



**THRIVE  
BY FIVE**

# **NORTHERN TERRITORY EARLY CHILDHOOD ALLIANCE ACTION PLAN**

**An alliance of 18 organisations** from across the child development and well-being, education, health, and early learning and childcare sectors has come together to make clear the actions the Northern Territory needs to take to give every child the best possible start in life.

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we meet, work and live, and recognise their continuing connection and care to land, water and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.





Every child, no matter where they live or what their background is,

**NEEDS TO BE ABLE TO ACCESS  
QUALITY, AFFORDABLE, EARLY  
CHILDHOOD SERVICES AND  
HOLISTIC SUPPORTS.**

# 1

## Establish an independent Office of Early Childhood Development that leads early childhood development, care and learning in the Northern Territory.

The Northern Territory Government must introduce new legislation establishing an Office of Early Childhood Development (the Office) to provide strong governance of the early childhood development and learning system. Its overall mandate would be to increase the proportion of children who are developmentally 'on track' when starting school.

The legislation to establish the Office should describe an early childhood development system that includes families, communities, local government, First Nations organisations, non-government and government providers in health, human services, disability and early childhood education and care. The Office must have a legislated leadership, oversight and coordination role and be separate from the departments and agencies that are responsible for the delivery of early childhood services. It must have appropriate resourcing to allow the Office to perform its function.

### The functions of the Office should include:

- 1 Providing overall strategic direction to the Territory Government early years services (noting operational planning and delivery should remain in current departments and agencies).
- 2 Providing oversight of developmental outcomes, using a universal data system that tracks screening, identification and intervention relating to each child.
- 3 Supporting First Nation designed, managed and delivered early years services.
- 4 Commissioning or recommissioning Territory Government services as required with a particular focus on the needs of First Nation children and children in remote locations.
- 5 Commissioning independent research and evaluation of key issues pertaining to Early Childhood Development in the NT, such as quality, workforce and access.

## 2

### **Establish new and enhance existing First Nations designed, managed and delivered community-controlled early years services**

Every child, no matter where they live or what their background is, needs to be able to access quality, affordable, early childhood services, and holistic supports. First Nations children are more than twice as likely to be falling behind in their developmental milestones than other children when they start school (AEDC, 2021).

To assist in meeting the NT's commitments towards Closing the Gap, strong First Nations designed, managed, and delivered integrated early years services must be supported to drive social and economic development.

Flexible, inclusive, and community-based approaches have been successful in facilitating the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to access high-quality early childhood education programs.

#### **To ensure First Nations children thrive:**

- 1** The Northern Territory Government support financial and policy pathways for local, place-based First Nations organisations to establish more early years services where communities have identified the need for community-controlled services.

# 3

## The Northern Territory Government establish an Early Childhood Development system that supports all children's development and learning from conception to school.

Every child in the Northern Territory, in every community, needs access to opportunities that promote their development and wellbeing to help them reach their full potential. To do this the Northern Territory Government needs to create an Early Childhood Development system that is integrated and connected to meet the needs of children and their families. Its design, development and implementation would be overseen by the Office of Early Childhood Development.

### **A Northern Territory Early Childhood Development system would:**

- 1** Be holistic and include all early childhood services that families need to thrive such as early childhood education and care (e.g. childcare, preschool), maternal and child health, disability and allied health, and other services that support communities, such as playgroups and toy libraries.
- 2** Ensuring that every child, no matter where they live, can access quality, affordable, early childhood education and care and child health and development services.

- 3** Enable community-led, place-based solutions that deliver a flexible choice of services, delivered with care, empathy and trust.
- 4** Provide quality, culturally safe services and supports.
- 5** Promote the importance of the early years and the value of early childhood services, programs, and child-friendly, safe spaces.
- 6** Reflect the complex needs of NT families and issues that impact raising children, such as housing, family violence and cost of living.
- 7** Have cultural and language policies that show sensitivity to local communities and seek consultation in their design.

# 4

## The Northern Territory Government work with the Australian Government to develop and implement funding models that are sustainable and integrated to ensure high quality early childhood services are available in all communities.

Government funding underpins early childhood services that are essential to families and children. However, funding for early childhood services, particularly integrated services such as those in First Nation communities, is fragmented, and often short-term. This needs to be fixed.

Funding should mandate collaboration between services, support workforce development and be responsive to the diverse needs of NT children and families. Funding models should be informed by the extensive work of SNAICC.

### The models must:

- 1 Support First Nations designed, managed, and community-controlled early years services.
- 2 Consult with providers when commissioning new integrated services to ensure adequate funding is provided for their successful and sustainable operation.
- 3 Meet the challenges of recruiting and retaining a skilled early childhood workforce.
- 4 Provide for children who are likely to be developmentally vulnerable and/ or need additional support.
- 5 Meet the needs of those living in very remote locations and those who are mobile across borders.



# 5

## The Northern Territory Government establish a \$10million Early Childhood Workforce Fund.

The workforce shortages in the early childhood sector are particularly acute in the NT. To address this the Northern Territory Government should commit a minimum of \$10 million per year to an Early Childhood Workforce Fund for the next 4 years.

The Early Childhood health, development and education and care workforces in the Northern Territory are in crisis. Many education and care, health and child development services have no staff or untrained staff, and little likelihood of attracting suitably qualified staff in the foreseeable future. Staff shortages are most common in low income, regional and very remote communities. This means that children living in these areas are not getting the services they need, when they are likely the children that need them the most.

Improvements in working conditions are needed to attract and retain a suitable workforce to ensure that all children can access the programs and services they deserve.

The purpose of the Early Childhood Workforce Fund would be to increase the supply of early childhood nurses, teachers, allied health professionals, and educators, with a particular priority on attracting and retaining workers in regional and remote communities. It would prioritise the education and training of First Nations people so that children could have access to First Nations cultural knowledge and can engage children in two-way learning. Local workforce development should take into consideration community knowledge, experience, and skills, as well as qualifications.

### **The Early Childhood Workforce Fund should focus on:**

- 1 Developing the First Nations workforce
- 2 Recruiting and retaining highly skilled professionals in early identification and intervention
- 3 Appropriately remunerating and supporting the workforce, particularly in remote and regional communities.
- 4 Reimagining the design and delivery of training and professional learning.

# ENDORISING ORGANISATIONS



**Toy Libraries**



**AUSTRALIA**



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