanisms to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through peak bodies, Commissioners, and partnerships at community, jurisdictional and national levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> <li>• National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Support, and jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander evidence and research bodies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productivity Commission Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap</li> </ul>
<p>15. Engage with ACCOs to identify and scope the skills and capability needs of their current and future workforce in line with planned transition and growth under Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 4 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>

<sup>48</sup> Targets may vary based on individual jurisdictional contexts, including the capacity of ACCOs to meet service demand based on the targets and the parallel work of governments to support and invest in that capacity.

Example Action	Responsible parties	Interrelated actions
This process should consider opportunities for a collective workforce approach across relevant Closing the Gap priority areas and should include engagement with ACCO peaks to understand sector-wide needs in regions, states, territories and nationally.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	
16. Develop new and/or expand existing workforce development strategies focused on developing the ACCO workforce, including through the supply of new entrants, retention and wellbeing, skills development and building effective workforce foundations.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 4 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>17. Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to meet the requirements of roles within ACCOs.</p> <p>17.1 Review and refresh existing program funding and funding models to identify and address barriers to achieving pay-parity between ACCOs, governments and non-Indigenous agencies.</p> <p>17.2 Develop and invest in targeted initiatives for supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attain qualifications matched to current and future ACCO child and family sector needs, including scholarships, partnerships between ACCOs and skills and training providers, on-the-job training, mentoring for tertiary students, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led tertiary studies courses.</p> <p>17.3 Provide ACCO delivered cultural safety and competence training for non-Indigenous staff delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.</p> <p>17.4 Provide direct investment in ACCO child and family services to support the development and training needs of their staff, including mentoring and support, professional development opportunities, and backfill for study leave.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 4 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>18. Simplify and tailor funding allocation and reporting processes to privilege ACCO service delivery and reduce administrative burden while maintaining robust and accountable processes.<sup>49</sup></p> <p>18.1 Implement relational, non-competitive funding processes that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and ACCOs to propose, design and deliver the child and family services their communities need, in place of competitive processes that typically privilege formal grant writing capabilities over the community leadership, cultural knowledge and relationships that underpin effective ACCO service delivery.</p> <p>18.2 Tailor the complexity of funding application and reporting processes to the amount of available funding, ensuring that applications for small grants require minimal time and resource allocations from applicants.</p>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	Action 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan
<p>19. Review program funding for child and family service programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and align funding allocations with the full cost of effective ACCO service delivery, including capital infrastructure, core operational funding, wage parity, and workforce development costs. The timing of this activity should allow for notification of changes to program funding to be provided well in advance of program funding renewal/cessation periods.</p> <p>19.1 Assess service delivery costs specific to the context of ACCOs, including the impacts of remoteness, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce development needs, addressing wage inequities, historical inequities in access to property and infrastructure ownership, and core service costs that are higher for smaller and localised organisations.</p> <p>19.2 Develop the full costing of effective and evidence-based ACCO child and family support services, accounting for the flexibility required for community-led design and responses to locally identified needs and priorities, to inform government budget and funding allocation processes.</p>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	
<p>20. Provide sustainable and dedicated funding for organisational development activities and supports for ACCOs.</p> <p>20.1 Informed by ACCOs, undertake needs assessment to identify funding requirements for organisational growth and development as part of service design and continuous improvement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> </ul>	

<sup>49</sup> Action 2g of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan 2023-2026 (Safe and Supported) commits to reforming funding models and procurement policies to direct proportionate funding and address systemic barriers to support the growth of the ACCO sector. This best-practice example action suggests options to reform funding processes and reduce barriers to the growth of the ACCO sector. It's important that funding and reporting processes are robust and maintain accountability.

Example Action	Responsible parties	Interrelated actions
20.2 Regularly review funding requirements based on advice from ACCOs on their organisational needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	
21. Develop State and Territory plans and processes for ensuring jurisdictional Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People are established, legislated and fully empowered in line with the Minimum Requirements for National, State and Territory Commissioners for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People.	State and Territory Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 7 of the Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>22. Ensure the National Child and Family Investment Strategy is reflected in new and existing market strategies developed under Safe and Supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan, Action 2(c): “Develop a market strategy to support ACCO capacity and establish market transition approaches that increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs. This includes mapping the growth, spread and location of new ACCOs and building the capability of existing ACCOs against where the need is going to be across a jurisdiction.”</p> <p>22.1 Reflect the National Child and Family Investment Strategy principles, system elements, and relevant actions in new ACCO market strategies developed under Safe and Supported.</p> <p>22.2 Where ACCO market strategies already exist or are in development, review their alignment with the National Child and Family Investment Strategy and identify opportunities to strengthen the approach.</p>	Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Action 2 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander First Action Plan</li> </ul>
<p>23. Where partnerships with non-Indigenous organisations are used as a mechanism to support ACCO development and transition funds to ACCOs, ensure ACCOs have the option to become the lead funding recipients to address power imbalance and ensure genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leadership in partnerships.</p> <p>23.1 Wherever new partnership funding is allocated for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child and family services, include a requirement that an ACCO should be the lead funding recipient if they choose to be, and should receive the majority of funding for the partnership activities.</p> <p>23.2 Review existing funding that is provided to ACCOs through sub-contracts under non-Indigenous organisations to investigate the effectiveness of the arrangement and determine whether the ACCO can be the lead grant recipient and or funded directly under a separate contract.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments</li> <li>• ACCO sector (including peaks, service providers etc.)</li> </ul>	

## Appendix D – Government Implementation plan template: Shifting investment to early and tailored support

### Shifting investment to early and tailored support

#### System Element 1: Evidence-informed investment and innovation

- Investment decisions must draw on the evidence base that promotes prevention, whilst further building the evidence about what works to address the needs and support the priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

#### System Element 2: Development of legislation, policy, and frameworks

- Relevant legislation, policy and frameworks (both updated/amended *and* newly developed) must prioritise early supports and strengthen protective factors relating to child safety. These must be consistent with the best interests of the child and family and have clear language and definitions of key concepts to promote consistency across the sector.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

#### System Element 3: Budget decisions and funding processes including contracting

- Budget decisions and funding processes must prioritise early support, address gaps in existing service provision and consider future avoided costs and economic benefits.
- Reliable, sufficient and long-term funding is needed to achieve long-term positive outcomes.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

#### System Element 4: Community leadership and accountability, including by ACCOs

- Community leadership, accountability and shared decision making must be incorporated in all decisions regarding children and families.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations often prioritise a focus on early support, and that leadership can play a huge role in reorienting the system.
- Alongside broader community leadership in child and family services, this element focuses on investing in ACCO leadership in the design and delivery of child and family services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

**System Element 5: Collaboration and buy-in across different levels and portfolios of government**

- Strengthening family supports requires multidisciplinary responses that extend across multiple portfolios.
- Collaboration and integration between government departments, within and across jurisdictions, including cross-portfolio buy-in at local service, departmental and ministerial levels is crucial to reduce siloes and adopt a holistic approach to service delivery.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Existing, changed or new activities</b>	<b>Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Resource commitment – incl. new or existing</b>	<b>Timeframe for delivery</b>	<b>Lead/ Collaboration</b>

**System Element 6: Independent oversight and governance**

- Adequate resourcing of existing organisations that have the cultural authority to conduct independent oversight and governance of systems. This includes promoting increased accountability and independent oversight to drive system reform, hold governments and systems to account and avoid repeating approaches that do not work.
- Fully empowered, legislated and resourced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioners for Children and Young People are key to keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children safe within systems and ensuring their rights are at the centre of responses.
- Commissioners, Guardians and Advocates for children across the country have a critical role in ensuring the accountability of systems for protecting children’s rights and improving outcomes.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Existing, changed or new activities</b>	<b>Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Resource commitment – incl. new or existing</b>	<b>Timeframe for delivery</b>	<b>Lead/ Collaboration</b>

**Government Implementation plan template: Transition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations**

**Transition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations**

**System Element 1: ACCO funding prioritisation policies and alternative commissioning models**

- In line with the National Agreement, State and Territory Governments have committed to increasing the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs.
- The commitment to increase the proportion of services delivered by ACCOs can be operationalised through policy and program instruments, such as Aboriginal organisation first procurement policies and quarantined funding or percentage-based allocation to ACCOs based on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.
- This element includes going beyond funding prioritisation policies and moving towards a transformational shift to alternative commissioning models, in line with the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Existing, changed or new activities</b>	<b>Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Resource commitment – incl. new or existing</b>	<b>Timeframe for delivery</b>	<b>Lead/ Collaboration</b>

**System Element 2: Sustainable resourcing of ACCO services**

- The short-term nature of funding cycles has a significant negative impact on children and families and ACCOs delivering these services.
- ACCOs often receive small, short-term grants with complex reporting requirements, making their funding unsustainable and fragmented.
- The uncertainty and instability of this type of funding impacts service delivery through ‘stop-start’ programs that undermine community trust and prevent ACCOs from being able to build local workforces and invest in organisational growth and development.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Existing, changed or new activities</b>	<b>Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Resource commitment – incl. new or existing</b>	<b>Timeframe for delivery</b>	<b>Lead/ Collaboration</b>

**System Element 3: ACCO Workforce Development Strategies in all jurisdictions**

- The demand on and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce will increase with the transfer of investment to the sector.
- Recruitment and retention of highly trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff will be critical to the positive child and family outcomes that ACCOs and government are both striving towards.
- The National Agreement speaks to the responsibility of jurisdictions to partner with the ACCO sector in the development of reform agendas. Strengthening the workforce relies on jurisdictional commitment and investment to the development and implementation of workforce development strategies.

<b>Actions</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Existing, changed or new activities</b>	<b>Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies</b>	<b>Resource commitment – incl. new or existing</b>	<b>Timeframe for delivery</b>	<b>Lead/ Collaboration</b>

#### System Element 4: Aboriginal led decision-making in funding development and allocation

- Move towards ‘Aboriginal-led decision making’ instead of ‘shared-design making’ in national and jurisdictional program and service design.
- Aboriginal-led decision making in funding processes is crucial, as government-funded programs often do not meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs or support holistic care models.
- The development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander commissioning policies, processes and frameworks are a key mechanism to advance Aboriginal led decision-making for funding allocation.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

#### System Element 5: Direct investment in ACCOs to adequately resource core functions, infrastructure and service delivery

- In line with Clause 45a of the National Agreement, strong sectors require sustained capacity building and investment in ACCOs.
- Clause 45d requires that ACCOs who deliver common services have a dedicated, reliable and consistent funding model designed to suit the types of services required by communities.
- ACCOs deliver holistic and integrated services that are not appropriately covered by current funding models and amounts.
- As current funding often falls short of meeting the needs of children and families, ACCOs fill service gaps by doing unfunded or underfunded work at their own cost.
- Many ACCOs operate at a small scale on the individual community level, which supports their cultural authority and local responsiveness. However, they lack the economies of scale of larger non-Indigenous providers that are required to resource core operations and infrastructure.
- Direct investment in ACCOs is required to adequately resource core functions, infrastructure and service delivery. Direct investment has resulted in substantial growth of the ACCO sector in states like Victoria (VIC) and Queensland (QLD) (e.g. Queensland Child and Family Wellbeing Services; Victoria Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care).
- Although there is a place for sector and workforce strengthening partnerships and non-Indigenous services have a role to play in the transition of service delivery, there are risks for potential power imbalances and the superficial engagement of ACCOs. Where there are partnerships in place, there must be an intentional approach to embed self-determination and genuine shared decision-making.

Actions	Activities	Existing, changed or new activities	Barriers/ Mitigation Strategies	Resource commitment – incl. new or existing	Timeframe for delivery	Lead/ Collaboration

