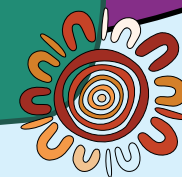




South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy 2026



Government of
South Australia



Flying Start
for kids

Acknowledgement of Country

From the heart

We acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples as the First peoples of South Australia and as custodians of the lands, waters, skies and Communities where we live, learn and raise children.

We recognise Aboriginal peoples as having the longest living Culture, raising children safe and strong in their identity, Community, Culture, and connection to Country.

We pay our deep respects to Elders past and present, and their role as the first knowledge sharers for children. We follow in their footsteps.

Aboriginal peoples, working with and for children, are central in shaping our work. Their wisdom, advice, and guidance enriches our practices, creating a more inclusive and Culturally safe environment for children and families.

We respect Aboriginal peoples' ways of being, doing and wise practices guiding our continual learning. Together we walk and build stronger, more supportive Communities for all children.

Cover credit

Phillip Jackson Jnr and Ochre Dixon (Uncle and Niece) are pictured together playing, learning, and growing on Kaurra Country at Kura Yerlo Children's Centre. Phillip's cultural groups are Kokatha, Mirning, Adnyamathanha and Ngarrindjeri. Ochre's cultural groups are Kaurra, Narungga, Wirangu, Kokatha and Mirning. Thank you to Kaurra and Ngarrindjeri photographer Shemeike Watkins for our cover photo, which is published with permission from the families and Kura Yerlo Children's Centre.

Terminology

Throughout this document, the term 'Aboriginal' respectfully refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We respect the preference to use the term 'Aboriginal' to acknowledge in written and spoken language both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also acknowledge that Torres Strait Islanders may refer to themselves as Zenadth Kes, which is an amalgamation of Torres Strait language names for the 4 winds that pass through the region.

The term 'Indigenous Data Sovereignty' is utilised in line with the Australian Government [Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data](#).

The use of the term 'families' throughout this document respectfully refers to a conception of family that is inclusive of kinship carers, caregivers and extended family members.

The terms 'Culture' and 'Community' are capitalised throughout this document to respectfully acknowledge the deep spiritual and social significance of Culture and Community. In doing so, we seek to emphasise the profound and holistic interconnectedness between Country, Culture and Community.

We also capitalise 'First Teachers' to acknowledge the Cultural authority, knowledge and status of Aboriginal people as the original and ongoing educators of this land long before Western education systems existed. We recognise and respect the significant role Aboriginal people have played as Custodians and transmitters of knowledge for thousands of years.



Contributors and thank you

The Strategy is built on the strong voices and insights of Community members across South Australia.

In addition to the many individual Community members involved in the development of the Strategy, the Office for Early Childhood Development (OECED) and the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network (SAACCON) would particularly like to thank the members of the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group (ACGG) and the following contributors to the co-design process:

- the early childhood education and care (EEOC) sector and Aboriginal Community members connected to and supporting their local preschools and long day care services
- MTL Consulting Services in partnership with Kimberley Wanganeen Consultancy for leading the co-design engagements
- the Aboriginal Leadership Committee within the OECED
- Elders and families as children's First Teachers; and
- the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and educators that paved the way for this Strategy.

Your knowledge, experiences and insights were heard, felt and valued. Your wisdom, advice, and guidance enrich our practices, creating a more inclusive and Culturally responsive environment for children and families.

Artwork

‘Padninthi Kumangka Muna Padni: Walking Together from the Beginning’ by Allan Sumner

This artwork was created for the Office for Early Childhood Development by Allan Sumner, a descendant of the Ngarrindjeri, Kurna, and Yankunytjatjara people. The artwork acknowledges the Kurna people as the First Custodians of the greater Adelaide region, the lands on which much of the Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy (the Strategy) was developed, and extends its story across all South Australian Aboriginal Nations, reflecting a shared responsibility to nurture and support Aboriginal children in their early years.

The artwork reflects a Culturally safe and supportive system where children, families and Communities are respected, and where relationships are central. Children stand strong in the knowledge of those who came before them, while being supported to walk confidently into the future.

We thank Allan Sumner and the team at We Create Print Deliver for developing an artwork that stands as a visual expression of the Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy and its Theory of Change - grounded in connection, guided by Culture and shaped through partnership.



Explanation of artwork symbols



Element: Children

Meaning: At the heart of the artwork, this symbol represents Aboriginal children and symbolises strength of spirit, Culture, identity and belonging. This central gathering place symbolises the spirit, identity and Cultural strength of children, grounded in belonging and connection.



Element: Family and Community

Meaning: Clusters of gathering circles represent families, carers, educators, Elders and Community knowledge holders. These include mothers, fathers, aunties, uncles, grandparents, older siblings and Elders. Each plays a vital role in teaching, guiding and nurturing children as they grow. Gathering circles reflect shared decision-making, co-design and the ongoing guidance of Elders and Community.



Element: Journeys of Children

Meaning: Circular, layered rings of colour and intricate dot work represent the journeys of children as they grow and learn through story, song, ceremony, Cultural rhythm, and lived experience. Together, these elements reflect the richness of Cultural knowledge that is held and shared, and symbolise the living presence of Elders and knowledge holders.



Element: Landscape and Country, Sky and Water

Meaning: The flowing landscape and layered patterns reflect Country as a living presence. Distinct colour fields including earthy reds, warm ochres, deep greens and soft pinks reflect land, water and sky across South Australia. These elements speak to the diversity of Country while reinforcing connection, balance and wellbeing across Cultural, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions.



Element: Journey Pathways

Meaning: Radiating pathways link the gathering circles and illustrate the ongoing exchange of knowledge, including stories, language, Cultural practices and life skills passed between generations with care and respect. These pathways form a strong, interconnected network of support surrounding each child and represent the journeys of children and the many relationships that guide and support them.

Minister's message

The South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy sets out a clear vision: Aboriginal children in South Australia thrive. We want our children to be strong in Culture, confident in learning, and supported by families and their Communities as First Teachers. Achieving this vision requires Culturally responsive preschools and early learning centres, meaningful engagement with Aboriginal Communities, integrated service delivery, and connected government systems that listen, learn and transform.

The Strategy responds directly to the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care and shared commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. As South Australia rolls out universal 3-year-old preschool from 2026, we want more Aboriginal children to access more Culturally responsive preschool supports that reflect their identities, strengths and aspirations.

This vision will be delivered through both the co-designed new initiatives outlined in this Strategy, but also the extensive early childhood reforms being stewarded by the Office for Early Childhood Development, which has embedded Aboriginal voices and prioritised Culture and Community within every program supporting the roll out of universal 3-year-old preschool and associated reforms.

South Australia is making a record \$1.9 billion investment to 2032 to deliver universal 3-year-old preschool and broader early years reform to support all children. In response to the recommendation of the Royal Commission, within this investment, the government specifically committed to fund new initiatives focused on Aboriginal children. This investment totals \$35 million over the next four years, and \$12.8 million per annum ongoing from 2030-31.



Hon Lucy Hood MP

Minister for Education, Training and Skills

\$5.8 million has also been committed as part of our commitment to grow, strengthen and support South Australia's Aboriginal early childhood workforce, and there is an estimated benefit of \$40 million to 2032 through broader OECD reforms with the goal of empowering Aboriginal children.

I would like to thank the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network for its formal partnership with the Government of South Australia on this critical work, overseen by the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group, and affirm our ongoing commitment to Closing the Gap principles of shared decision-making, accountability and Aboriginal leadership at every stage of design and implementation.

I would also like to acknowledge and thank the Honourable Blair Boyer MP, as the former Minister for his strong support of this work. I am proud to endorse this Strategy as a cornerstone of South Australia's early childhood reforms. It reflects our responsibility to do better, our willingness to work differently and our belief in the strength and leadership of South Australian Aboriginal Communities.



Kim Little

Chief Executive

Office for Early Childhood Development



Scott Wilson

Lead Convenor

South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network

Partners' message

The South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy is a result of the Office for Early Childhood Development and the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network entering into a formal partnership in line with [Priority Reform 1](#) under the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#). Throughout the Strategy's development, we have embedded the South Australian Public Sector [definition, principles and conditions](#) for authentic engagement and co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our shared purpose was to respond to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care to co-design investments to ensure that Aboriginal children retain and increase the benefits from 3-year-old preschool as universal 3-year-old preschool is introduced in South Australia.

Co-design sits at the heart of this Strategy and guides the state's approach to early

childhood reform. We acknowledge the leadership of Aboriginal Communities, Elders, families, educators, and Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) who have guided this work, overseen by the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group, as well as the work to support strong Aboriginal workforce representation in the early years within the [South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy](#).

We are also grateful to MTL Consulting Services in partnership with Kimberley Wanganeen Consultancy for gathering critical insights from Communities across the state.

Their voices, wisdom and lived experience are embedded in the shape and nature of this Strategy, and its approach to empowering Aboriginal children.

Table of contents

Executive summary9

The broader context – weaving it all together10

National Agreement on Closing the Gap10

Aboriginal children in South Australia – data snapshot11

Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) - a national Closing the Gap forum12

National Sector Strengthening Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development12

Department for Education13

Governance14

Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group (ACGG)14

Ongoing Community engagement and local voice14

South Australian First Nations Voice to Parliament14

Community-led co-design15

Key engagement themes15

Theory of change16

Vision19

Goals19

Elements20

Principles22

Enablers23

Phased implementation24

Actions to drive change26

All preschools are culturally responsive26

ECEC & family services are well connected28

Families understand child development30

Families have more choice - ACCOs32

Barriers to engagement are reduced33

Families are decision-makers35

Accountability framework36

Guiding principles36

Measures & reporting38

Evaluation framework38



Executive summary

About this strategy

The Strategy is a cornerstone of the state’s early childhood education reforms. It responds directly to the recommendations of the 2023 Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care, ensuring that the universal rollout of 3-year-old preschool from 2026 empowers Aboriginal children and their families.

Aboriginal children in South Australia have benefited from access to 2 years of public preschool since 1988, providing a strong foundation for their learning and development. This Strategy strengthens this foundation by centring Aboriginal voices, perspectives and leadership in preschools for families, to empower Aboriginal children to thrive as they grow.

Developed through Aboriginal-led co-design across the 6 South Australian [First Nations Voice to Parliament](#) regions and governed by the Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group formed for this purpose, the Strategy reflects a strong and consistent message from Communities: early childhood reform must be shaped *with* Aboriginal peoples, not *for* Aboriginal peoples.

Building on the legacy of Aboriginal-led preschool programs and decades of advocacy, this Strategy aligns to an Aboriginal Co-Design Governance Group developed Theory of Change that defines the elements required to deliver on our shared vision that all Aboriginal children in South Australia thrive.

Actions to drive change

	Theory of Change alignment	Existing initiatives	New initiatives
System and service level	All preschools are Culturally responsive, and there is more proactive and positive engagement with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing	Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training	Elders in Residence
	Early childhood education and care and other family services are well connected	Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy	SA Early Years Support Service + Advocacy
	There is accountability to Aboriginal Communities and commitment to Indigenous Data Sovereignty	ACCO Integrated Hubs	Accountability Framework
Child and family level		Child Health and Development Screening	Co-designed Evaluation Framework
		Governance	
	Families understand child development and are more aware of the benefits of 2 years of preschool	Words Grow Minds First Nations campaign	SA Aboriginal Preschool Communication Strategy
		Preschool Hours Uplift (Department for Education)	OECD Aboriginal Branding
	Families have more choice about attending a well-supported Aboriginal Community controlled service	Sector Strengthening	Aboriginal Playgroup Strategy
		Flying Start - Infrastructure Grants Program – ACCO stream	Tailored ACCO Funding Models
			Strengthening ACCOs Infrastructure Fund
			Community Liaison Officers (Linkers)
			Fee Relief
			Early Childhood Education and Care Enrolment and Administrative Process Review (Department for Education)
	Barriers to engagement are reduced		
	Families are decision makers	Enter for Success Strategy (Department for Education)	Place-Based Self-Determination Funds

The broader context - weaving it all together

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

The South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy is grounded in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, which provides the overarching framework for shared accountability, outcomes and reform between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Strategy aligns with:

Outcome 3: Children are engaged in high quality, Culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Target 3: By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to **95%**.⁴

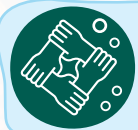
Outcome 4: Children thrive in their early years.

Target 4: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to **55%**.

It is also guided by the 4 Priority Reforms of the Agreement, which focus on changing how governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:



Priority Reform 1:
Formal partnerships and shared decision-making



Priority Reform 2: Building the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector



Priority Reform 3:
Transforming government organisations



Priority Reform 4:
Shared access to data and information at a regional level

By embedding Aboriginal priorities at every stage of reform, the Strategy keeps Closing the Gap at the centre, ensuring Aboriginal children are supported to thrive, connected with Culture, identity and belonging, and able to learn with strength, pride and agency.

⁴ Note: Target 3 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is currently being reviewed, with proposed refreshed targets expected to place increased emphasis on both enrolment and attendance in YBFS early childhood education.

Aboriginal children in South Australia – data snapshot



A young and growing population

Aboriginal peoples have a younger age profile than the non-Aboriginal population, with a higher proportion of children in the early years. This reinforces the importance of investing early in Culturally responsive early childhood systems to support lifelong wellbeing, learning and identity.²

South Australia is home to approximately **5,700** Aboriginal children aged 0-4 years and **2,300** preschool aged children in the 2 years before school. The majority of Aboriginal children aged 3-4 years old are enrolled in Government preschools.³



Strong enrolment in 4-year-old preschool (Outcome/Target 3)

In 2024, Productivity Commission data indicated that **93.5%** of Aboriginal children in South Australia were enrolled in a preschool program in the YBFS age cohort.

Nationally, enrolment of Aboriginal children in YBFS early childhood education is on track to meet the current Closing the Gap Target 3, with participation increasing significantly since the 2016 baseline year.⁴



Why reform is still needed (Outcome/Target 4)

In 2024, **28.7%** of Aboriginal children commencing school in South Australia were assessed as developmentally on track across all 5 AEDC domains, compared to **53%** for all children.⁵

This highlights the need to move beyond 4-year-old preschool enrolment measures alone and strengthen the quality, Cultural responsiveness and connectedness of early childhood experiences, particularly in ways that support identity, wellbeing and learning.

² National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics; Department for Education (SA).

⁴ South Australian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan: 2024–25 Annual Report.

⁵ 2024 Australian Early Development Census.



Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership (ECCDPP) - a national Closing the Gap forum

The [ECCDPP](#) enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to work in genuine partnership with governments to drive Community-led, early childhood care and development outcomes.

This Strategy is informed by the work of the ECCDPP which reflects our shared goal that Aboriginal children thrive in Culturally responsive and safe, well-connected environments. This includes:

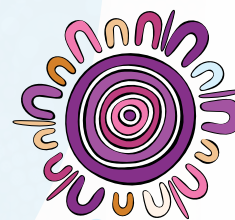
- incorporating learnings and priorities of the ECCDPP into design
- focusing on Aboriginal-led implementation
- strengthening integrated services
- building workforce capability; and
- embedding authentic local engagement.

The National Sector Strengthening Plan for Early Childhood Care and Development

The National Sector Strengthening Plan is focused on building the Aboriginal Community-Controlled sectors that address:

- early childhood education and care (ECEC) and integrated supports to children and families to support child development; and
- child protection and family support services that focus on the needs of children and families experiencing vulnerability and/or who are in contact with child protection systems.

The Strategy strongly aligns to this work in its significant investment in the ACCO ECEC sector.



Department for Education

Aboriginal children in South Australia have been entitled to access 12 hours of preschool per week from the age of 3 since 1988, through Department for Education (the department) preschools.

In 2024, as part of the Royal Commission response and recognising the importance of 3-year-old preschool for many Aboriginal families, the government increased its existing offer of preschool for 3-year-old Aboriginal children, from 12 to 15 hours a week in department preschools to align with its universal offering. Like all South Australian children, Aboriginal children are eligible to access 600 hours (15 hours per week) of government preschool in the year before full-time school.

Building on this targeted approach to supporting Aboriginal children and their families, the department also extended its Enter for Success Strategy, so Aboriginal children can enrol in any government preschool.

Recognising the benefits and importance of Aboriginal children developing foundations for success in the early years, the department has set this as a goal of its Aboriginal Education Strategy, 2019 to 2029, along with the following objectives:

1. Health and developmental services are provided to Aboriginal children and families in accessible and Culturally welcoming ways and locations.
2. Aboriginal children access and participate in quality early childhood learning and care that incorporates meaningful engagement from families and Communities.
3. Aboriginal children and their families have in place the foundations for learning as they transition from home to early childhood services to school and between schools.
4. Aboriginal families and Communities are active participants in the governance of child and family centres.

The department is also delivering several aligned programs including the Preschool Reform Agreement (PRA) funded early years engagement officer program in the Anangu Lands; the Hearing

impairment support program; Families as First Teachers training; and implementation of playgroups in the Anangu Lands.

The department is committed to providing access to high-quality early childhood education and care experiences for Aboriginal children and their families. These should be Culturally appropriate and build on the strengths of Aboriginal nations and their Cultures. These experiences will be complemented by engaging families and Communities in their child's learning and development planning.

In partnership with Aboriginal people, the department has reset its approach to improving education outcomes for Aboriginal learners across all public education settings, from early childhood through to senior secondary.

The co-designed [Blueprint for Aboriginal outcomes in public education](#) (the Blueprint), released in 2026, provides a clear and unified vision for Aboriginal outcomes. It builds on good work underway, creating consistency through a system-wide understanding about the practices and behaviours that have the greatest impact for Aboriginal learners, and what success looks and feels like for Aboriginal learners and their families.

It sharpens focus on the public system's collective responsibility and accountability for supporting Aboriginal outcomes, and that Aboriginal voices must share decision-making. The Blueprint is about creating the right system foundations so Aboriginal children and young people learn and thrive in public education.

As part of its 10-year goals, the department is committed to improving Aboriginal children's cognitive, emotional, social and communication skills and overall health and wellbeing, to support them to succeed. This requires working alongside Aboriginal families and Communities and building a confident, Culturally inclusive workforce ready to identify and implement the actions necessary to maximise the success of the department's Aboriginal Education Strategy and this Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy, in close partnership with the Office for Early Childhood Development and the South Australian Aboriginal Education, Training and Consultative Council (SAAETCO).

Governance

Effective governance is central to the success of this Strategy, grounded in Aboriginal leadership and accountability to Communities. In line with Priority Reform 1: *Formal partnerships and shared decision making*, specifically the “strong partnership elements” defined in Clauses 32 and 33 of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#), the governance structure for this Strategy is built on the principles of self-determination, shared decision-making and Aboriginal-informed accountability, ensuring Aboriginal people shape the processes and decisions that affect their children and families.



Image: ACGG meeting.⁶

Aboriginal Co-design Governance Group (ACGG)

ACGG is the primary shared decision-making body for this Strategy. It is currently a co-chaired governance group between the South Australian Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation Network and OECD.

Membership: The ACGG has equal government and non-government membership, with majority Aboriginal representation, and includes early education and child development experts, representatives from ACCOs, SAACCON, the education peak SAAETCC, Wakwakurna Kanyini - the peak body for Aboriginal Children and Families, Community Elders as First Teachers and government agencies.

Role: The ACGG exists to uphold and advance the principles of co-design in early childhood policy and practice. Its primary purpose is to ensure that Aboriginal voices, Cultural authority, and lived experience shape the development and implementation of initiatives that impact Aboriginal children, families, and Communities. Through its leadership, the group promotes Culturally safe, Community-led approaches that reflect the aspirations of Aboriginal South Australians.

Ongoing Community engagement and local voice

Beyond ACGG, OECD is committed to deep, ongoing engagement at the local, regional and remote levels. This Strategy was built on extensive, Aboriginal-led place-based engagements across South Australia's 6 First Nations Voice to Parliament regions. This commitment to listening to and collaborating with Communities will continue.

The Strategy implementation will require work with local Communities and leaders, ACCOs and Aboriginal peaks to co-design and implement programs that are responsive to local priorities, needs and Cultural contexts. Prioritisation will be given to ACCOs and Aboriginal businesses for the design and implementation of initiatives.

South Australian First Nations Voice to Parliament

Consistent with the Government of South Australia's commitment to listening to Aboriginal voices, the First Nations Voice will play a crucial role in informing the transformation of the sector to respond to the needs of Aboriginal children and families. Engagement with the First Nations Voice to Parliament will continue during the co-design process of implementing and evaluating the Strategy.

Community-led co-design

Aboriginal leadership guided the development of this Strategy. The OECD engaged MTL Consulting Services and Kimberley Wanganeen Consultancy to lead the extensive co-design engagement process.

Through multiple phases of engagement (including metropolitan, regional and remote workshops, online sessions, and targeted discussions) Aboriginal educators, parents, Elders, Community members and ACCO and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) representatives shared their

insights on barriers, strengths and aspirations for early childhood education.

This Strategy is the outcome of that process: a genuine, Community-led co-design, built around Aboriginal knowledge and aspirations. It reflects the themes and priorities raised during this process and builds on a shared commitment to create Culturally inclusive and responsive early education for every Aboriginal child in South Australia.

Key engagement themes

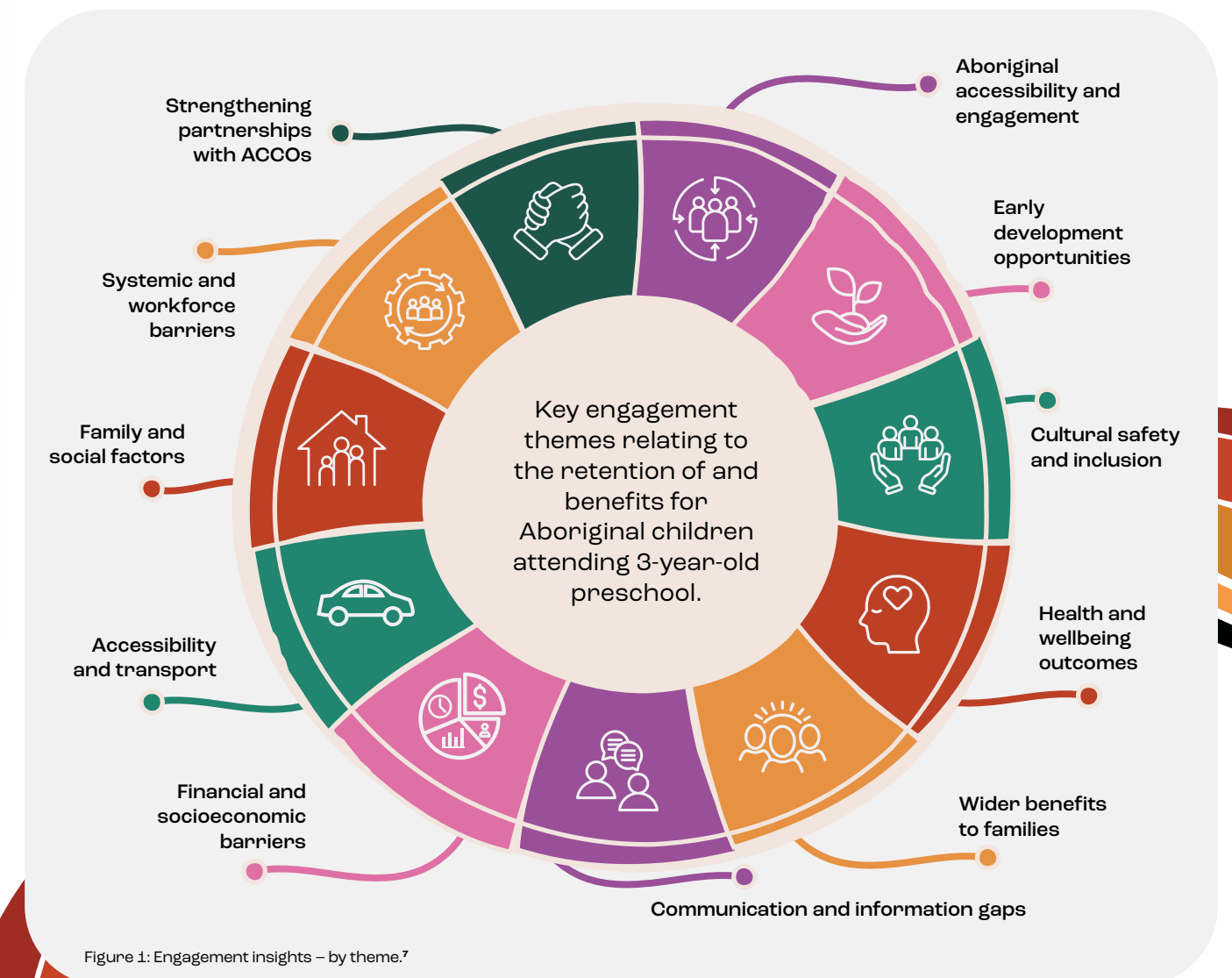


Figure 1: Engagement insights – by theme.⁷

⁶ Image: Members at the December 2025 ACGG meeting, also attended by MTL Consulting Services and Kimberley Wanganeen Consultancy.

⁷ MTL Consulting Services and Kimberley Wanganeen Consultancy, *South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Co-Design Project: 3-Year-Old Preschool Report*, South Australian Government, August 2025, p. 23

South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy

Theory of Change / Strategy on a Page

Vision

Aboriginal children in South Australia thrive

Goals

Preschool will strengthen identity and support healthy development and learning

Families and Communities will experience a Culturally responsive and better-connected early childhood service ecosystem

Measures

Closing the Gap Outcome **3 Children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years**
Target: Being refreshed in 2026

Closing the Gap Outcome **4 Children thrive in their early years**
Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55% (The South Australian 2024 baseline was 28.7%)

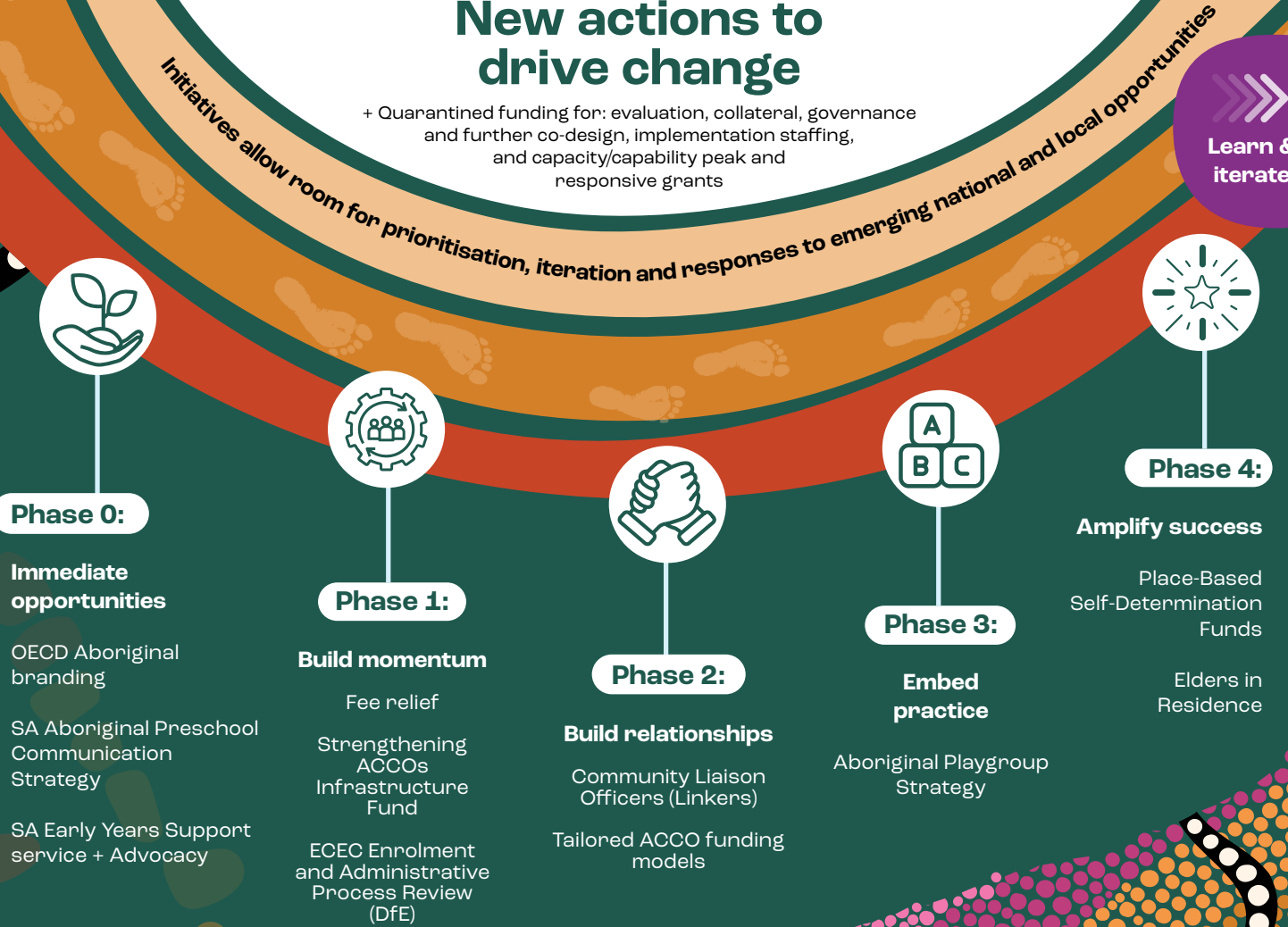
These will be achieved through



Our vision will be delivered by phased investment in new initiatives in addition to: mandated Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training for preschools, the Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy, ACCO integrated hubs, Child Health and Development screening, ongoing Aboriginal Governance, the Words Grow Minds First Nations campaign, Preschool hours uplift in the Department for Education, Sector Strengthening initiatives and the Flying Start Infrastructure Grants Program – ACCO stream.

New actions to drive change

+ Quarantined funding for: evaluation, collateral, governance and further co-design, implementation staffing, and capacity/capability peak and responsive grants



This approach reflects our starting point and opportunity....

...to build on decades of an existing Aboriginal 3-year-old preschool entitlement

...as a part of a universal, whole of sector roll out that enables us to design new approaches and reach all children

...with a mandate, dedicated funding and aligned Closing the Gap and Sector Strengthening commitments

And is underpinned and informed by corresponding fundamental principles and enablers of design and delivery:





Theory of change

Vision

This vision honours and amplifies the voices of Aboriginal children, families, and Communities, reflecting their hopes and aspirations. True success means children are happy, confident and eager to attend preschool. Children engage in learning with wonder, joy and agency, supported by families who are present, connected and valued. Aboriginal children are strong in their Culture and surrounded by family and Community in environments grounded in Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing. This becomes possible when education and care systems provide Culturally responsive learning conditions and partner with families who are the decision-makers in their child's journey. Governments support this through Priority Reform 3: *transforming government organisations*.



Goals

To achieve this vision, OECD commits to 2 ambitious, interconnected goals that resonate with what Communities said is most important:

Goal
Preschool will strengthen identity and support healthy development and learning.

Goal
Families and Communities will experience a Culturally responsive and better-connected early childhood service ecosystem.

Achieving these goals is central to South Australia's commitment to Closing the Gap. It requires moving beyond access, to ensure that what is offered is of high quality and informed by Aboriginal lived experiences. This means embedding Culturally responsive practice across early childhood settings (including both traditional preschools and preschool programs in long day care/early learning centres), strengthening partnerships with Aboriginal families and Communities and building an integrated service system that supports every child's development, wellbeing, sense of belonging and Cultural safety.

Theory of change

Elements

Achieving the Strategy's vision and goals requires change at every level. The following elements of our Theory of Change reflect the core engagement themes raised by Communities and will guide OECD's actions and reform work.

System and service level

All preschools are Culturally responsive, and there is more proactive and positive engagement with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing

Communities identified Cultural responsiveness as the essential foundation for Aboriginal children's success in early learning. Embedding Aboriginal perspectives must go beyond symbolic gestures to become a defining feature of how services are designed, delivered and evaluated. Community feedback also highlighted the importance of Aboriginal people working in the ECEC sector, embedding local Cultural knowledge in practice, supporting warm and early connections to education settings, and visibly welcoming environments.

Early Childhood Education and Care and other family services are well connected

Communities called for holistic, wraparound approaches that help connect education, health, housing and family supports to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and families. Too often, services operate in isolation. This leaves families to navigate complex and fragmented systems. Supporting stronger cross-sector connections will create a more coordinated and empowering ecosystem that responds to each child's developmental, Cultural and family context.

There is accountability to Aboriginal Communities and commitment to Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Aboriginal people have been clear that genuine accountability and shared decision-making are fundamental to achieving better outcomes for children and families. This requires transparent communication, shared governance and data practices that respect Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles. Strengthening Aboriginal governance over the data ecosystem including creation, development, stewardship, analysis, dissemination and infrastructure can help Communities see and shape progress in real time. Implementation actions will establish mechanisms for Aboriginal leadership in monitoring, evaluation and data governance and explore shared access for Community. This will help embed accountability and transparency throughout implementation.

Child and family level

Families understand child development and are more aware of the benefits of 2 years of preschool

Community feedback highlighted the need for clearer, Culturally framed communication about child development and the value of 2 years of preschool. Many families expressed interest in supporting their children's learning but wanted more accessible information delivered in trusted spaces and through trusted voices. Strengthening families' understanding of child development (particularly during the early years) can enable more informed decisions and greater engagement with preschool programs.

Families have more choice about attending a well-supported Aboriginal Community Controlled service

Communities consistently emphasised the importance of Aboriginal-led early childhood services that reflect and uphold Culture, language and identity. ACCOs are uniquely positioned to deliver programs that are both educational and Culturally responsive, providing safe and empowering environments for Aboriginal children and families. Strengthening partnerships with existing ACCOs and supporting the development of new Aboriginal-led services expands family choice for early learning experiences that align with Community priorities.

Barriers to engagement are reduced

Community engagements identified a range of barriers that prevent families from fully participating in preschool programs and early childhood services, including transport challenges, complex enrolment processes, financial pressures and limited flexibility in service delivery. Addressing these systemic and practical obstacles is critical to improving access and participation.

Families are decision-makers

Communities emphasised that Aboriginal families want to be recognised as leaders and decision makers in their children's early learning and development journeys. This can require shifting power and practice so that families have an active voice in shaping preschool programs, priorities and everyday experiences. Building the capability of services to engage respectfully and share decision-making authority means that families' Cultural knowledge and aspirations can guide planning and practice.



Theory of change

Principles

The following principles will guide the implementation of this Strategy, ensuring it is responsive and impactful.

Principle	How it will guide this work
<i>Learn and iterate</i>	We will leave room for growth, reflection and change through our fund administration and Accountability Framework and evaluation approach, adapting the approach and our resource allocation based on ongoing evaluation and Community feedback.
<i>Build on early momentum and engagement</i>	We will maintain the meaningful connections established during the co-design process, ensuring Communities remain engaged through key milestones, starting with initiatives that seize immediate opportunities and build momentum.
<i>Focus on core, impactful priorities</i>	We will prioritise bold, trust-based initiatives identified by Community as critical for success and invest more in doing fewer things at a larger, sustained scale.
<i>Set up for success</i>	We will reduce the implementation burden on services and Communities by providing adequate resources, allowing for administration and reporting overheads, building capacity, being flexible and ensuring funding is secure and long-term.
<i>Create coherence</i>	Our actions will align with OECD programs and reforms, as well as national, state and local strategies and frameworks (including the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the South Australian Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership and the Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan), to ensure a coordinated approach.



Enablers

The following enablers are the foundational conditions necessary for the successful design and delivery of this Strategy. They reflect what we heard through the co-design process and aim to create true power-sharing.

Enabler	How it will guide this work
<i>Aboriginal leadership</i>	Aboriginal people must be at the table, shaping the design and delivery of programs that affect Aboriginal children and Communities.
<i>Shared decision-making</i>	We commit to genuine co-design and governance processes based on trust, transparency and shared decision-making and accountability.
<i>Embedding Cultural ways of knowing, being and doing</i>	We will uphold and reflect Aboriginal values, connection to Country, kinship and Community in all our work.
<i>Ongoing investment aligned to agreed outcomes</i>	Sustained, flexible funding and ongoing commitment to initiatives is critical to enable ACCOs and other Community services to focus on long-term impact.
<i>Transparent, Aboriginal-informed accountability frameworks</i>	Our Accountability Framework establishes clear accountability to Aboriginal Communities, ensuring our measures of success are meaningful, transparent and drive continuous improvement.
<i>Robust governance and Indigenous Data Sovereignty</i>	Community self-determination will be embedded in local initiatives and the principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty reflected in our Accountability Framework and evaluation approach.



Theory of change

Phased implementation

A coordinated set of new funded initiatives, that turn our commitments into practical, place-based and system-level change have been co-designed with ACGG, in response to Community voice, aligned to the core elements of the Strategy’s Theory of Change.

Implementation will be staged over 4-5 years to build momentum, deepen relationships, test and learn, scale and embed practice and amplify impact, while ensuring readiness across Communities, services and systems.

Together, these initiatives focus on strengthening what works, removing structural barriers, and enabling Aboriginal children, families and Communities to shape early childhood systems that support strong Cultural identity, wellbeing and learning from the earliest years.

These initiatives were prioritised by the ACGG after extensive analysis by SAACCON and the OECD of the many potential initiatives identified through the co-design process, and a range of other state and national reforms and commitments. The prioritisation was based on alignment back to the opportunity and barrier themes identified through the co-design engagements, alignment to the Theory of Change elements and enablers, and consideration of the principles of sustained investment in fewer, larger impactful initiatives.

The Theory of Change specifically commits to setting programs and delivery partners up for success through effective implementation resourcing, leaving room for iteration, growth, reflection and change. A portion of funding will be quarantined for evaluation, communications products, governance and further

co-design, implementation staffing, and building the capacity and capability of local ACCO peaks via responsive grants. As implementation planning, testing, evaluation and scaling up inform the ongoing monitoring of the Strategy’s impact, the ACGG will also consider funding of priorities in response to emerging national and local opportunities. This flexible and responsive design, and the Aboriginal informed Accountability Framework and evaluation approach, are the main contributors to element 3 of the Theory of Change: *there is accountability to Aboriginal Communities and commitment to Indigenous Data Sovereignty*. All new and existing specific initiatives have been mapped against the other Theory of Change elements in the following section.

In addition to the new initiatives identified through the co-design process, the OECD has ensured that Aboriginal families, Communities and workforce are at the centre of a wide range of other universal and targeted reforms. These are happening right now to immediately strengthen Aboriginal participation in preschool and, together with the newly funded initiatives, will support achievement of the vision and goals of the Strategy.

Building on the insights from Community engagement, the new initiatives being invested in through this Strategy will be delivered through a phased implementation approach. The Government of South Australia has committed \$35 million over the next 4 years, and \$12.8 million per annum ongoing from 2030-31. This approach supports momentum-building, trust and confidence across the sector, and ensures systems and services have the capacity to evolve and strengthen over time.



Phase	Aim
Phase 0: <i>Immediate opportunities</i>	Establish the core foundations, including renewing governance, new OECD Aboriginal branding and early ACCO support and peak readiness work to support a coordinated rollout and ensure the reform is visible and connected to Community from the outset.
Phase 1: <i>Build momentum</i>	Establish trust, and support families by strengthening Aboriginal leadership and the sector alongside early place-based and preschool-level action.
Phase 2: <i>Build relationships</i>	Expand implementation by deepening Community partnerships and encouraging greater service participation, helping to build shared ownership of the reform.
Phase 3: <i>Embed practice</i>	Establish sustainable programs, build on phases 1 and 2, and embed these initiatives for long-term success, while beginning to explore expansion of local programs reflective of Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing into everyday practice.
Phase 4: <i>Amplify success</i>	Amplify Aboriginal voice and governance and place-based self-determination, and deliver programs embedding local Culture and authority.

Work will continue beyond the 4 initial growth phases to strengthen system learning, and embed Aboriginal leadership in the evaluation and design of all programs.

Actions to drive change

All preschools are Culturally responsive, and there is more proactive and positive engagement with Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing



Elders in Residence

Phase 4 new initiative – Amplify Success

Co-design theme/s: Aboriginal Cultural safety and inclusion | **Priority Reform alignment:** 1

The Elders in Residence Program will embed respected Aboriginal Elders and Cultural knowledge holders in early childhood settings, prioritised in locations with higher rates of enrolment of Aboriginal children.

Elders will work alongside educators, families and local Communities to strengthen Cultural responsiveness and safety, and support relationship-building and Culturally grounded early learning for Aboriginal children.

Their presence will support local knowledge and authority to shape practice, transitions, and everyday learning environments. All children benefit from greater knowledge of Culture, not just Aboriginal children.

This initiative aims to:

- deepen Culturally responsive practice in preschools
- reinforce service accountability to Aboriginal Communities; and
- nurture children's identity, belonging and wellbeing.

Aboriginal Cultural Safety Training

Existing initiative

Co-design theme/s: Aboriginal Cultural safety and inclusion

All early childhood professionals are encouraged to undertake Aboriginal Cultural Safety training to help create more inclusive services for Aboriginal children, families and Communities.

Services that partner with the government to deliver universal 3-year-old preschool are required to ensure that educators working in the funded preschool room/s, and other staff in direct contact with families from these rooms (such as administration staff), undertake at least the foundation level of Aboriginal Cultural Safety training delivered by approved ACCOs or Aboriginal business suppliers. This foundational training is made available at no cost to partner preschools, and is complemented by the mandated, and free, Trauma-informed Practice training. This core training supports all partner services to strengthen their capability and respond to children where they are at.

The [Aboriginal Cultural Safety content framework](#) is shared in detail with all preschool partners and includes 3 levels of training:

- **Level 1 - Knowing:** is the foundation level of Aboriginal Cultural Safety training mandated for all services
- **Level 2 - Being:** is classed as intermediate level 2 training, that further builds understanding beyond the foundational level; and
- **Level 3 - Doing:** is considered advanced level 3, and unpacks in more detail, the critical elements to Aboriginal Cultural safety.

Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy

Existing initiative

Co-design theme/s: Systemic and workforce barriers

Growing the early childhood education sector's Aboriginal workforce representation is not only vital for improving outcomes for Aboriginal children, it also strengthens the Aboriginal Cultural safety, capability and inclusivity of the entire sector and its services. The [Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy](#) launched in September 2025 and is focused on building a strong, visible, connected and Culturally safe Aboriginal workforce across the early childhood sector.

South Australia is the first in the nation to have co-designed a dedicated Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce Strategy. We are proud to be investing a record \$5.8 million as part of our commitment to grow, strengthen and support South Australia's Aboriginal Early Childhood Workforce. Initiatives include:

- a targeted attraction approach
- building and supporting entry pathways (traineeships, taster courses, Culturally safe placement options, grants for local training options)
- development, recognition and retention of staff (financial supports, paid placements, scholarships, Aboriginal Cultural safety assessments of services); and
- community & employer collaboration (grants for embedding Aboriginal Cultural safety & growing services' Cultural knowledge).

These are above and beyond other initiatives in place, including a scholarships pathway via QualifySA and a statewide Flying Start Aboriginal Professionals Network aimed at supporting early childhood professionals, allied health and community services professionals, to connect and collaborate on improving early childhood education and care outcomes.

Actions to drive change

Early childhood education and care and other family services are well connected



SA Early Years Support Service + Advocacy

Phase 0 new initiative – Immediate opportunities (already underway)

Co-design theme/s: Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs | **Priority Reform alignment:** 2

SNAICC is the National Voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. This initiative will reduce the administrative burden on ACCOs through the expansion of the [SNAICC Early Years Support](#) service (EYS) backbone into South Australia in partnership with local ACCOs and Aboriginal peak bodies.

The EYS backbone service works with ACCO early years services and local bodies as a trusted and Culturally respectful partner. The EYS provides ACCO ECEC services with practical operational assistance and tailored, responsive support for quality programs. It supports sector connections and strengthened networks, advocacy and representation (in partnership with local Aboriginal peak bodies).

In addition, complementary formal partnership arrangements between the OECD and South Australian ACCO peak bodies will support peak sector strengthening and capacity for early years engagement, advocacy, policy and governance support. This will position local bodies well to consider future partnerships on implementation of new initiatives. These partnerships include:

- [SAAETCC](#) - the South Australian education peak - for engagement and advocacy in early years policy, reform design and implementation, and ongoing co-design governance; and

- [Wakwakurna Kanyini](#) - the South Australian peak for Aboriginal Children and Families - to increase capacity to engage in early years policy and governance.

This initiative aims to:

- uphold the government's formal partnership commitments under Priority Reform 1 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, while delivering on Priority Reform 2
- expand family access to strong ACCO-led options; and
- continue to strengthen local South Australian peak bodies.

ACCO Integrated Hubs

Existing initiative

Co-design theme/s: Aboriginal Cultural safety and inclusion; Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs

The Government of South Australia has committed to establishing 20 integrated hubs across South Australia. These hubs incorporate integrated supports for the children most at risk of developmental vulnerability and their families, as measured on the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC). The OECD is working with ACCOs towards the goal of at least 2 of these hubs being ACCO-led.

ACCO-led integrated hubs will provide Aboriginal families access to preschool alongside health, family and other Community support services and programs. Integrated hubs will value and respect the role of

families, Elders and Aboriginal Community members as First Teachers. Place-based co-design ensures Community priorities are understood and shape infrastructure requirements that respond to local needs.

Child Health and Development Screening

Existing initiative

Co-design theme/s: Health and wellbeing outcomes; Family and social factors

Free health and development screening is available for children from birth to 5 years living in South Australia. Screenings help make sure children are growing, learning and thriving, while connecting families with the right support early, if needed.

The Government of South Australia, through the OECD in partnership with the Child and Family Health Service is [expanding access to free screening across the state](#), so families have more appointment times in more locations, including areas with high demand and regional and remote Communities.

The OECD is also working to strengthen access to screening and improve navigation and follow-up pathways for Aboriginal families. ACCHO and ACCO program partnerships have tested the value of linker roles and connecting families to ACCHO delivered health and development screening. A future linker model, connected to the Community Liaison Officer new initiative is now being scoped by the Aboriginal Health Council of SA.

Actions to drive change

Families understand child development and are more aware of the benefits of 2 years of preschool

SA Aboriginal Preschool Communication Strategy

Phase 0 new initiative – Immediate opportunities (already underway)
Co-design theme/s: Communication and information gaps; Aboriginal accessibility and engagement | Priority Reform alignment: 1

A state-wide, Culturally nuanced and co-designed communications strategy will increase awareness, trust and uptake of preschool by Aboriginal children.

This initiative will co-design messaging, resources and engagement approaches that reflect Culture, identity and Community voice.

It will include tailored regional campaigns, digital and print materials, Community-based activation, adaptation of the Words Grow Minds campaign for Aboriginal families and Communities, as well as development of a Culturally accessible preschool information hub and resource directory. Using a strengths-based approach, communications will promote 2 years of preschool and recognise Aboriginal families as leaders in their child's learning journey.

- This initiative aims to:
- support and complement the Words Grow Minds adaptation for Aboriginal families and Communities
 - strengthen families' understanding of child development and the value of 2 years of preschool
 - support informed family choice and increased enrolment and participation of Aboriginal children in preschool
 - increase trust in government and education systems; and
 - increase visibility of Aboriginal Culture and voice in early childhood education promotion.

OECD Aboriginal branding

Phase 0 new initiative – Immediate opportunities (already underway)
Co-design theme/s: Aboriginal Cultural safety and inclusion | Priority Reform alignment: 3

Building on the existing Flying Start brand, new cohesive, Culturally grounded branding helps strengthen visibility, identity and trust with Aboriginal Communities across SA. The design and artwork will be used in communication to support connection and ownership among Aboriginal families and Communities in early childhood initiatives.

Developed by Aboriginal artists in partnership with ACGG and the OECD, the branding has created a unified visual identity and communication assets that reflect Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing.

Use of this branding beyond the Strategy will ensure reforms are recognisable and help achieve coherence between universal preschool reforms and Aboriginal priorities - signalling respect, Cultural responsiveness and accountability from the outset.

- This initiative aims to:
- strengthen Community ownership and engagement with reforms, supporting better outcomes with Aboriginal families and children; and
 - increase trust, visibility, awareness and recognition of Aboriginal Communities.

Aboriginal Playgroup Strategy

Phase 3 new initiative – Embed Practice
Co-design theme/s: Early development opportunities | Priority Reform alignment: 2

Playgroups are an early learning engagement platform that support development, strengthen Cultural identity and create smooth transitions into preschool.

A new SA Aboriginal Playgroup Strategy will strengthen and expand programs that are already working. It will establish and sustain Aboriginal-led playgroups connected to local preschool programs and other Community supports as appropriate, while maintaining the playgroup as a Culturally responsive, family-centred early years platform.

Aboriginal playgroups will provide Culturally responsive and strengths-based early learning environments for children from birth to 5 years old and their families. Aboriginal playgroup programs will be locally designed and delivered in partnership with Aboriginal Communities and organisations wherever possible.

- This initiative aims to:
- build families' understanding of child development and support families as their children's First Teachers
 - connect early learning services and pathways; and
 - reduce barriers to engagement through increasing belonging, trust, and embedding Cultural responsiveness from the earliest years.

Words Grow Minds First Nations campaign

Existing initiative
Co-design theme/s: Communication and information gaps; Aboriginal accessibility and engagement

With 90% of brain development occurring before the age of 5, everyday interactions lay the foundations for lifelong learning. [Words Grow Minds](#) is a Community-based campaign that gives parents and caregivers clear, consistent messages about supporting development in the first 3 years of life.

Funded by the OECD and delivered by Raising Literacy Australia, Words Grow Minds champions the idea that everyday interactions build strong brains and set children up for lifelong learning.

Backed by the latest research, the campaign has lifted awareness, built professional capability and provided families with practical tools and advice to help babies and children thrive. Words Grow Minds is now being adapted into a First Nations campaign that is supported by the OECD and will be drawn on for developing the SA Aboriginal Preschool Communications Strategy.

Preschool Hours Uplift (Department for Education)

Existing initiative
Co-design theme/s: Wider benefits to families; Family and social factors; Aboriginal accessibility and engagement

In 2024, as part of the Royal Commission response and recognising the importance of 3-year-old preschool for many Aboriginal families, the government increased its existing offer of preschool for 3-year-old Aboriginal children from 12 to 15 hours a week in department preschools to align with its universal offering. Like all South Australian children, Aboriginal children are eligible to access 600 hours (15 hours per week) of government preschool in the year before full-time schooling.

Actions to drive change

Families have more choice about attending a well-supported Aboriginal Community Controlled service

Tailored ACCO Funding Models

Phase 2 new initiative – Build Relationships
Co-design theme/s: Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs | Priority Reform alignment: 2

The Government of South Australia will make a significant new investment in ACCO ECEC services. This investment will focus on increasing funding for preschool and aligned child development supports, consistent with the primary role of the state in early childhood. Sustainable funding for ACCO-led ECEC services is a shared responsibility between the state and federal governments.

The federal Department of Education through the Early Childhood Care and Development Policy Partnership recently commissioned a report on tailored and sustainable ACCO funding models.⁸ The Government of South Australia's new tailored ACCO funding model is aligned with that report, including its principles of certainty, control, reliability, responsiveness and administrative simplicity. The state will continue to advocate to the Australian Government to also adopt these principles in its reform of funding for ACCO-led ECEC services.

- This initiative aims to:
- enable ACCOs to deliver sustainable, integrated, Culturally responsive early childhood education and care (including preschool programs, if self-determined) and wraparound services; and
 - complement the role of the Australian Government in funding ACCO-led ECEC services.

⁸ Funding Model Options for ACCO Integrated Early Years Services Final Report (SNAICC with Deloitte Access Economics, 2024)

Strengthening ACCOs Infrastructure Fund

Phase 1 new initiative – Build Momentum
Co-design theme/s: Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs | Priority Reform alignment: 2

A time-limited fund will provide grants to ACCO-led ECEC services to plan, improve and maintain critical infrastructure to deliver early childhood services across South Australia. Flexible funding will support the unique indoor and outdoor infrastructure needs of each service, while facilitating improved connections to place and Culture, and supporting ACCO-led integrated hub facilities.

This initiative complements the Flying Start Infrastructure Grants Program – ACCO stream, which will support services to increase preschool capacity.

- This initiative aims to:
- strengthen connection to place and encourage participation in Cultural and Community activities; and
 - support ACCO-led services to identify, plan for and access infrastructure opportunities and progress solutions to infrastructure issues.

Flying Start Infrastructure Grants Program – ACCO stream

Existing initiative
Co-design theme/s: Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs

ACCOs are leaders in providing Culturally safe and high-quality ECEC services in their Communities. The \$40 million [Flying Start Infrastructure Grants program](#) is being expanded to support ACCO-led ECEC services to build new or expanded facilities where needed to support more Aboriginal children to access 3 and 4-year-old preschool in this setting.

Sector Strengthening

Existing initiative
Co-design theme/s: Strengthening partnerships with ACCOs

The Government of South Australia committed to an [Early Childhood Care and Development Sector Strengthening Plan](#) in 2021 under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The OECD is committed to [strengthening the ACCO Early Childhood Education and Care sector](#) in South Australia through supporting services to partner to deliver preschool and integrated hubs. South Australian ACCO ECEC services have been provided targeted supports to consider early childhood reform opportunities, including through tailored preschool expression of interest registration processes, tailored support for services and capacity and capability sector strengthening grants. Services are utilising these grants to support quality uplift, workforce development and engagement in opportunities to partner with the OECD.

Barriers to engagement are reduced

Community Liaison Officers (Linkers)

Phase 2 new initiative – Build Relationships
Co-design theme/s: Systemic and workforce barriers | Priority Reform alignment: 2

A future network of Aboriginal Community Liaison Officers (“Linkers”) will walk alongside families and strengthen connections between health and early childhood services.

The OECD is partnering with the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia (AHCSA) to consult and scope the feasibility of an Aboriginal Child and Family Linker approach, that will build on the learnings from ACCO and ACCHO child health and development screening pilots. This work will inform future decisions about the linker role design, scope and delivery.

Potential linker functions may include acting as Cultural brokers, supporting families to navigate child health and development pathways, improving follow-up and referrals, and strengthening engagement with early learning, preschool and other early childhood development opportunities.

- This initiative aims to:
- increase child health and development screening uptake
 - build family confidence in navigating early childhood services and systems
 - increase families’ understanding of child development and benefits of playgroups and preschool; and
 - connect families to other services.

Actions to drive change

Barriers to engagement are reduced

Fee Relief

Phase 1 new initiative – Build Momentum
Co-design theme/s: Financial and socioeconomic barriers | **Priority Reform alignment:** 3

Fee Relief will support the participation of Aboriginal children in 3 and 4-year-old preschool, by equitably reducing financial barriers to preschool in all settings, including ACCO-led services.

This builds on the existing targeted child subsidy available in some long day cares offering a funded Year Before Fulltime Schooling (4-year-old) preschool program. Subsidy levels will be determined by the type of preschool setting – government, non-government sessional or long day care (including ACCO-led). Fee relief is designed to ensure that financial circumstances do not determine access to high-quality, Culturally responsive preschool.

This initiative aims to:

- increase enrolment of 3 and 4-year-old Aboriginal children in preschool; and
- give families more choice.

Early Childhood Education and Care enrolment and administrative process review (Department for Education)

Phase 1 new initiative – Build momentum and relationships
Co-design theme/s: Financial and socioeconomic barriers; Accessibility and engagement | **Priority Reform alignment:** 3

This initiative will review the Department for Education's preschool and early childhood enrolment and administrative processes to identify barriers affecting Aboriginal families. It will build on existing department reform work.

Through consultation with Aboriginal families, educators, leaders and Community, the review will map enrolment pathways and administrative processes to identify where systems can be more accessible, Culturally responsive and trauma aware. Opportunities will include simplifying documentation requirements, strengthening communication about enrolment options, educating site leaders and staff and supporting local flexibility while maintaining statewide standards.

Where improvements are identified, solutions will be tested and embedded within broader department systems and processes to ensure changes benefit Aboriginal families and all families accessing early childhood services.

This initiative aims to:

- increase Aboriginal enrolment and sustained participation in early childhood services; and
- build and strengthen relationships and trust between Aboriginal families, Communities and government preschools.

Women's and Children's Health Network profile

Aboriginal Family Birthing Program

The Women's and Children's Health Network is leading a statewide Aboriginal Family Birthing Program model of care in partnership with regional Local Health Networks' Aboriginal Leadership. This model will focus on improving outcomes across the first 2,000 days (from conception to 5 years), with a strong emphasis on child health and development. The program builds on the success of the Aboriginal Family Birthing Program, Anangu Bibi Birthing Program in Port Augusta and Ngangkita Ngartu Aboriginal Family Birthing Program established at the Women's and Children's Hospital, both delivering Culturally safe pregnancy, birthing and early parenting care. Multidisciplinary teams, comprising of midwives, child and family health nurses, medical practitioners, Aboriginal Maternal Infant

Families are decision-makers

Place-Based Self-Determination Funds

Phase 4 – Amplify Success
Co-design theme/s: Wider benefits to families; Accessibility and transport | **Priority Reform alignment:** 1

Locally governed funding pools will devolve decision-making authority to Communities in priority locations.

Communities will determine investment priorities within agreed parameters to strengthen early learning, Cultural initiatives, family engagement and service integration. Backbone governance and capability support will be provided by local or statewide ACCOs, funded through the place-based budget allocation.

This initiative captures a broader range of place-based initiatives identified through co-design including transport and other locally specific potential priorities. The purpose is to strengthen early learning and child development through self-determined Community-led approaches, leveraging local assets, Cultural knowledge, leadership and understanding of local Community needs and priorities.

This initiative aims to:

- advance family and Community decision-making
- embed accountability to Aboriginal Communities
- reduce barriers through locally led solutions; and
- strengthen Community-owned evidence and impact.

Enter for Success Strategy (Department for Education)

Existing initiative
Co-design theme/s: Wider benefits to families; Accessibility and transport; Family and social factors; Aboriginal accessibility and engagement

The [Enter for Success strategy](#) supports the inclusion, attendance, participation and retention of Aboriginal children in Department for Education services. It gives Aboriginal children the opportunity to enrol and be accepted into any government preschool or school they nominate the year before they start preschool, primary or secondary school.

Accountability framework

Guiding principles

Accountability and evaluation are central to achieving the Strategy’s vision that Aboriginal children in South Australia thrive. They help to increase the likelihood that commitments made through this Strategy lead to lasting, positive change for children, families and Communities by ensuring that:

- Government systems and partners remain answerable for the outcomes they aim to achieve; and
- impact is maximised by tracking whether reforms and initiatives are working as intended and, where needed, making timely corrections.

Accountability

Accountability is about clarity of roles, responsibilities, and authority. It establishes a system where commitments and actions are answerable, where it is clear who is responsible for what and the parties or stakeholders to whom they are answerable, and who makes decisions. It outlines who follows up when actions are not completed, and how progress is transparently and respectfully shared and responded to over time. It includes clear agreed approaches for sharing, interpreting and acting upon findings with Aboriginal people, Communities, and organisations.

Improving early childhood outcomes for Aboriginal children occurs within a complex system, with responsibilities shared across governments, organisations, services and Communities. In this landscape, accountability is essential. To achieve our vision, we need a shared understanding of who is responsible for delivering actions, who is accountable for achieving results, and how progress will be monitored and acted upon. Strong accountability creates the conditions for commitments to translate into meaningful action, continuous improvement, and better outcomes for Aboriginal children, families and Communities.

Evaluation

Evaluation helps us understand what works, for whom, in which contexts, and why. Under the Strategy, it supports Aboriginal self-determination, strengthens decision-making, improves practice and systems, and identifies barriers and inequities. Evaluation under the Strategy is positioned as a tool for learning, improvement and shared responsibility – not compliance. End-to-end evaluation will be conducted in partnership with Aboriginal people, Communities, and organisations so that findings are relevant, meaningful, and support the people the evaluation is intended to serve.

Notably, accountability and evaluation are separate but interrelated concepts. You can be accountable even when outcomes are difficult to measure, and you can measure outcomes with shared or unclear accountabilities. The greatest impact occurs when these concepts work together: accountability ensures clarity about who will take actions, guided by insights gained from what we measure.

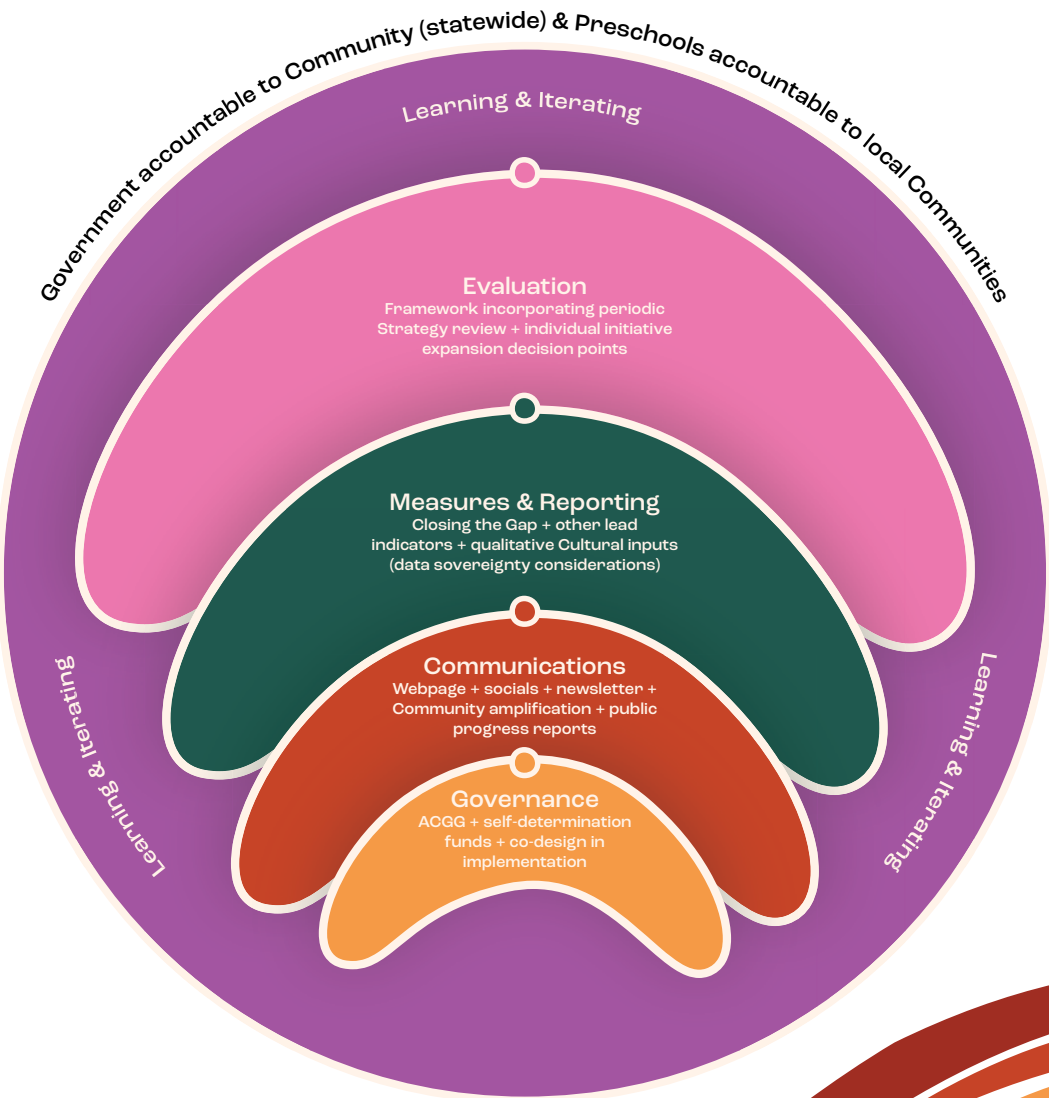
The Strategy’s accountability framework brings together governance, evaluation, monitoring, reporting and communication, aligned to the Theory of Change.

Governance

The ACGG provides strategic oversight of accountability and evaluation, guides priorities, advises on measures of success and supports shared decision-making throughout implementation. Further governance will be critical to the success of the Place-based Self-determination Funds and further co-design will be required in implementation planning, and delivery of many initiatives.

Communications

A critical piece in remaining accountable to Community is to ensure regular, clear and transparent communications and reporting on implementation progress and evaluation findings. This will encompass a wide range of fora, including preschool and Community amplification of progress, successes, and further opportunities. The practical detail for how this will be done, including communication channels, formats and intended cadence, will be informed by the ACGG.



Accountability framework

Measures & reporting

Progress will be tracked using Closing the Gap Outcomes 3 and 4, alongside additional success measures and lead indicators identified through the development of an Evaluation Framework. Quantitative measures, such as enrolment and attendance data will be collected alongside qualitative data collected via stories, yarning, family feedback and Elders' insights to provide a holistic picture of what success looks like for Aboriginal children, families and Communities.

Closing the Gap Outcome 3: Children are engaged in high quality, Culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.

Target: Being refreshed in 2026.

Closing the Gap Outcome 4: Children thrive in their early years.

Target: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all 5 domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55%.⁹

This Strategy is also underpinned by a commitment to grow understanding and incorporation of Indigenous Data Sovereignty and Aboriginal data governance in the work of the OECD, in line with Priority Reform 4: *Shared access to data and information at a regional level*, including through:

- Aboriginal involvement in deciding what data is collected and why
- shared authority over how data is interpreted and reported
- clear protocols for data access, storage and use; and
- a focus on data as a tool for Community empowerment, truth-telling and system improvement.

Over time, the Strategy will support strengthening of Aboriginal capability and leadership in evaluation and data governance.

Evaluation Framework

The Strategy is complex, comprising multiple cross-cutting long-term initiatives with distinct aims and objectives. This complexity requires a carefully considered and clearly articulated approach to evaluation that sets out what will be evaluated, how it will be evaluated, and when. The OECD will partner with an Aboriginal-led business or ACCO to develop an Evaluation Framework.

The Framework will guide how we measure success by providing clear direction on assessing the Strategy's impact. It will articulate the expected outcomes, identify appropriate indicators, outline the methods for data collection and interpretation, and establish a timeframe for when each evaluation activity should occur. This will then ensure we are targeting our efforts to achieve the best outcomes for Aboriginal children and their families. The Framework will enable us to understand the overall effectiveness of the Strategy by examining its projects and initiatives in a cohesive, integrated way.

.....

⁹ The South Australian 2024 baseline was 28.7%

The Framework will:

- articulate how the Strategy is intended to work and the outcomes, noting the links between the projects and initiatives and how they collectively contribute to Strategy-level impact
- note the timing and phasing of initiative-based evaluations, by identifying how to sequence evaluation activities, including how formative and summative evaluation will be implemented over time and guiding future procurement activities
- set out the evaluation activities required to be able to assess effectiveness, implementation, and outcomes, and to support learning and continuous improvement across the Strategy
- describe the methods and data sources to be used, including the use of Community data sources and experiential evidence alongside quantitative data
- set out how evaluation findings will be used and reported, including how evidence will inform policy, program refinement, and accountability; and
- articulate the approach to Indigenous Data Sovereignty across the Strategy's evaluation activities, ensuring they are aligned with data sharing commitments under Closing the Gap.

This approach recognises that meaningful change may be experienced locally before it is visible in population-level data.

Learning and iterating

Aboriginal-led research is critical to evolving our understanding of what works for Aboriginal children, families and Communities to achieve our vision that Aboriginal children thrive. The OECD has also allocated a 5-year funding stream for medium to long-term Aboriginal research projects, to be shaped by the ACGG and led by Aboriginal research bodies.

These components of the Accountability Framework together will enable reflection, adaptation and growth across all phases of implementation of the South Australian Aboriginal Early Childhood Strategy, and ultimately support adjustment to approaches or initiatives as needed to deliver on our vision that all Aboriginal children in South Australia thrive.



